

7 Sering's Journey Comes to an End

The Third Reich, 1933–1939

1933–1934: The New Reality

During the first year and a half of Nazi rule, the agrarian world was in a state of flux. Surprisingly, there was initially room for dissent, as we will see both in Sering's publications, as well as in the pages of *AFK*. In fact, for the first six months of the Nazi regime, the classic inner colonizers had a staunch ally in Hitler's cabinet, as Hugenberg was the Minister for Agriculture. A man who will be featured prominently in this chapter, Sering's all-time archenemy Richard Walther Darré, had expected to be given this position but had to instead stew for six months while Hitler appeased Hugenberg's DNVP. An article appearing in *AFK* entitled, "What Should Agrarian Settlement Expect from Hugenberg?"¹ assured readers that they had nothing to fear from the famous industrialist, as his incredibly long (especially prewar) history with inner colonization was impeccable. Indeed, during his six-month tenure Hugenberg did attempt to place the agrarian sector at the center of the German economy, but he did not share the extreme racist goals of Darré and was constantly at loggerheads with him. When Hugenberg resigned in June, both his career and the DNVP came to an end.² Hugenberg's, and indeed most inner colonizers', misunderstanding of Nazi settlement thinking was that while they, the moderates, believed that the land was as important as the *Volk*, Darré simply saw the land as the setting, and in some ways the engine, for the creation of the *Bauerntum*, the new racially pure peasantry. As opposed to soil and vegetables, Darré thought only in terms of human breeding.³ He was, however, still an agrarian romantic. Even though

¹ Pauly, "Was hat die ländliche Siedlung von Hugenberg zu erwarten?," *AFK* 33 (1925): 129–132.

² John A. Leopold, *Alfred Hugenberg: The Radical Nationalist Campaign against the Weimar Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

³ Darré had been a horse breeder, and he appears to have seen little difference between that and what he was now undertaking with humans. Anna Bramwell, *Blood and Soil: Richard Walter Darré and Hitler's 'Green Party'* (Abbotsbrook: Kensall Press, 1985).

Darré's purely racial approach would logically produce an egalitarian German population, a "Master Race" (*Herrenrasse*), he believed in a heroic peasantry ruled over by a *Herrenschicht*, a class of lords, not so dissimilar to the medieval village that existed in Sering's mind.

Darré's thinking was well known via his previous publications,⁴ and there were early attempts by agrarian moderates to temper his ideas. A month after Hitler's ascent, Sering gave a speech at an agrarian conference for the Friedrich List Society in Bad Oeynhausen. He was well aware of Nazi thinking, and that Darré was in the audience, when he walked through three issues. First, he addressed (then quickly moved on from) the "racial political historical viewpoint," arguing that, despite centuries of movement from the land to the city, Germany still possessed a strong reserve of peasant stock. This was unlike what he, Sering, had witnessed the previous Fall in England where their version of a "Reich Settlement Law" had been a complete failure and the land was still empty.⁵ He then moved on to his next theme, "Eastern Border Protection," an old favourite and an outlook that he enthusiastically shared with the National Socialists. Yet his discussion of it pre-emptively attacked the hereditary, racially based, semi-feudal inheritance law that Darré had been publicly formulating, in which only one member of the family would inherit the farm. Sering insisted that the existing farming situation, where all family members had a stake in the property, led to early marriage and lots of children. Such an inheritance situation should remain at all costs, Sering argued: "It's about the existence of Germanness in the East, it's about the survival of the Reich."⁶ Finally, Sering turned to the problem of six to seven million unemployed people and how inner colonization could solve this problem. But to do so, the new regime needed to carry out what had already been agreed to in his 1919 law, the expropriation of a third of the large landed estates. And to

⁴ His book, *Das Bauerntum als Lebensquell der Nordischen Rasse* (Munich: J. F. Lehmann, 1929), was reviewed in *AFK* 21 (1929): 170–171. While the reviewer found his deep racial mythology confused, he was happy with the emphasis placed on farming as the safest way to strengthen the German race. However, the reviewer was annoyed that Darré never once mentioned inner colonization, and instead wasted time talking about breeding. This is especially surprising as one of Darré's very first articles had been entitled "Innere Kolonisation," where he made it quite clear that Germany had more than enough land. Richard Walther Darré, "Innere Kolonisation," *Deutschlands Erneuerung* 10 (1926): 152–155.

⁵ I have unfortunately found no trace of a 1932 England trip in Sering's archive.

⁶ Max Sering, "Ziel und Weg der Siedlung; ihre gesamtwirtschaftliche und staatspolitische Bedeutung (Innenkolonisation)," *Deutsche Agrarpolitik im Rahmen der inneren und äusseren Wirtschaftspolitik. Verhandlungen der Konferenz von Oeynhausen. 11–14. Februar 1933*. Volume Two. *Entschuldungs- und Siedlungsproblem* (Oeynhausen: Agrarkonferenz der Friedrich List-Gesellschaft, 1933), 129.

counter any claims that this was somehow illegal, Sering made the incredibly bold statement: "in the Middle Ages peasant property was forcibly confiscated or bought by the *Junker*. In that regard, it is therefore an act of restitution."⁷ Sadly, Sering complained, the *Osthilfe* program had kept alive many *Junker* estates, and should surely now be suspended. Here Sering drove home his anti-*Junker* argument, describing how he had visited giant farms in the American West in 1930, and had seen the results: a vast expanse of land with very few people.

This pre-emptive strike against Darré's plans continued in the pages of *AFK*, initially with a contributor who later supported the Nazi position. Max Stolt's article, "Future Settlement and the Most Appropriate Legal Reforms for its Practitioners," completed its brief history of inner colonization by pointing out that it had fared worst when the hand of a controlling government was heaviest, a direct reference to Darré's preparation for massive state intervention. He then mischievously invoked the *Führerprinzip*, that agrarians knew the will of the leader, and therefore they understood best how to carry out his principles. The journal carried a long quote from Wilhelm Kube's "Eastern Questions and National Socialism," that stated that the importance of eastern colonization was not in itself "anti-*Junker*," but that there was nevertheless little need for large latifundia.⁸ Meanwhile, however, the future historian of inter-war agrarian settlement, Wilhelm Boyens, penned an article that acknowledged the power of a National Socialist agrarian policy, noting that flight from the land was now being caused by heavy indebtedness and this debt quite simply needed to be forgiven.⁹ Indeed, this was exactly what Darré was mooting at the time and would implement.

By the summer of 1933, Sering was heavily involved in organizing the hosting of a major international agrarian conference at Bad Eilsen, and in late June reached out to the new Reich Minister for Food and Agriculture Darré, inviting him to attend.¹⁰ In an obvious effort to get Darré on his side, Sering followed up with a gushing letter in early July, telling Darré how pleased he was that the Ministry was in the hands of someone who understood how important farmers were. Sering then declared that he

⁷ Sering, "Ziel und Weg der Siedlung," 135. In the ensuing discussion, the chairman, Dr. Harms, claimed that he well remembered the pre-war days when Sering was a pioneer of inner colonization, "in the spirit of Frederick the Great," as he claimed Sering always said (143). And Dr. Salin Basel noted that they were still talking about the very issues Max Weber had brought up in his inaugural lecture at Freiburg (212).

⁸ Max Stolt, "Die kommende Siedlung und die zweckmässigste Rechtsform ihrer Träger," *AFK* 25 (1933): 199–219.

⁹ Wilhelm Boyens, "Die Absiedlung," *AFK* 25 (1933): 319–324.

¹⁰ Sering to Darré, June 22, 1933, in BArch K, N/210/2.

would be giving up his scientific life's work, his leadership of this conference, and his involvement in the GFK, now that he knew agrarian settlement was in such good hands.¹¹ Darré responded that, although he would not be able to make it to the conference, Sering should be assured "that it is for him a great pleasure to know that in the future they can work together hand in hand on the question of settlement."¹² This seemingly happy exchange ended with Sering informing Darré that, sadly, due to the economic crisis, it had become impossible for their American colleagues to make it to Germany, so the conference would be postponed for a year.

Sering's real thoughts about what was happening to his world in Germany can be found in a letter he wrote to the English agronomist Leonard K. Elmhirst, in late November. He noted that, although they had had to suspend the conference this year, it was crucial that it go ahead the next year:

Since the War an increased feeling of nationalism spread throughout the world. Herein lies the danger of the destruction of ideals with which mankind has long been concerned. I am deeply convinced, that it is not only our duty to represent national interest but also those of humanity and the unity of mankind. There is perhaps no organisation which is more fitted to foster the interest of humanity than our own, because we are united by science, the systematic exploration of truth. In this respect the single scholars do not only depend on one another, because their works are complementary, but the more we obtain a profounder recognition of the decisive causes of economic developments, the more the conviction grows that the well being of a single nation is dependent on that of all the others.¹³

Reichsbauernführer Darré and Extreme Inner Colonization

The law that Darré introduced at the national level in September 1933, the so-called *Erbhofrecht*, or Law of Inheritance, was nothing short of the firmest answer to central problems that had been in the mind of Sering and all of inner colonization from the start: how do you give land to a peasant family and then stop them from selling it? How do you stop speculation? How can you entail peasants while pretending you are not

¹¹ Sering to Darré, July 4, 1933, in BArch K, N/210/2.

¹² Darré to Sering, July 18, 1933, in BArch K, N/210/2.

¹³ Sering to Elmhirst, November 29, 1933. Sering surely had help to write this in English, for in a January letter to Currie, he wrote "It makes me some difficulties to write in English," then continued in German, since Currie knew a German who could translate. Sering to Currie, January 3, 1933.

recreating serfdom? Darré created an inheritance structure that made it virtually impossible for a majority of farmers to sell.¹⁴ Further, the law allowed the state to remove a farmer if he was found to be “dishonourable” or “inefficient,” for, as Darré pointed out, the individual’s needs did not outweigh the needs of the race. And, in a move that had no historical precedent (as Sering would point out), in certain circumstances, the inheritor of the farm was to be the youngest son, not the traditional first born.¹⁵ Cabinet members spoke up, exclaiming (correctly) that this amounted to something akin to feudalism. At this early stage, Darré had the backing of Hitler, and at this moment the Führer declared that such a law was indeed the only way to stop speculation. Darré thus got his way. Fascinatingly, powerful economic arguments that such small estates would not increase food production were dismissed by Darré, for this plan to maintain the small peasant on the land at all costs was deemed necessary for the future of the race. That nation/race was more important than pure scale economics had long been accepted by the most moderate of inner colonizers. Darré argued that such an approach was neither socialism nor capitalism. Again, at this point, such extreme focus on agrarian human breeding was approved by Hitler and would only become a problem when Darré insisted that there be no expansion of the borders in the East, for there was more than enough racial work to be accomplished within the *Altreich*. In some ways, this was a new version of the empty/full arguments surrounding space, already seen in the First World War. Whereas *Kaiserreich* inner colonization required new land to escape the obstacles they encountered *within* Germany, for Darré, there was no need to “escape” the confines of Germany, as the Nazis could simply remove any obstacles, legal or otherwise.

Of course, Sering and his fellow travellers had always claimed that inner colonization was above any mere definition as socialist or capitalist. While he, and the likes of Max Weber, had insisted that it was instead nationalist, that term was now simply replaced with a more abstract racial notion, yet the sentiment was similar. Darré’s new law stated that any

¹⁴ One of the most detailed explanations of the *Erbhofrecht* can be found in Daniela Münkel, “Bäuerliche Interessen versus NS-Ideologie. Das Reichserbhofgesetz in der Praxis,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 44 (1996): 549–580. Münkel argues that the law was barely followed, did not work, and that without forced labour Germany would have starved during the Second World War. See also Henry W. Spiegel, “Land Inheritance under the Swastika,” *Agricultural History* 14 (1939): 176–188.

¹⁵ J. E. Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika: The NSDAP and Agriculture in Germany, 1928–45* (London: Sage, 1976), 111. Farquharson argues that Nazi ideas were flush with antiliberal romantic notions of the peasant and not with rational economic analysis (122–123). But, of course, one could make the same charge that inner colonization had always been this way, and Sering was no different.

farm large enough to sustain a family was to be included in the strict inheritance system. But whereas “national” had always been squishy among the pre-1933 thinkers, now Darré was able to bring racial selection directly into play regarding who could receive or retain land. Using figures that should have pleased the *Junker*-hating Sering, Darré’s settlement office projected settling 1.5 million ha with 90,000 new holdings, which was exactly the amount of land made up by farms over 100 ha, that is, large estates. Indeed, Darré and the influential Nazi racial thinker Alfred Rosenberg spoke openly of the “twilight of the *Junker*,” a class to be replaced with the blood and soil of peasants.¹⁶ The Nazis hated that the *Junker* used foreign labour, and they, along with *Junker* allies like President Hugenberg and Conservatives in general, were all deemed to be unreliable. Hitler was sympathetic to these anti-*Junker* sentiments but, ever the political schemer, he knew that his *Wehrmacht* generals were for the most part raised on these landed estates and he would have to put up with them for a while.

Resistance from the Old Inner Colonizers

Darré’s new law, the *Erbhofrecht*, was initially put forward at the provincial level, for the state of Prussia, and this version was printed in the *AFK* in mid-May 1933. After it had become law and the idea of a national *Erbhofrecht* was being pushed, the issue was actually debated in the pages of the journal by Darré and Hugenberg. Darré put forward his position that this was the best way to control a form of settlement that was not “at any price” (by disallowing speculation), and yet would last. Hugenberg responded that he was happy with traditional Laws of Inheritance (*Anerbenrecht*) and he was against the state having too much control over the lives of farmers’ families. Another contributor was critical of a law that was supposed to create a true “land of peasants” (*Bauernland*) yet allowed for the continued survival of the *Junker*.¹⁷ The Nazi-leaning Boeckmann then claimed that the relationship of the state to the peasant was outside any liberal system, that it should largely be outside any money scheme, and that the Reich should pay for peasants to stay on the land.¹⁸ Even after the national law had passed in September, critique was sustained in *AFK*, with Wilhelm von Gayl and others attacking Boeckmann’s ideas. In the last issue of 1933, an article about how to find good settlers was so critical

¹⁶ Farquarson, *The Plough and the Swastika*, 145.

¹⁷ Graf Gunther von der Goltz, “Landwirtschaftliche Betriebsgrößen-Gliederung und das bäuerliche Erbhofrecht,” *AFK* 25 (1933): 417–420.

¹⁸ Boeckmann, “Bauernsiedlung als deutsches Lehen,” *AFK* 25 (1933): 473–476.

of pre-1933 inner colonization that the editors intervened with explanatory footnotes. The first footnote challenged the assertion that postwar settlement was controlled by Marxists. Sure, the editors admitted, there were some Marxist influences in the government, but such a statement was very unfair, especially as the people being slandered were the editors!¹⁹ The same December 1933 issue announced that the journal, currently on volume 25, would be renamed in January. In a highly symbolic move, the title that focused as much on land as people, the *Archive of Inner Colonization*, would now be changed to directly reference Darré's prime consideration, *Neues Bauerntum*, or *New Peasantry* (hereafter *NB*). In an editorial, the journal editors stated that the old title was too difficult to say (true) and used foreign words.²⁰

Throughout 1934, *NB* described the new orthodoxy in articles like "Fundamental Questions of National Socialist Farmer Politics," which stressed "blood" and the Germanic roots of rural settlement in Germany.²¹ The international flavour of *AFK* was maintained, however, with an article on the first 10,000 Japanese reservists sent to settle in Manchuria.²² A more sinister "international" flavour appeared in the small notice, "Settlement of Jews from Germany in France?" which remarked on the Jewish Press's concern over the national revolution, arguing that it was time to go, for now, to southern France. Was this to form a colony there, the editors asked, or merely a stopping point on the way to Palestine or Argentina? They did not know.²³ Also, in 1934, there emerged a new and serious interest in "*Raumordnung*," the study of the physical space that Germany took up in Central Europe, and the question as to whether or not there was enough of it. In his May article, "The Organization of Space (Settlement Planning) in the Service of the Regeneration of German Farmers," Carl Lörcher claimed that, although Germany currently did not have "enough" *Raum*, for the time being it had to focus on thickly settling what it did currently possess, especially in the

¹⁹ The second intervention was to inform the author on how past experience made clear that the mere "education" of city dwellers did not create settlers. Krull, "Anforderungen an Siedlungsbewerber im Dritten Reich," *AFK* 25 (1933): 641–644.

²⁰ Editorial, *NB* 26 (1934): 1.

²¹ Meinberg, "Grundfragen nationalsozialistischer Bauernpolitik," *NB* 26 (1934): 2–6. See also Goltz, "Grossbesitz und bäuerliche Gemeindebildung," *NB* 26 (1934): 93–97.

²² The unnamed author cited the First World War scholarship of Schwerin on Roman settlement, claiming that he was correct. N.A., "Japans erste Wehrsiedlung," *NB* 26 (1934): 157–158. Later examples of this theme appeared in 1938, see N.A., "Japan in Manchurei," *NB* 30 (1938): 106–108, and N.A., "Innere Kolonisation in China," *NB* 30 (1938): 168–169.

²³ N.A., "Ansiedlung von Juden aus Deutschland in Frankreich?," *NB* 26 (1934): 180–181.

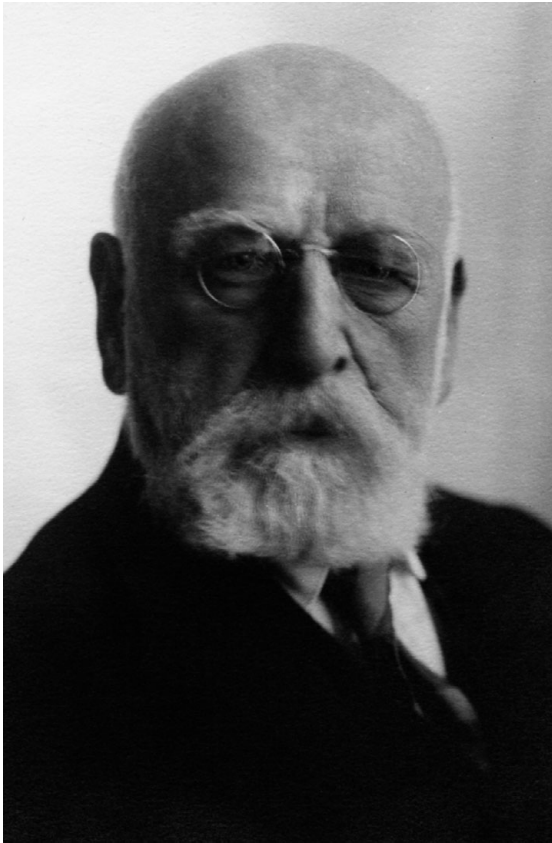


Figure 7.1 Max Sering in 1932
(Photo by Bundesarchiv)

threatened East.²⁴ The 1935 article, “Regarding the Question of *Raum* in German Settlement,” complained that Germany had lost twenty-seven million souls to overseas emigration, before claiming that there was currently more than enough *Raum* within Germany for big, healthy new German families.²⁵ By 1937, the work of Konrad Meyer, the ultimate *Raumforscher* (spatial researcher) would regularly appear in *NB*.²⁶ But the

²⁴ Carl Ch. Lörcher, “Raumordnung (Siedlungsplanung) im Dienste der Neubildung deutschen Bauerntums,” *NB* 26 (1934): 193–199.

²⁵ A. Genf, “Zur Raumfrage in der deutschen Siedlung,” *NB* 27 (1935): 146–149.

²⁶ There is a notice of the Meyer-edited journal *Raumforschung und Raumordnung* in *NB* 29 (1937), 463.

newly renamed journal did spend some time reflecting upon and thanking the now dissolved GFK. Since the Reich itself oversaw inner colonization, there was no longer any need for the Society, and the editors thanked the major players for their work, including Sering, but noticeably failed to mention the already *persona non grata*, Hugenberg. In fact, in the detailed history of the GFK that appeared in the pages of *NB* in 1934, Sering was heavily praised. But this would be the last moment of such reverence in this journal, as Sering was also about to become an unmentionable.

Sering Breaks with Darré

Sering's daughter lived with her family a short walk away from her father in Dahlem, and every Sunday she would set out from the von Tirpitz household with her youngest son (Wolfgang, born 1933) to walk to the famous home (and Sering Institut) at Luciusstrasse 9 for dinner. About halfway along the walk, at Am Hirschsprung 44–46, she would stop in front of an imposing, gated mansion, turn to little Wolfgang, and exclaim, "This is the house of the enemy of your father."²⁷ It was the house of Darré. In the initial stages of their relationship, Sering was diplomatic toward Darré, as was clear in the earlier cited letter exchange about the conference. Sering and Darré had still shared the stage as late as June 1933 at the GFK conference, which was held after the Prussian *Erbhofrecht* was in place. But by early 1934 Sering believed it was time to make his problems with a state-controlled, racially based system of agriculture more widely known. He wrote, but initially did not publish, a fifty-page memorandum entitled "The Right of Inheritance and Debt Relief: Legal, Economic, and Biological Aspects."²⁸ He began by arguing that Law (*Recht*) was indeed very important and had been a crucial part of the history of the peasantry.²⁹ Fundamental to that legal history, and what had now been rejected with the new law was that peasant families had always decided to whom the inheritance would go, and they had decided whether to perform a wholehearted *Anerben*, or the more equitable *Realteilung*, ceding the entire farm to one heir, or dividing it among the children. Now, with the new law, it was the legal authorities alone that made these ancient and traditional decisions. Then, in an interesting move to fight the anti-liberal Nazi fire with his own, Sering made the

²⁷ Author in Conversation with Wolfgang von Tirpitz, 2013.

²⁸ Max Sering, "Erbhofrecht und Entschuldung unter rechtsgeschichtlichen, volkswirtschaftlichen und biologischen Gesichtspunkten." Manuscript, written January 1934.

²⁹ He included here that women had evolved to become a part of *Bauernrecht* but that the new law had again removed them.

following argument: when the state intervened within what is the most fundamental cell of the state body, the peasant family, it was breaking up that cell into something to be controlled by a bureaucracy, an insidiously “liberal,” “individualizing” move. Sering then undertook to dissect the motive for all of this, which he rightly stated to be Darré’s desire to make the peasantry the blood source of the race. But, argued Sering, while the peasants had been the soldiers (*Kampftruppen*) of the early National Socialists, these new policies had now sapped them of their energy. The new law created “grotesque” situations, such as the case where the desire to have the farm in the hands of the strongest and longest yet to live farmer resulted in the youngest son inheriting the farm. If he had no cash on hand to pay off his siblings, one could foresee circumstances where the oldest son now served the youngest. Sering finished by again using Nazi racial logic to attack the very same: after citing Hitler and Erwin Bauer on the importance of avoiding “degeneration” at all costs, Sering claimed that the biological impacts of the new law were such that unhappy families were forced to have only one child, for this was the only security in controlling their own family’s inheritance.

In early February 1934, Sering wrote to Darré to inform him that he simply could not agree with Darré’s *Erbhofrecht*. Sering offered ideas that would bring it more squarely in line with traditional *Bauernrecht*, peasant law. He enclosed his recently written memorandum with the letter and asked Darré to please have a look.³⁰ Sering ended the letter by confirming that the previously delayed international agrarian conference was now definitely going to take place. No invitation was extended. Darré responded back in a letter to the doyen of agrarian settlement with the rather dismissive claim that he rejected Sering’s “purely economic” reasons against *Erbhofrecht*, and that, due to their “fundamentally different starting points,” it did not make much sense to continue to argue about it.³¹ At the same moment, Sering sent Goebbels a notice that he had provided Darré with a memorandum highly critical of entailment and that it was here attached, should he be interested. Walter Funk, Goebbels’ state secretary, responded that the *Reichsminister* of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda had read it with great interest.³² Before Darré had even received the memorandum, he had his henchman, Herbert Backe, write to Sering on January 27, informing the professor that his institute would no longer be funded, as this was only causing a “fragmentation” of research, and that Sering’s work was now

³⁰ Sering to Darré, February 2, 1934, in BArch K, N/210/2.

³¹ Darré to Sering, February 19, 1934. BArch L, R 43 I/1301.

³² Funk to Sering, March 16, 1934, in BArch K, N/210/2.

redundant in the wake of the successful revolution.³³ Sering promptly wrote to Reich Minister of the Interior, Wilhelm Frick, claiming that the recently deceased Professor Erwin Bauer had promised that Frick would allow good research to continue. Apparently, Frick relented. The institute stayed open for the time being.³⁴

In any case, Sering had already let loose the dogs of war. His colleague Hjalmar Schacht, President of the Reichsbank, and soon to be Minister of Economics, had financed the printing of 100 copies of this memorandum, and Sering had distributed them to anyone he thought might be interested. It was not long before some of them slipped out of the country to be read and eventually reported on by the foreign press. Darré was furious. In June 1934, Darré had *Der Stürmer* print an article "outing" Sering as a "half Jew" who personally disliked the law as it prevented "*Mischung*," the mixing of races. Darré then directly asked Hitler in late June to please cancel the big upcoming conference. Hitler responded that for "diplomatic" reasons he simply could not.³⁵

1934 Primer for the Conference

While under assault for his attack on Darré, Sering continued to organize the major conference to take place at Bad Eilsen in September and managed to put together and publish a large tome to act as a primer on all things German for those attending the conference.³⁶ In the second chapter, on the history of agriculture in Germany, Sering did not hesitate to once again critique those currently running the show. After a nod toward race, including that it was in fact "Indo-Germanic" for the eldest son to inherit the father's house,³⁷ Sering agreed with the Nazis that the

³³ Backe to Sering, January 27, 1934. See Irene Stoehr, "Von Max Sering zu Konrad Meyer — ein 'machtergreifender' Generationswechsel in der Agrar- und Siedlungswissenschaft," in *Autarkie und Ostexpansion. Pflanzenzucht und Agrarforschung im Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Suzanne Heim (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2002), 63.

³⁴ Stoehr, "Von Max Sering zu Konrad Meyer," 63–64. In a note dated 19 March 1934 that seems to report on a conversation Sering had with Schacht, Schacht indicated that Hitler had read Sering's memorandum, and was nevertheless fine with Sering proceeding to and speaking at the International conference. "Unterredung mit Präsident Schacht," BArch K, N1210/63.

³⁵ Stoehr, "Von Max Sering zu Konrad Meyer," 71. Hitler's secretary's response was written on July 1, while Hitler was in Munich commencing the Night of the Long Knives. One can only imagine that Sering was shaken when news of the murder of those close to Von Papen, including Schleicher, became known.

³⁶ Max Sering (with assistance from Heinrich Niehaus and Friedrich Schlömer), *Deutsche Agrarpolitik auf geschichtlicher und landeskundlicher Grundlage* (Leipzig: Buske, 1934).

³⁷ Sering happily pointed out that the best work on the "right of inheritance" was his 1908 book on Schleswig-Holstein.

reforms of the early nineteenth century, the introduction of capitalism into land ownership, had indeed “mobilized” the land in ways that hurt the peasantry. Then, in what would have been unsurprising to most (and music to Nazi ears), he stated that the World War was “a war of the land-rich versus the land-poor peoples of Central Europe.”³⁸ He then used his reverse-colonial rhetoric to state that the experience of Germany under the Versailles *Diktat* had been akin to how the old *Kulturvölker* used to treat people of colour. But, all this agrarian history was discarded, claimed Sering, in the new *Erbhofrecht*, an ahistorical law that had as its sole focus an abstract idea about what an ideal peasant should be.³⁹ Although the Prussian Settlement Commission had been expensive, Sering admitted, its results, he surprisingly claimed, were stellar. At the cost of half a billion marks they had settled 21,749 families on 309,139 ha of land. He then argued that, since 1919, the settlement work had continued, and that garden suburbs were now also a key feature. In a hint that Sering no longer believed in the Nazi ideal of autarky, he claimed that this blending of industry and agrarianism was crucial, as Germany was “weak on raw materials” and would forever need healthy trade. But this Weimar period of settlement was not yet over, Sering claimed. He then quoted some of Darré’s rants about Jews and how capitalism needed to be removed from the agrarian sector. To this, Sering responded that, instead, unfortunately, the agrarian sector had now been made socialist. Sering registered his astonishment at how much had changed so fast. In one year, one man, Darré, had changed everything.

What Sering surely did not want to admit was that Darré and his racist colleagues had almost managed to cancel the conference. A letter that Sering received in early March from the Reich Food Office (Reichsnährstand) informed him that they had only just been made aware of the conference and that they must know exactly who would be representing Germany, as no international conference could now be held in Germany “without the competent and responsible official bodies being involved, or at least informed.”⁴⁰ Sering answered by sternly reminding them that their boss (Darré) was fully aware of the conference, attached a list of letters and attendees, and ended the letter with “Heil Hitler.”⁴¹ After some more back and forth, Sering was informed that Konrad Meyer would represent the German government.

³⁸ Interestingly, when describing how bad the British Blockade had been, Sering noted the number of pigs that had died (69). One would think he would avoid mentioning this.

³⁹ Sering then quoted a Nazi thinker, stating that history did not matter, it was instead all about race (81).

⁴⁰ Beer to Sering, March 3, 1934, in BArch K, N/210/2.

⁴¹ Sering to Beer, March 8, 1934, in BArch K, N/210/2.

Sering was then contacted by Elmhirst in early May, with the American professor passing along the news that one of the members, a "Hebrew," was withdrawing from the conference, and asked whether there was any guarantee that the Russian delegation would be able to attend.⁴² Sering contacted Frick and received a guarantee in writing that no "obstacles" would be encountered by the Russian delegation to the conference. Sering then passed this information to Elmhirst.⁴³

Finally, in late August and early September, the International Conference of Agrarian Economists took place and representing the German government, in Darré's place, was the man who perhaps more formally would supersede Sering, Konrad Meyer. Elmhirst opened the proceedings, thanking Sering for his and others' organizing of the event and the German government for sending Meyer. Sering next provided a basic greeting, and was followed by Meyer, who mounted the podium to deliver a speech full of Race, Space, *Lebensraum* and *Volk*. In line with the Nazi approach to science, Meyer reminded these assembled scientists that yes, we can exchange ideas, but politics was of the uppermost importance. He finished with a reference to the health of nations, noting that, while the foreign members of the audience had arrived to find a weak nation, he promised that it would quickly become stronger. Although this was followed by a relatively tame global overview of the world economy by Sering, the old professor ended by imploring that governmental control not "smother" the peasantry and warning that when governments move too quickly they tend to not allow much public discussion of what they are doing. Nevertheless, Sering reminded his audience, "we" are men of science, and let us not personally attack anyone or any party at this conference.⁴⁴

Darré would have been pleased with the next two speakers. The first attacked the expert (Sering), accusing him of committing the "murder of the pigs" during the war.⁴⁵ Then, reporting straight from Darré's office, Dr. Ludwig Herrmann opened with this: "National Socialism is not a

⁴² Elmhirst to Sering, May 3, 1934, in BArch K, N/210/2.

⁴³ Sering to Elmhirst, May 18, 1934. Sering wrote this letter to Elmhirst on the eighteenth, whereas Frick's letter is dated the nineteenth. Perhaps a phone call from Frick was not enough, and Sering demanded the guarantee in writing.

⁴⁴ Max Sering, "Die Welt-Wirtschaftskrise," in *Internationale Konferenz für Agrarwissenschaften, 26 August–2 September 1934. Vorträge und Verhandlungen über die Weltagrarkrise* (Leipzig: Buske, 1934).

⁴⁵ Freiherr von Falkenhausen, "Verwaltungserfahrungen aus der deutschen Kriegsernährungswirtschaft," in *Vorträge und Verhandlungen über die Weltagrarkrise*, 133–143.

method, instead it is a *Weltanschauung*.”⁴⁶ He went on to mock the idea that, as Ukraine and Canada produced more than enough wheat for the world, we should let them alone grow it. Alas, this philosopher noted, people are not so nice, and instead “becoming (*werden*) and growing is only accomplished through fighting and striving and struggling in this world,” and that there was no such thing as a “global economy, only a Volk-economy (*Volkswirtschaft*).”⁴⁷ We Germans, Herrmann stated, required food security and market regulation, and only via Darré’s law could this be achieved.

One speaker who at least attempted to please both sides was G. Lorenzoni. He opened by praising the massive influence of Sering in Italy for the last many decades, especially via the 1919 Reich Settlement Law. Lorenzoni happily pointed out that Sering had in fact been his teacher some thirty-four years earlier. Interestingly, to this agrarian scientist, operating outside the German personal and political fights, he concluded by stating that the fascist approach to inner colonization in Italy was working very well.⁴⁸ Schacht then spoke of international credit problems, Henry C. Taylor discussed international agrarian planning, and Sering gave a brief closing address.⁴⁹

The Setting Aside of Sering

A few weeks after the conference, Darré wrote to Frick thanking him for the embargo on Sering’s memorandum and went on to point out how dangerous it was for Germany, especially considering the press coverage. Darré later forwarded this letter to Hitler in November and Chief of the Reich Chancellery Hans Lammers in December. Finally, in late December Darré reprimanded Frick and told him to stop

⁴⁶ Ludwig Herrmann, “Die Krisenbekämpfung in Deutschland (Methoden, Stufen und Grenzen der Marktregelung),” in *Vorträge und Verhandlungen über die Weltagrarkrise*, 144.

⁴⁷ Herrmann, “Die Krisenbekämpfung,” 145.

⁴⁸ G. Lorenzoni, “Die Neubildung von Kleingrundbesitz in Italien nach dem Kriege,” in *Vorträge und Verhandlungen über die Weltagrarkrise*, 164–177. On fascist inner colonization in Italy, see Roberta Pergher *Mussolini’s Nation-Empire: Sovereignty and Settlement in Italy’s Borderlands, 1922–1943* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018) and Federico Caprotti, *Mussolini’s Cities: Internal Colonialism in Italy, 1930–1939* (Youngstown, NY: Cambria, 2007).

⁴⁹ Hjalmar Schacht, “Das internationale Schulden- und Kreditproblem,” 272–334, Henry C. Taylor, “International Planung landwirtschaftlicher Produktion,” 402–412, and Max Sering’s closing address, 429–430, all in *Vorträge und Verhandlungen über die Weltagrarkrise*.

protecting the professor and to please cut off all government funding to the Sering Institut.⁵⁰ This last letter is especially intriguing as it indicates that Darré was unaware that Konrad Meyer had in fact already achieved this. Not long after the conference, on October 12, Meyer called for the end of all funding for the Sering Institut by November 1. Sering had been given assurances that he still had time to finish up the institute's affairs, for he wrote to the Minister of Science, Education and National Culture, Bernhard Rust on November 19 thanking him for a three-month extension in funding. Whatever promises had been made, Rust quickly got back into party line, writing four days later: "due to a scarcity of funds a monthly subsidy from 1 November 1934 can no longer be granted."⁵¹ An indignant Sering responded that they had been promised funding until April 1, that people were employed, there was work to be done, and that they could not accept a sudden suspension of funding. This letter ended with "Heil Hitler." Another ministry letter, from December 22, stated that as of the twentieth, there was no more funding available and that "[t]herefore I see myself obliged to dissolve the institute with effect from 31 December 1934."⁵² On Christmas Eve, Sering was forced to write to the members of the institute that it would be pointless for him to reiterate the reasons the government was shutting them down, as these motives were already widely known. He reminded his colleagues that since the end of the war they had been the central place for the study of settlement, something they had shown the world at Bad Eilsen, and that they should therefore all be proud. This letter he ended with "mit deutschem Gruss," (with German greetings) and not "Heil Hitler."⁵³

In her analysis of the shift in power from Sering to Meyer, Irene Stoehr astutely suggests that Meyer likely used Darré's indignation to help him shut down Sering, though it seems without informing Darré of the fact. The institute had been on its deathbed since early November 1934 when, on December 20, Meyer confirmed that the Institute had to close once and for

⁵⁰ Darré to Frick, September 25, 1934; Darré to Hitler, November 16, 1934; Darré to Lammers, December 22, 1934; Darré to Frick, December 22, 1934, all in BArch L, R 43 I/1301. See also Stoehr, "Von Max Sering zu Konrad Meyer," 72.

⁵¹ Sering to Rust, November 19, 1934, and Sering to Rust, December 1, 1934 (in which he responds to Rust's November 23 letter), in BArch K, N1210/156, document 3.

⁵² Rust to Sering, December 22, 1934 in BArch K, N1210/156, document 3. The copy indicates that the letter's author's name is illegible ("Unterschrift unleserlich"), but we can assume it was Rust.

⁵³ Sering to the Directors of the Institute, December 24, 1934. Letters from the summer of 1935 involve Sering attempting to find a home for the institute's remaining books, including a list of all 124, in BArch K, N1210/156, document 3.

all, as the Minister had no “trust” (*Vertrauen*) in either the old professor or any of his trained students.⁵⁴ Darré’s letter demanding that Frick cut off funding, mentioned at the start of this section, was written on December 22. Darré may well have also been fooled by the fearless countenance of the seventy-seven-year-old professor. One of the only glimpses we have into the personal life of Max Sering at this time comes from the incredibly rich diary of the American Ambassador William Dodd. The University of Chicago history professor had actually spent time in 1900 studying at Leipzig and had likely already then been made aware of this friend of America. In fact, US Secretary for Agriculture, Henry A. Wallace, whom Sering had visited in Iowa in 1930, had told Dodd to allow Sering to use his diplomatic pouch for any correspondence to the United States. On the morning of October 24, 1934, Sering called on Dodd, to speak to him about a letter he was writing to Wallace. Dodd reported that the “very vigorous” Sering told him: “[t]hese people do not know anything about economic and historical problems. They are sacrificing the culture and intellectual life of Germany for their fantastic ideals of perfect unity and complete independence of all the world, which is impossible for a great nation.”⁵⁵ Dodd then relayed to Sering that, in March, he had strongly reminded Hitler and Rust about the importance of academic freedom for world civilization. Sering was “surprised and most happy” to hear this. The old German, who did not fear the Gestapo, went on, arguing that the present German leadership

has got itself into a warlike attitude toward all neighbors, and war would ruin Western civilization. This leadership demands submission from the universities, the churches and the people, to its childish ideal. It allows no freedom of speech, conscience or initiative. That will ruin us. We cannot endure it. I am no longer young. I oppose the system and I express my opinions when opportunity offers. If they want to kill me, they can do it. I shall not submit.⁵⁶

Dodd ended his diary entry with this: “Dr. Sering is in danger – serious danger – although I shall keep what he said entirely confidential.”⁵⁷ Dodd knew Schacht well, one of Sering’s staunchest defenders, and it is entirely possible that Schacht had brought home to Dodd the full danger of Sering’s situation.

Dodd met Sering again that momentous Fall, on Sunday, November 11. At lunch, Sering “was again most vigorous and outspoken in his opposition to the Hitler philosophy and practice.” And then,

⁵⁴ Stoehr, “Von Max Sering zu Konrad Meyer,” 65–67.

⁵⁵ William E. Jr. Dodd, and Martha Dodd, eds., *Ambassador Dodd’s Diary, 1933–1938* (New York: Victor Gollancz, [1941] 1945), 188–189.

⁵⁶ Dodd and Dodd, *Ambassador Dodd’s Diary*, 189.

⁵⁷ Dodd and Dodd, *Ambassador Dodd’s Diary*, 197.

interestingly, “[h]is wife was even more venturesome in my presence.” Dodd wrote that the couple were attending Niemoeller’s church in Dahlem, and “rejoice at the Lutheran revolt against the present effort to force all Germans into one church – the *Deutsche Christen*.”⁵⁸ Sitting at that very table was a man wearing “the regular Party badge and to [Dodd’s] surprise, seemed to be preparing a report to the Propaganda Ministry of what he heard.” Sering ignored the man, although Dodd claimed the attentive Nazi was somewhat interested to hear that Sering was related to Admiral Tirpitz.⁵⁹

Although Darré had earlier attempted to bring the full force of antisemitism against Sering in the previously mentioned *Der Stürmer* article, Sering was forced to formally defend himself in the wake of the Nuremberg Laws of 1935. After Sering filled out a University of Berlin form in September 1935, stating: “I do not belong to the National Socialist German Workers’ Party,” the University then sent him a letter in October asking whether any of his grandparents were “full Jews,” or “members of the Jewish religious community.” In his handwritten response, in December, Sering referenced the new laws to indicate that, with only one Jewish grandparent, he was just fine. Perhaps his response was not properly recorded, for in late February the following year, the Rector informed Sering that he could no longer be affiliated with the university, as he was “of a foreign race” (*fremdrassig*).⁶⁰ Sering responded again with his racial information, and in early March the Rector wrote that he was indeed sorry, there had been a mix-up in the office.

An important defender of Sering’s was “Hitler’s Banker,” the earlier mentioned President of the Reichsbank and Minister of Economics, Hjalmar Schacht.⁶¹ Schacht put together a large edited volume in 1937 and had Sering contribute a chapter, the elderly professor’s first publication since the 1934 imbroglio. Although much of the article,

⁵⁸ Dodd and Dodd, *Ambassador Dodd’s Diary*, 197–198.

⁵⁹ Dodd and Dodd, *Ambassador Dodd’s Diary*, 198. In Sering’s papers, there is a letter from the Political Science Professor at Northwestern, Hugo Ferdinand Simon, thanking Sering for a lovely evening at the house in Dahlem in early 1935, alongside Sering’s extensive notes on Simon’s recent publication, *Revolution – Whither Bound?*, in BArch K, N1210/34, document 4.

⁶⁰ All these documents can be found in HUB UA *Personalakten* 84. See also, Steffen Rückl and Karl-Heinz Noack, “Agrarökonomien der Berliner Universität 1933–1945. Von der Vertreibung unerwünschten Hochschullehrer bis zur Ausarbeitung des ‘Generalplan Ost,’” in *Die Berliner Universität in der NS-Zeit*. Vol. 2. *Fachbereiche und Fakultäten*, ed. Rüdiger von Bruch (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 2005), 73–91.

⁶¹ The first record of their acquaintance is a letter from Schacht to Sering on August 13, 1917, in BArch K, N1210/151, document 8. Stoehr states that Schacht funded the publication of Sering’s critique of Darré, Stoehr, “Von Max Sering zu Konrad Meyer,” 71.

“The Agrarian Foundation of the Social Constitution. Great Britain – Germany – Southern Slavic Countries,” focuses on the United Kingdom, Sering’s growing interest in the Danubian Basin (*Donaauraum*) of the Southeast was on full display. Once again, Sering stubbornly mentioned the importance of traditional laws of inheritance for family and farmer stability, something that would surely be seen as once again criticizing the Darré system.⁶² Indeed, more evidence indicates that Sering was as foolhardy as ever. As this volume was coming out, Sering and Schacht made an interesting appearance in Dodd’s diary. On March 30, 1937, Dodd arrived late to what he referred to as Sering’s eighty-fifth birthday (Sering was eighty and, while his birthday was in January, the party that year was in March). Although he missed Sering’s and Schacht’s speeches, he heard that, in front of a hundred guests, both had “criticized the Nazi policy and German military activity. I [Dodd] knew both of them thought this way but was surprised to hear they had felt free enough to talk before a large group of people. Schacht said to me [Dodd]: ‘My position is very critical; I do not know what is to happen’.”⁶³

*The Triumph of Race Science and the Evolution of the
German Right*

With Darré’s “breeding” policies ultimately replacing the ethnic nationalism of Sering’s agrarian-centred small-plot farming families, we see the emergence of eugenics onto centre stage in Germany. From the 1890s to the late 1920s, eugenicists were often in Sering’s orbit, whether sitting beside him at meetings of the Navy League or whispering in the ears of his close friends, such as in Schwerin’s Pan-German circles or amongst the utopian rural thinkers around Sohnrey. In eugenics’ earliest form, the Social Darwinists were interested in rural reform and may well have eventually crossed paths with Sering and garnered his attention, but by the time of the founding of the Racial Hygiene Society in 1905, Alfred Ploetz and other leaders of the movement had largely abandoned any agrarian or romantic interests and were purely focused on “scientific”

⁶² Max Sering, “Die Agrarischen Grundlagen der Sozialverfassung. Grossbritannien – Deutschland – Südslawische Länder,” in *Probleme des Deutschen Wirtschaftslebens: Erstrebtes und Erreichtes* [Dedicated to Dr. Hjalmar Schacht on his 60th Birthday], ed. Deutsches Institut für Bankwissenschaft und Bankwesen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1937): 823–860. The volume also had an article by Dietze, “Volkswirtschaft und Weltwirtschaft unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Rohstofflage,” 651–673, and, during the period where he began moving away from Nazism, a piece by Werner Sombart, “Weltanschauung, Wissenschaft und Wirtschaft,” 749–789.

⁶³ Dodd and Dodd, *Ambassador Dodd’s Diary*, 399–400.

breeding. But these thinkers were difficult to place on the political spectrum. Because of their desire to prevent the procreation of those deemed “weak” or “inferior,” it is often mistakenly assumed that eugenicists were fully on the right politically. Yet their belief that certain traditional values should be ignored in the pursuit of maximally healthy human bodies often led them to hold seemingly liberal values, such as equal rights for women, an interest in socialism, and very little patience for antisemitism. In the 1920s, however, thinkers like Darré managed to take the baseline eugenic program of breeding and link it to exclusive race thinking, that is, Aryanism. Further, Darré connected racial hygiene to his version of inner colonization, where race breeding was to take precedence over the “agrarian” functioning of the system. This was the new agrarian program against which Sering fought in 1934. As “proper” inner colonial thinkers like Sering were “removed” by Darré and his ilk, so the old, “pure” eugenicists were equally silenced by the *Reichsbauernführer*. To the previous generation who had fought hard to remove “tradition” and “unscientific” thinking from racial hygiene, the Nordic Ring and associated Aryan occult elements all sounded rather silly.⁶⁴

Paul Weindling argues that it was the First World War that marked the shift in eugenics from intellectual theory to state planning, spurred by concern over a falling birthrate, nutrition challenges, the loss of so many young men, etc.⁶⁵ Sering's inner colonization had been offered as the solution to such problems before the war but, over the course of the 1920s, the more radical solutions of eugenics gained increasing purchase. Simultaneously, the experience of the war marked a crucial shift in the possibilities of German colonial thinking. The prewar Pan-Germans and their ilk had been interested in the expansion of the German sphere of influence deeper into eastern and southeastern Europe. But such “colonial” endeavours were always to be undertaken alongside the classic pursuit of a proper nineteenth-century Great Power, that is, the maintenance of overseas colonies and global trade, all protected by a modern navy. With the loss of the German overseas empire during the war, there would be no more “split” in German colonial attention or ambition.

⁶⁴ Paul Weindling, *Health, Race and German Politics between National Unification and Nazism, 1870–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 57–141. The Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics was opened in 1927 in a building that is today a part of the Otto Suhr Institute for Political Science, at Ihnestr. 22, very near where the *Raumplaner* Meyer would open the Department of Planning and Soil, and just over three kilometres from Sering's home and institute at Luciusstr. 9.

⁶⁵ Weindling, *Health, Race and German Politics*, 9.

Although the Eastern Empire had also been lost, most imperial-leaning German thinkers from 1919 on agreed that the only future for German expansion would be by land. While Sering remained detached from the rise of biological racism on the German Right, he was of course very sympathetic to the increasingly land-focused thinking of his conservative colleagues. In fact, in the final phase of his life, Sering would become a major advocate of a *Mitteuropa*-style of thinking, along the lines of Naumann's publication of that name in 1915.

Sering, Inner Colonizer of the East, Becomes an *Ostforscher*

By 1935, Sering fully realized that he had lost his hallowed perch atop the world of "inner colonization." Darré and Meyer had taken over his role as the new intellectuals of settling Germans on "empty space," within the *Raum* and the borders of the Reich. Sering hated their approach to settlement, but of course in certain key ways it could be seen as simply the most radical version of what he had always wanted.⁶⁶ The fact that his protégé, the man who took over his chair at Berlin, Dietze, seemingly endorsed the new Nazi path and yet remained a very close colleague of Sering, indicates that pride was likely at the center of the obstinate Sering's dismissal of the *Erbhofrecht*. He could have chosen at this moment to walk quietly into oblivion, or indeed to turn against all Nazi colonial thinking. But he most certainly did not. Instead, just as the radical laboratory that was the Great War had led to him moving further "eastward" in his thinking, beyond Germany itself and all its many frustrations and obstacles, Sering spent the twilight of his career doing, mentally, the very same thing. Sering became an *Ostforscher*, a researcher of the "East."

Michael Burleigh's seminal 1988 book, *Germany Turns Eastward*, details the transition from *Osteuropaforschung*, the study of Eastern Europe, to *Ostforschung*, the study of "the East," a change in thinking that is helpful in understanding this late and final evolution of Sering.

⁶⁶ Friedrich Grundmann argues that Sering's "ideal vision" was only different in nuance from the Nazi program. He cites a cover letter of Sering's, sent along with his 1934 memorandum to "Juris Gaertner," in which Sering said that, while he liked the overall goal of the *Erbhofrecht*, it flew in the face of "Old German Law," especially in the manner it ignores daughters in inheritance. Nevertheless, Sering wrote that he had "campaign[ed] for decades for the goals that the law pursues." Friedrich Grundmann, *Agrarpolitik im "Dritten Reich": Anspruch und Wirklichkeit des Reichserbhofgesetzes* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1979), 54–57. Farquharson also concludes his book arguing that what Sering had always wanted was ultimately similar to the Nazi program. See Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika*, 256.

Alongside colleagues like the renowned Russia expert Otto Hoetzsch, Sering had for decades studied the people and land of East Central Europe, and importantly did not see Russia as the *Urfeind*, eternal enemy, of Germany. Poles were much more of a problem for Sering than Russians. Burleigh tracks a shift in the late 1920s, and increasingly throughout the 1930s, of academic specialists of the East, like Sering, from their “moderate” study of Eastern Europe to a focus on the entire Eastern European space as one to be dominated by Germany. Such a move inevitably became anti-Russian at its core. And such was of course an academic development fully in line with Nazi spatial thinking and ideology. As we shall see, whereas Hoetzsch would not bend the knee and was largely removed from the academic scene by 1935, in that same year, Sering, in the wake of his troubles with Darré, decided to cozy up to the now dominant *Ostforscher*, specialists of “the East.”⁶⁷

Ultimately, this was not exactly a major leap for the old inner colonizer. One of the major areas of *Ostforschung* was the study of *Deutsche Sprachinseln*, islands of German speakers found throughout Eastern Europe, and, following from this, how these Germans could be used for geopolitical gain. Indeed, David Thomas Murphy, in his *The Heroic Earth: Geopolitical Thought in Weimar Germany, 1918–1933*, makes the argument that the intellectual foundation provided by the “inner colonizers” was key to the rise of this academic discipline.⁶⁸ He states that those historians who attempt to draw a hard divide between the earlier thinkers and those who thrived under National Socialism, due to the injection of specific race theories, are simply wrong. Willi Oberkrome pushes this argument, claiming that, instead of a 1933 caesura when it comes to German thinking about the East, one must instead recognize the continuum, as he argues in “Consensus and Opposition: Max Sering, Constantin von Dietze and the ‘Right Camp’ 1920–1940.”⁶⁹ Here Oberkrome traces the many ways in which the work of these two professors on agrarian settlement were not so very different from what became Nazi agrarian settlement science. Once Sering announced that he would like to be a part of team *Ostforscher*, he had little trouble, for, after all, in

⁶⁷ Michael Burleigh, *Germany Turns Eastwards: A Study of “Ostforschung” in the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). Sering was a member of the editorial board of Otto Hoetzsch’s journal *Osteuropa*. See also, Guntram Henrik Herb, *Under the Map of Germany: Nationalism and Propaganda, 1918–1945* (New York: Routledge, 1977).

⁶⁸ David Thomas Murphy, *The Heroic Earth: Geopolitical Thought in Weimar Germany, 1918–1933* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1997).

⁶⁹ Willi Oberkrome, “Konsens und Opposition. Max Sering, Constantin von Dietze und das ‘rechte Lager’ 1920–1940,” *Zeitschrift für Agrargeschichte und Agrarsoziologie* 55 (2007): 10–22.

Oberkrome's words, he was "one of the most imposing figures in the German academic landscape of the early twentieth century."⁷⁰

A mere two months after Darré and Meyer's "silencing" of Sering, the old professor sent a letter to the German Academy in what would today be termed a "cold call." After informing the leadership there of how important his International Agrarian Conference had been, and that both Schacht and important members of the NSDAP had attended in Bad Eilsen, he stated that the Academy had indicated its desire to focus on German settlement in eastern and southeastern Europe. As a specialist on the agrarian history of Germans, he informed them that, since the Middle Ages, German peasants' ability to sell their own land had been crucial to their development (somewhat ironic from a man who had spent decades complaining about speculation). Thus, immediately after citing his Nazi bona fides (Meyer's attendance at the conference), Sering could not help himself but directly criticize Darré's *Erbhofrecht*. He ended his letter with a request, suggesting to the Academy that he write "the agricultural constitution of German settlements in non-Russian eastern and southeastern Europe."⁷¹ As was the case for the remainder of his life, Sering ended the letter with his "German greeting," and not "Heil Hitler." It appears the latter was only used when he still believed he could convince high level Nazis of his point of view or was attempting appease Nazi addressees. A couple of weeks later Sering wrote directly to the godfather of geopolitical-thinking, Karl Haushofer, thanking him for the writings he had sent Sering. He complimented Haushofer, telling him that, for many years, he had been an "eager reader" of his *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik*. He hoped that Haushofer had seen his recent request to the Academy and informed him that he would be attending the upcoming conference in Munich.⁷² Haushofer responded that he was so excited by Sering's ideas that he would like him to present at the conference.⁷³

Sering attended the Munich conference and claimed to have learned a lot from the growing *Ostforscher* crowd.⁷⁴ By May 1935, Sering was in correspondence with many of them, including Albert Brackmann, Director of the Prussian State Archives in Dahlem. In turn, the *Ostforscher* were keen to tell Sering to be very discrete, as the politics were rather delicate, especially with Poland and Czechoslovakia.⁷⁵ In late

⁷⁰ Oberkrome, "Konsens und Opposition," 13.

⁷¹ Sering to the Deutsche Akademie, February 19, 1935, in BArch K, N/1210/14, document 1.

⁷² Sering to Haushofer, March 2, 1935, in BArch K, N/1210/14, document 3.

⁷³ Haushofer to Sering, March 7, 1935, in BArch K, N/1210/14, document 4.

⁷⁴ Various letters in BArch K, N/1210/14, document 5.

⁷⁵ See Creutzberg to Sering, May 22, 1935, and Sering to Brackmann, May 24, 1935, in BArch K, N/210/2.

May, Sering wrote to Dietze informing him that Brackmann had told him that he, Brackmann, led a research foundation that had as its focus the European East and the Germans living in that space. Further, Sering would be giving a talk for them at the Prussian Archive in Dahlem the following Tuesday.⁷⁶ Sering then went one step further and used his lifelong accumulated stature as a fair-minded international scholar: he wrote to his co-conspirators that they could use the International Agrarian Conference membership and structure as an umbrella to make the whole project look innocuous and scientific, but to watch out as there were members from Eastern Europe and the Baltic states that had to be kept in the dark.⁷⁷ This approach reached its culmination in Sering's speech at the International Agrarian Conference held in St. Andrews, Scotland, in late Summer 1936. After walking his listeners through Germany's agrarian history, and how the *Diktat* had both wreaked havoc on the agricultural sector and barred Germany from global trade, he turned to his new *idée fixe*; southeastern Europe, if joined in an economic union with Germany, would encompass some 225 million souls and be the size of the United States, always Sering's standard for a proper land empire. Further, and invoking one of Sering's favourite colonial measurements, the density of the population living along the Danube was only 57 PPSKM. Finally, while this area would only benefit from free and open trade with Germany, it happened to be in possession of most of the raw materials that the German economy required.⁷⁸ This appears to have been Sering's final moment on the international stage.

By June 1935 Sering was actively bringing together authors for the chapters of his planned edited volume on Eastern Europe, the book that would be his final major project. The people he brought on board, such as Kurt Lück and Walter Kuhn, would later become intimately involved in Meyer's *Generalplan Ost*, the genocidal organization of occupied Eastern Europe during the Second World War.⁷⁹ By October, Sering was far enough along on the project to ask his new "source of support,"

⁷⁶ Sering to Dietze, May 24, 1935.

⁷⁷ Sering to Dietze, Creutz., Uhlig, Wiedenf., Seraphim, Aeroboe, June 3, 1935, and Sering to Brackmann, June 3, 1935, in BArch K, N/210/2.

⁷⁸ Max Sering, "The Relations of Land Tenure to the Economic and Social Development of Agriculture," in *Proceedings of the Fourth International Conference of Agricultural Economists held at St. Andrews, Scotland, 30 August to 6 September 1936* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 73–86.

⁷⁹ Various letters involving Sering's contacting authors can be found in BArch K, N/1210/14. In one intriguing letter, Sering claimed he was going to be "political." Sering to Stieve, June 8, 1935. For more on Lück and Kuhn, see Burleigh, *Ostforschung*, 103. Sering would have been well aware of Lück's racist position on Poles, from his book, *Deutsche Aufbaukräfte in der Entwicklung Polens* (Plauen: Günther Wolff, 1934).

the Academy, for ninety-five marks for an eight-day research trip to Poland. They gave it to him.⁸⁰ Sering surely felt (as would decades of historians after 1945), that his new friends, the *Ostforscher*, were somehow not part and parcel of the Nazi project for the East. On December 6, 1935, Dodd once again encountered Sering and his wife, and Sering's daughter's mother-in-law, Countess von Tirpitz. The "frank" talk at the table shocked Dodd, as all present openly criticized the current regime. Nevertheless, Dodd was taken aback when his private conversation with Sering took a very different turn: "Germany's economic interests must spread over the Balkan zone, where there must be an exchange of industrial for agricultural goods," stated Sering, who later added, "[o]f course political co-operation must follow." Dodd, who had clearly met many similar "non-Nazis," wrote the following in his diary:

This was not discussed because I did not care to remind him that the old Kaiser's policy of expanding toward Constantinople was the chief cause of the World War. It is an instinctive policy of national-minded and even moderate Germans to annex parts of the Balkan states and dominate the others, just as Mussolini thinks the Mediterranean Sea and the countries bordering it are properly his, perhaps excepting France.⁸¹

Here, Dodd is succinctly summarizing Burleigh's thesis many decades in advance. Yet, as Dodd would note a month later, Sering was never a Nazi, and was instead "an old-time royalist who prays for Hohenzollern restoration."⁸² Indeed, while warming up to the Nazi-adjacent *Ostforscher*, Sering made clear his contempt for those who held undisputed power in the Third Reich. At an event on February 20, 1937, with black-uniformed SS in the room, Sering openly and loudly criticized the regime's treatment of universities. After Dodd signalled to him the enemy in the room, Sering shouted "I say what I think. They can shoot me any time they want to. This system is ruining German intellectual life."⁸³

Of course, Sering's research was an obvious and direct continuation of the very Naumannesque *Mitteleuropa*-thinking praised by Sering and others some twenty years earlier during the Great War. To what degree then was Sering now flirting with the newer, darker, racial elements of *Ostforschung*? A folder in Sering's papers, containing some research notes for his edited volume then underway, reveal that he was, at the very least, reading the racially leaning material of his peers. Works like Herbert Meyer's "Folk, Race and Law" are heavily underlined, and there are

⁸⁰ Sering to Deutsche Akademie, October 8, 1935, in BArch K, N/210/2.

⁸¹ Dodd and Dodd, *Ambassador Dodd's Diary*, 291–292.

⁸² Dodd and Dodd, *Ambassador Dodd's Diary*, 307.

⁸³ Dodd and Dodd, *Ambassador Dodd's Diary*, 389.

typed notes to Karl Schöpke's "Outline for an Overall Plan for Policies to Overcome the Flight from Agriculture." Although the latter was deeply race-based, Sering surely enjoyed the author's claim that Sering's Reich Settlement Law had been successful. Strangely, Schöpke first praised Darré's 1934 law before pointing out that a lot of farmers had left the land from 1933 to 1938. Sering's handwritten note at the end of this last sentence screams "NB! Without any connection to the previous point then."⁸⁴

Sering's activity regarding the volume was intense. In October 1937, he toured the Balkans, visiting professors, and in March 1938 he spent a week in Timisoara, Romania. In May 1938, he exchanged letters with Gustav Fochler-Hauke, a Sudeten German who worked closely with Karl Haushofer. At the time, Sering was editing the volume's chapter by Andreas Meisner on the Sudetenland, and fascinatingly, at this moment when the circumstances for the Germans living there had quite suddenly changed, Sering did not want the chapter to be "updated."⁸⁵ In another letter to Fochler-Hauke in April 1939, as the edited volume was about to appear, Sering proclaimed that both *Lebensraum* and *Sprachinseln* (ethnic enclaves or "language islands") were themes in the new work and he very much hoped it would find a wide audience. Sering then admitted that, as Fochler-Hauke likely already knew, Darré hated him for something he had written long ago, something that "developments had unfortunately proven [Sering] to be completely correct about." Regarding the sour relationship, Sering "fear[ed] that because of this," any review in a journal associated with Darré was bound to be biased against him.⁸⁶

When the volume finally did appear, Sering and Dietze's long forward opened with the happy news of the return of the Sudeten Germans to the Empire.⁸⁷ Despite Sering's readings over the last two years, the tone is not explicitly racist. It instead harkens back to the decades-old language of German high culture, law, and justice, and how these things should spread into the eastern and southeastern spaces that were, and had always been, German. They argued that the "principle of nationality" meant, quite simply, that once land was Germanized, that land should become a part of the nation of Germany, an argument that was in effect a green light to conquer most of eastern and southeastern Europe, for at least "some" Germans could be found almost anywhere. Along these

⁸⁴ All papers can be found in BArch K, N1210/148, document 3.

⁸⁵ All in BArch K, N1210/148, document 18.

⁸⁶ Sering to Fochler-Hauke, April 28, 1939, in BArch K, N1210/148, document 18.

⁸⁷ Max Sering and C. von Dietze, eds., *Agrarverfassung der deutschen Auslandsiedlungen in Osteuropa* (Berlin: Franz Vahlen, 1939), xiv.

lines, their discussion of the *Wartheland* is especially illuminating. After stating that Posen and West Prussia had been settled by Poles and Germans, and that Frederick the Great had disparagingly referred to this space as “backwoods Canada” (*hinter Kanada*), they argued that the 1886 Program of Inner Colonization had only been partially successful, as “the ruling government principles avoided any compulsion and an energetic Polish counter-colonization was allowed.”⁸⁸ At the very end of his life, Sering was here regurgitating elements of the Nazi critique of his life-long work, that legal niceties were weak, and that “lesser races” were not to be negotiated with. The authors then spent some time, in line with the “principle of nationality,” arguing for the German nature of this land, especially the so-called Polish Corridor, and thereby providing “scientific” cover for Hitler’s “proper” return of said space to the Reich (something about to take place that fall). With regard to the land of the Corridor, they wrote: “The efforts made during the Bismarck Empire, when it was considered inadmissible to use force, resulted in merely consolidating the existing German population, and thereby the German majority.”⁸⁹ Indeed, the authors claimed that had Posen and West Prussia been given a vote in 1919, they would have chosen to stay in the German Empire, as many of the Poles had assimilated and the Prussian state had instilled duty and honour among them. Thankfully, rejoiced the authors, Hitler had ripped up the very *Diktat* that had stolen the land. They finished their foreword claiming that a new “Greater Economic Space” (*Grosswirtschaftsraum*) in East Central Europe would be good for Germany, and the *Sprachinseln* would be much safer under such circumstances.⁹⁰

The Twilight Years

Supporting Women

In an article celebrating the old professor’s eightieth birthday in January 1937, one of Sering’s many female students, Wendelin Hecht, wrote that, after the war, Sering had ended every lecture with a call for the

⁸⁸ Sering and Dietze, *Agrarverfassung*, xxxvi. ⁸⁹ Sering and Dietze, *Agrarverfassung*, xli.

⁹⁰ Some of the more interesting chapters in this volume include: Otto Auhagen, “Ueber die Entwicklung der Agrarverfassung der deutschen Bauern im heutigen Gebiet der Sozialistischen Sowjet-Republiken,” 1–86; Hans-Jürgen Seraphim, “Die Wandlung der Agrarverfassung der deutschen Volksgruppe in den baltischen Staaten,” 87–128; Karl Lübbike, “Siedlungsgeschichte, Sozial- und Wirtschaftsverfassung der deutschen Landbevölkerung in Polen,” 129–208; and Andreas Meisner, “Die Agrarverfassung der Deutschen in den Sudetenländern und den Westkarpathen,” 213–306.

end of the *Diktat*, the restoration of the honourable military, and the independence of Germany. She claimed that the lecture halls were packed with soldiers and officers who loved him, and that he would take students on hour-long hikes through the Grunewald, observing woodpeckers hunting for worms.⁹¹ Among the ninety-six guests at the formal birthday party held that March were old academic pals, Auhagen, Broedrich, Meinecke, Oncken, Ponfick, Adolph Weber, inner colonizers Gayl and Lindequist, the lead *Ostforcher* Brackmann, Sering's closest protégé Dietze, Sering's daughter and her husband von Tirpitz, Schacht, Ambassador Dodd, and the Minister of Finance Graf Schwerin von Krosingk.⁹² In a speech at the party, Schacht declared Sering to be the "best fighter for Germany's *Lebensraum*."⁹³ For his part, Sering expressed that he did not hear that evening's speeches to be so much about him, as they were about the importance of "free speech in the sciences as necessary for Germany's well-being."⁹⁴ In other words, the old professor seemed to never let a public moment slip past without a dig at the anti-intellectualism of the Nazis.

It was no coincidence that a woman wrote the article detailing the professor's relationship with his students. German politician and seminal member of the German women's rights movement, Marie-Elisabeth Lüders, published an article in *Die Frau* in February, fondly recalling her classes with Professor Sering, how the door to the lecture hall would swing open ninety degrees, and in Sering would confidently stride. He would put down his books with a thump, then lecture passionately in a loud full voice, all the while with his water glass at the edge of the lectern, about to fall.⁹⁵ Although conservative, Sering took on many female students and possessed at least a moderately feminist

⁹¹ "Der alte Geheimrat. Zu Max Serings achtzigstem Geburtstag," *Frankfurter Zeitung*, January 17, 1937.

⁹² Documentation about the party can be found among Dietze's papers, in ALUF UA, C100/677.

⁹³ In an incredible letter sent to Sering on the occasion of his birthday, Commander-in-Chief of the Wehrmacht, General Field Marshall Werner von Blomberg, told Sering that, "On the grounds of national security your work during the war is not yet fully known. You will be satisfied to know that today's *Wehrmacht* builds upon your past work." Oberkrome, "Konsens und Opposition," 19.

⁹⁴ Dietze to Sering, March 19, 1937, in ALUF UA, C100/677. Dietze spent years trying to put together a Festschrift for Sering, but it never happened. See the nine years' worth of letters back and forth to contributors, 1928–1937, in ALUF UA, C100/671–5.

⁹⁵ Irene Stoehr, "Stille Dienste, hoher Knall: Professor Sering und die Frauen," in *Geschichte in Geschichten: Ein historisches Lesebuch*, ed. Barbara Duden, Karen Hagemann, Regina Schulte, and Ulrike Weckel (Frankfurt: Campus, 2003), 30. Lüders also wrote a letter that was published in *Die Frau* (February 1937) emphasizing how supportive of women Sering was. ALUF UA, C100/677.

understanding of women's roles in the public sphere. In 1905, he hosted women's rights activists at his home, and as early as 1902 he convinced the later famous social reformer, Alice Salomon, to pursue studies which he later oversaw. Salomon proclaimed Sering to be "very progressive."⁹⁶ Lüders had in fact been his doctoral student (co-supervised with Schmoller) in 1912. Indeed, Sering's own daughter was studying economics under her father when she met Wolfgang, the son of Admiral von Tirpitz, in class, whom she then married in 1921. Female academics knew Sering to have a sympathetic ear, and many of them wrote letters to him when he took his stand against the *Erbhofrecht* in 1934, for, in its already absurd "youngest son" inheritance procedure, women (including the widow) could be banned from inheriting the farm even if they were the only living child.⁹⁷ Sering's interest in female academics reached its zenith at the very end of his career when, in 1939, he and Dietze edited volume number three of the series "German Agrarian Politics," entitled *Women in German Agriculture*. In the foreword the authors generously stated that the new *Erbhofrecht* had stopped the agrarian crisis but had not done enough to halt the flight from the land. This flight, they argued, alongside massive industrialization, had put the German *Hausfrau* in an incredibly difficult situation.⁹⁸ There followed six chapters on the plight of women in the German countryside, and all were written by women.⁹⁹

Negotiating with Power

Sering was forced to use what power he had left in the Summer of 1937 when his protégé, Dietze, was arrested. Dietze had been a Russian prisoner of war in Siberia and had there learned Russian. After

⁹⁶ Stoehr, "Stille Dienste," 29. Sering wrote the foreword to Charlotte Engel-Reimers, *Der Idealismus in der Wirtschaftswissenschaft*, ed. Dorothea Bernhard-Jacobi (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1932).

⁹⁷ Stoehr, "Stille Dienste," 25–26. In a letter to the *Raumplaner*, Wilhelm Seedorf, Sering complained that the *Erbhofrecht*'s rules had resulted in a drop in the rural birthrate, and that the situation was miserable for the *Bauernfrau* (farming wife). Sering to Seedorf, August 1, 1938.

⁹⁸ Max Sering and Constantin von Dietze, eds., *Deutsche Agrarpolitik*. Vol. 3. *Die Frau in der deutschen Landwirtschaft* (Berlin: Franz Vahlen, 1939), v–vii.

⁹⁹ Dr. Marie Berta von Brand, "Die Landfrau im Reichsnährstand, im weiblichen Bildungswesen, in der Rechtsordnung"; Dr. Marie Berta von Brand, "Die Frau in der Landwirtschaft Süddeutschlands"; Toni Walter, "Die Frau in der Landwirtschaft Ost- und Nordostdeutschlands"; Toni Walter, "Die Frau in der Landwirtschaft Mitteldeutschlands, dargestellt an der Provinz Sachsen"; Dr. Lucie Roeske-Wierper, "Die Artländerin im wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Leben. Ein Kultur- und Lebensbild aus dem niedersächsischen Bauerntum"; and Dr. Ida Kisker, "Das weibliche Gesinde in der rheinischen und westfälischen Landwirtschaft."

the war he had written a dissertation at the University of Breslau in 1919 on Stolypin's land reforms and completed his *Habilitation* with Sering in 1922.¹⁰⁰ The two had in fact met in Warsaw in March 1918, after Dietze's liberation following the Russian Revolution. Dietze was Sering's replacement at the University of Berlin in 1933, but things were not easy for him under the Nazi regime. At Bad Eilsen in 1934, Dietze had put on a good face, praising the attempt at full control over the agrarian sector being put in place by Darré, but, behind the scenes, there was little Sering's protégé could do to escape the wrath of the *Reichminister*.¹⁰¹ He did not help himself by being a member, like Sering, of the Confessing Church, and he was indeed quite active in his local church in Potsdam. By 1936, he had escaped to the more hospitable Freiburg, replacing the retiring Professor Karl Diehl at the university there, but he was back visiting in Potsdam in the Summer of 1937 when he crossed the line, as it were. It appears that the local Confessing Church pastor had been removed and replaced by a member of the Nazi-friendly "German Christians." That new pastor, Dr. Thom, did not like what Dietze was saying in the church one Sunday and asked him to stop. Dietze then asked the congregation to follow him outside, where he continued to speak of the injustice of the current situation. Shortly thereafter the Gestapo arrested him. Sering fired off letters to Schacht and the Minister of Finance, Krosingk. Dietze was released after two weeks and skulked off to Freiburg where he kept his head relatively low but continued to work closely with Sering over the next two years.¹⁰²

In the same year as Dietze's arrest, Darré resumed his vitriolic attack on Sering with the publication of a book entitled *The Murder of the Pigs* (*Der Schweinemord*). Darré's thesis was that a cabal of Jewish professors, intent on the destruction of Germany from within, conspired to starve the nation into defeat during the Great War. At the centre of the story was the "half Jew" (in reality, one-quarter Jewish) Sering, at the head of the scientific commission charged with organizing the feeding of the German people. The first thing Sering and his henchmen did, seethed Darré, was to call for the slaughter of seventy-five percent of Germany's pigs in early 1915. Of course, a Jewish disgust for pork was cited as a motivating factor. And to remind us as to why Darré was so angry with Sering, he wrote that Sering's call for the pig slaughter was done via a

¹⁰⁰ Oberkrome, "Konsens und Opposition," 14.

¹⁰¹ Dietze wrote to Goering in 1934, complaining that Darré had the Gestapo suppress an article of his, even though it involved his support for Germany and the *Führer*. Dietze to Goering, May 5, 1934, in ALUF UA, C100/349.

¹⁰² For letters and documents about this episode, see ALUF UA, C100/29, 31, 34.

secret memorandum (the very same way he attempted to disrupt Darré's *Erbhofrecht* in 1934). Some twelve pages later, Darré indeed reminded his readers of the 1934 backstabbing episode.¹⁰³

While it is more than clear that Darré had an undying hatred for old Sering, Konrad Meyer's relationship with him is more difficult to discern. Irene Stoehr argues that the cold, calculating Meyer instrumentalized Darré's anger against Sering for his own purposes, slowly but surely usurping Sering's role as the chief settlement expert of Germany. She goes further, invoking a vaguely Oedipal take down and replacing of the authoritative father, but a passage in Meyer's autobiography runs somewhat against such an interpretation. Meyer's father was a conservative patriot embittered by the First World War, similar to Sering, and the father and son were quite close before the former's death in 1931.¹⁰⁴ In any case, Meyer was directly involved in sidelining Sering in 1934, but the historical record leaves us with the words of someone who at least "performed" respect and deference toward his elder. In the preparation for the next International Agrarian Conference, to be held in Banff in 1938, Meyer corresponded very cordially with Sering, as Meyer would be representing Germany in Canada. Sering was heavily involved in organizing which other professors would be going and was full of advice for Meyer. Stoehr frames this as the final usurpation of Sering by Meyer, but I highly doubt Sering was ever going to make such a journey at his advanced age.¹⁰⁵ The following year Meyer would take over the editorial role for *NB*, and at that point a noticeable shift to more theoretical work on settlement appeared in the journal.¹⁰⁶ Such thinking would soon take centre stage with the conquest of Poland and renewed work of settlement in the *Wartheland*.

Sering's End

Indeed, the newly erupted war in the Fall of 1939 led to Sering's final act. Finding his nation once again involved in a major conflagration, Sering set aside his reservations with the Nazi regime and relied upon his

¹⁰³ Richard Walther Darré, *Der Schweinemord* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1937).

¹⁰⁴ In the late 1930s, Meyer would go for early morning rides in the Grunewald, and one wonders if he sometimes came across Sering. Meyer's unpublished memoir can be found as Konrad Meyer, "Auf Tiefen und Höhen. Ein Lebensbericht," (written 1972/1973), in BArch K N 1561/24.

¹⁰⁵ See Meyer to Sering, February 18, 1938. BArch K, N/210/2, third folder, document 1.

¹⁰⁶ The elder Sohnrey was officially replaced by Meyer as the editor of *NB* at the beginning of 1939. Shortly thereafter, his eightieth birthday was celebrated in the pages of the journal, as well as a mention that he too, like Sering earlier, had now received the *Adlerschild*.

experience during the First World War studying Germany's wartime economy to come up with a ten-page report in October, providing some general advice on how Germany should more effectively withstand the pressures of a breakdown in global trade. It surely irked him that he had never been allowed to publish the findings of his First World War research team, though at least he knew their work was probably being studied, as the Nazis had confiscated his entire archive of documents for the Economic Commission in 1933. In any case, he now set about putting his thoughts to paper, beginning by reminding the audience of his expertise, highlighting that "during the world war" he had been "Chairman of the 'Scientific Commission of the Prussian War Ministry'."¹⁰⁷ His three major points were profoundly linked to the experience of that war: (1) Germany could not win a stalemate war with France under the current conditions, so a British Blockade would have to be overcome (*sprengen*); (2) To survive a long war Germany would have to be on the defensive behind a "Westwall," while getting rural workers back on the land, and developing the Silesian coal export to neutral Eurasian countries; and, finally (3) Pursue a strong diplomacy with neutral countries in order to keep Germany as powerful as Russia. He proceeded from these points to offer several interesting thoughts, including a fear that the Americans would set up factories in Canada in order to be able to make and sell weapons to the Allies. He opined that it would be great if the Germans could pierce the Maginot Line and win a war of movement, as they had in Poland, but that this was highly unlikely, and unfortunately Germany could never win a long war of attrition against the Allies. This was especially true as another 950,000 Germans had fled the rural districts since 1933. Shockingly, Sering chose this moment to once again blame Darré's inheritance law for this flight from the land. Nevertheless, hunkering down behind a western wall would protect German rural workers, and then a "diplomacy" that brought in East Central Europe, Southeastern Europe, Italy and Italian Africa would create a bloc of 225 million people, Sering claimed, enough to weather any blockade, especially if good trade relations with Russia were maintained. He ended the memorandum with praise for Hitler's ripping up of the *Diktat*, and the hope that Germany, in such an alliance with Eastern Europeans and Russia, could defeat the "pirate law" of the British, the true enemy. If we required any more evidence of just how out of step Sering's understanding of the new dynamics in Germany were, how naïve

¹⁰⁷ Max Sering, "Auswertung der Erfahrungen des Weltkrieges für die deutsche Heeres- und Volkswirtschaft der Gegenwart unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Eisen und Nahrung," in BArch L, R 3101 32168.

he was about Germany's future in the East, this final document makes it quite plain that, at the end, Sering was still the relatively moderate nineteenth-century imperialist he had always been.¹⁰⁸

These thoughts, on how his homeland could best weather the storm of yet another global conflict, were still on Sering's mind when, at 10 pm on the evening of Sunday, November 12, he died. After working hard throughout October, stomach trouble sent him to bed in early November. During that final Sunday, intestinal and stomach bleeding hastened the end. As late as 9 pm he was reading aloud from Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, indicating which sections should be highlighted.¹⁰⁹ He then fell asleep. But, at the last moment, he awoke with a start and said to his daughter his last sentence. It was a summation of what he had learned in a lifetime of studying economics and imperialism, and simultaneously a critique of the National Socialists: "Autarky, crazy!" ("Autarkie, wahnsinn!")¹¹⁰

At 11:30 am, on Thursday, November 16, 1939, Sering was buried beside his son in the small cemetery behind the St. Anne Church in Dahlem, Berlin.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Oberkrome considers this final document to indicate a Sering much closer to Nazism than I do. See Oberkrome, "Konsens und Opposition," 20.

¹⁰⁹ Dietze to Friedrich Schlömer, November 18, 1939.

¹¹⁰ Wolfgang von Tirpitz, interview with author, 2013.

¹¹¹ A few weeks after Sering's death, in the wake of a series of laudatory obituaries, the official SS newspaper, *Das Schwarze Korps*, published an attack piece, bringing up the "half-Jew" charge, as well as pointing the reader to Darré's book on the *Schweinemord* and Sering's role in what the author deemed to be a pig slaughter that directly resulted in the deaths by starvation of hundreds of thousands of German women and children. The author then stated that he could not allow this history of backstabbing to go unmentioned. Although Darré's fingerprints appear all over this episode, it was not "officially sanctioned" and a brouhaha followed over the next several weeks as the *Wehrmacht* was livid. The staff of the OKW indicated that Sering was very popular in the *Wehrmacht* and that this article was an embarrassment. Henceforward, Keitel was to sign off on any article attacking a person of importance, and that if anyone, including Darré, had a problem with this, they should discuss it with Hitler. For the attack on Sering, see *Das Schwarze Korps*, December 7, 1939. The obituaries can be found in BAArch L, R/8034/III.