3 Career Beginnings, Eastern Interests
Kaiserreich, Part Two (1883–1897)

The First Appointment: Bonn, 1883

In October 1883, Sering returned to Germany but was no longer living in the frontline trenches of the Alsatian borderlands. Instead, he was in the reserve line: his new home was now on an ancient border, the Rhine river, at the University of Bonn. It would be fair to say that previously French-occupied, Catholic Rhineland was not as "German" as the Saxon heartland he had known as a child. The draw of Bonn for Sering was the ageing but influential economics professor Erwin Nasse. Although primarily known as an historian of banking and taxes, Nasse's interests had turned to agrarian history, including his study of enclosure in England.[1] Nasse had been a cofounder of the VfS and, from 1874, was the Chair of that organization. He was an excellent mentor to Sering.

By way of the letters Sering wrote to Friedrich Althoff, we get a glimpse of the famous Althoff-system[2] of Prussian higher education, as well as some rare insight into Sering's personal life at this time. Althoff, director of the university section of the Prussian Ministry of Culture, had enormous influence upon who received university appointments, and someone in Sering's precarious position had to remain in Althoff's good graces. Sering reported to Althoff that he was so busy writing up his findings that he had little time to lecture and, therefore, little money. He reminded Althoff first of a promised scholarship (which then arrived in December),[3] then, in February 1884, of an upcoming permanent professorship at Bonn which Althoff had clearly given him hopes he would one day receive.[4] Many times in these letters we see an element

[1] Erwin Nasse, *Ueber die mittelalterliche Feldgemeinschaft und die Einhegungen des sechszehnten Jahrhunderts in England* (Bonn: Carl Georgi, 1869).
[2] Many letters in the Althoff papers indicate that, in later years, Sering became himself a part of "the system," passing along his thoughts on professor appointments throughout Prussia.
[3] Sering to Althoff, November 29, 1883; Sering to Althoff, December 28, 1883.
[4] Sering to Althoff, February 28, 1884.

of a professor's life that remains unchanged today: Sering was always telling Althoff that the big book on his 1883 trip was right around the corner, he only needed a bit of time off from lecturing, one more research trip to Berlin, and so on. Of course, then as now, no administrator enjoys hearing only about this element of an academic's duty, so Sering smartly and constantly referred to how much he enjoyed lecturing and was getting better and better at it all the time.[5] By late 1884, however, Sering was getting a bit frustrated with what we today would call the "adjunct life" (again, little has changed). After informing Althoff that he was only making 2,000 marks a year, he claimed, or rather threatened, that he would not have been in this position of being forced to beg for scholarships if he had remained in his previous career, as a civil servant in Alsace.[6] Althoff seems to have responded well to such provocation, as this series of letters ended with Sering thanking Althoff for the fixed annual "remuneration" he would thenceforth be receiving.[7]

Sering quickly condensed his immediate post-trip thinking about North America and agrarian settler colonialism with his *Habilitationsrede*, the address he gave in November of 1883, at Bonn, as part of the formal requirements for attaining this highest of degrees, a post-doctoral designation usually needed in order to lecture. Over the winter, Sering expanded his thoughts from the speech and in 1884 published the revised version as an article in the major journal, edited by Schmoller, *Jahrbuch für Gesetzgebung, Verwaltung und Volkswirtschaft im Deutschen Reiche*, known colloquially as *Schmollers Jahrbuch*. Entitled simply "The Agrarian Politics of the United States of America," this fifty-four page overview contained the seeds of many of the issues and ideas that would be central to Sering's entire career. Indeed, the very kernel of his worldview appeared in the opening sentence: "The economic history of the North American republic is that of a colonizing *Volk*."[8] He then immediately laid out his utopian myth/fantasy of the American West, and its contrast to Germany's colonial lands. Fascinatingly, his point of comparison was not yet his future locus, Posen/West Prussia, but the very place he had grown up and was in the process of permanently leaving: "[The new Western Territories] have a similar legal position in the USA as our *Reichsland* Alsace-Lorraine,

[5] Sering to Althoff, February 28, 1884; Sering to Althoff, March 26, 1884.
[6] Sering to Althoff, November 1, 1884.
[7] Sering to Althoff, December 30, 1884. He ended this letter stating that he was not yet finished with his American report. He still had to finish some chapters and edit the others. This would in fact take three more years.
[8] Max Sering, "Die Landpolitik der Vereinigten Staaten von Nordamerika," *Schmollers Jahrbuch* 8 (1884), 439.

which is ultimately controlled federally."[9] But, Sering lamented, unlike what the Germans had to deal with in their West, Americans had encountered "a not yet existing society, in an immense, hardly yet settled space, to put in order."[10] By way of contrast, Germany possessed "old lands," where every attempt at innovation was stymied by layers and layers of tradition (and, it should be said, people). This fantasy, that the American West was virtually empty, the always desired colonial *tabula rasa*, would forever remain in Sering's mind, his *idée fixe*. The modernist fantasy was plain to see when Sering described *Vermessung*, the act of measuring, on the Prairies: the entire space was cut up into perfect 160-acre quadrilaterals, the high modern grid. Each farmer was dropped onto his square or rectangle. This was quite unlike Germany with its ancient property lines that no map could properly assess, and the resulting interminable squabbling. The American farmer was a rugged individual who owned his own piece of land – which Sering noted was in fact the case for most farmers in his current home in the Prussian Rhine Province. Yet, throughout his career, Sering was always the "scientist," never allowing pure ideological fantasy to completely blind him to realities. Right here, having just laid out the checkerboard dream of planning, he pointed out its unavoidable absurdities. Such a grid made no allowances for hills and streams, and thus farmers could inherit some difficult situations that could only be resolved through property trading with neighbours. And Sering had to point out that roads only followed lines of the extremely "logical" property lots, and obeyed no reasonable "road logic," resulting in some rather strange routes.[11]

In this same early article Sering made his first of what would be many future references to the formerly slave-owning elite of the American South, describing them in a manner that, although never directly stated, sounded an awful lot like the *Junker* of Germany's East.[12] He claimed that the American slaveholder aristocracy had earlier artificially inflated the price of land in the South in order to keep out settlers and maintain their hegemony. Indeed, as he would argue again three years later in his book, Sering directly compared the US North, with its small-holding, yeomen farmers, to the giant, former slave-holding estates of the South, arguing that a future great nation could only come from the former and

[9] Sering, "Die Landpolitik," 442. [10] Sering, "Die Landpolitik," 439.
[11] Sering, "Die Landpolitik," 443–445.
[12] Sering may well have heard a version of this from his teacher in Strasbourg, Friedrich Knapp, who had long favoured the break-up of *Junker* estates, comparing the *Junker* system to slave economies in America and the Caribbean. Erik Grimmer-Solem, *Learning Empire: Globalization and the German Quest for World Status, 1875–1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 35.

that the latter had to be destroyed. This was a rather thinly veiled critique of landless-labour/Polish-seasonal-worker-employing *Junker* aristocrats east of the Elbe.[13]

Sering then spent a few pages describing the great American Homestead Act of 1862, and focused on one of its central problems, a problem that Sering wrestled with throughout his entire career: if a government provides free, or virtually free, land to a settler, when (if at all) should that settler be allowed to sell that land? The 1862 law declared that the settler had to stay for five years, improving the land, however, after only six months one could sell for a "minimum price." Sering argued that, whereas Americans just wanted to sell the land for profit, Germans tended to have a deeper love of the soil and might not do so. Nonetheless, early on, Sering had already realized that "freedom" and love of the soil would most likely have to be married to some form of feudal "entailment"; land should be given to settlers but, in return, they should not have complete freedom to sell. Another element that appeared in the 1862 American law that would stay with Sering was the idea of specifically targeting veterans for settlement.

Sering ended his 1884 article by addressing what he considered to be the central problem at hand, and strongly hinted at the answer that he would spend his life attempting to implement. There was now "a renewed migration (*Völkerwanderung*) of the German peoples, after more than a thousand-year rest."[14] But, whereas the first migration saw a wild group of warlike hunters emerge from the forests to destroy the "fallen culture" of late Rome, this time the migration represented an old culture arriving in the "New World." Crucially, however, and far less dramatically, what was drawing them to that far off land was the promise of autonomy via the "*Vertheilung des Grundbesitzes*," the manner in which property had been divided into small and medium plots that allowed for families to be "independent." And, significantly, this had been done through the governmental imposition of a settlement law. Before 1862, Sering argued, it was simply luck that created the small, hardworking yeomen farmers of the American North. Now, such smallholdings were organized by the state and, because the West had been settled in such a fashion, America would continue to be strong, and continue to attract Germany's best and brightest.[15] The article appeared in April 1884 while Sering was teaching

[13] On the many comparisons being made in this period between *Junker* and the slave-holding South, see Angela Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, The German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

[14] Sering, "Die Landpolitik," 483. [15] Sering, "Die Landpolitik," 483–495.

at Bonn for the first time. The following year, at the age of twenty-eight, Sering received his first official *Ruf* at Bonn, and became an *ausserordentliche* professor. He would spend the next four years in Bonn, establishing his career, while Germany initiated a program that began to fulfill many of the wishes Sering hinted at in this, his first major article.

Bismarck and Colonialism: A Shifting Gaze from Overseas to Next Door, 1884–1885

In the same year that Sering declared that the Germans were wandering again, Bismarck convened the year-long Berlin West Africa Conference. In 1885, as the conference came to an end with Germany's decision that it would continue to establish an overseas empire, the Chancellor gave the order to expel some 32,000 Polish and Jewish seasonal workers out of Prussian Poland back to their Russian or Habsburg homelands. And by the end of 1885, schemes were forming to settle "wandering Germans" within Germany itself, in the German East, plans that Bismarck would turn into reality in 1886. At an elite level, German thinking in the mid-1880s shifted from the expansion of a settler empire overseas to a renewed settlement of German colonists in the borderlands.

Grand overseas colonial thinking seems to have never been of much interest to Bismarck. A few years later, in 1888, he uttered the famous line that made clear that, in the end, all foreign policy was about Germany's place in Europe: "Your map of Africa is really quite nice. But my map of Africa lies in Europe. Here is Russia, and here … is France, and we're in the middle – that's my map of Africa."[16] Whatever form colonialism took, whether economic, settler, overseas, or adjacent, improving the domestic situation within Germany seems to have been all Bismarck really cared about. The depression of the 1870s that led formally to the "Marriage of Rye and Iron," discussed in Chapter 2, was likely also what led to Bismarck's interest, by the early 1880s, in "economic" colonialism, as opposed to settler or migrationist colonialism. In December 1882, the Colonial Society (*Kolonialverein*) was founded in Germany and immediately began petitioning the *Reichstag*. The popularity of imperial expansion was obvious and Bismarck saw opportunities to use it for domestic gain, what the historian Hans-Ulrich Wehler famously termed "social imperialism."[17] It made sense to him, politically and

[16] Eugen Wolf, *Vom Fürsten Bismarck und seinem Haus. Tagebuchblätter*. 2nd ed. (Berlin: Fleischel, 1904), 16.
[17] Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Bismarck und der Imperialismus* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1969).

financially, to support a network of economic colonies in Africa in competition with Britain and France, and indeed it was the desire to secure these colonies that led to the 1884/1885 conference. There was, however, a downside to this "security" when the Berlin Conference introduced the idea of "effective occupation," that is, settler colonialism (unlike the purely economic colonialism Bismarck liked) would have to be supported with government monies. To hold onto a colony a European country would have to invest in it.

Matthew Fitzpatrick points out that imperialism (and indeed colonialism) was not some tangential element of the liberal project, but, from at least 1849, was central to liberalism in Germany. Further, already by the 1850s, there was colonial language that made clear that South America, the Danube, and even European Turkey, were all a part of an imagined German colonial project. Bismarck tended to rely on a political allegiance with the National Liberals and, thus, when the latter turned strongly toward colonialism in the early 1880s, he followed.[18] In turn, when Bismarck eventually aimed his "colonial" guns on the adjacent space of Prussian Poland, the National Liberals were some of his biggest champions. One of the major colonial thinkers in this period, Friedrich Fabri, had strongly argued for the need of "temperate" zones for German settler colonialism.[19] Many of the factors that would slowly but surely come to define the argument between "inner colonization" versus "overseas colonization" were thus highlighted right at this mid-1880s transitional moment. Effective occupation was indeed much easier to administer in Posen than East Africa. The climate in West Prussia was in fact ideal for a German. While inner colonial thinkers were usually in favour of all colonies, it was these very arguments that they would employ in favour of an Eastern versus an Overseas Empire.

Draining and Damming: Expulsion and Settlement Ideas

Forced Assimilation

Throughout the first decade of Bismarck's chancellorship, there was a growing reality in Germany's eastern provinces that was becoming

[18] Matthew P. Fitzpatrick, *Liberal Imperialism in Germany: Expansionism and Nationalism, 1848–1884* (New York: Berghahn, 2008).

[19] Woodruff D. Smith, *The German Colonial Empire* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 22. See also, Klaus Bade, *Friedrich Fabri und der Imperialismus in der Bismarckzeit: Revolution – Depression – Expansion* (Freiburg: Atlantis, 1975).

increasingly impossible to ignore: Posen and West Prussia were becoming more Polish. On the one hand, the cliché about Catholics appeared to be a reality, as Catholic Poles were having children at a faster rate than the Protestant Germans in the eastern provinces.[20] On the other hand, the less fecund Germans were leaving the eastern provinces for industrial job opportunities in the West of Germany or the promise of land on the Western Frontier of North America. Bismarck would first attempt to turn the growing Polish population into Germans and, when that failed, he began to resort to more extreme measures.

The 1870s in Prussian Poland saw many of the hallmarks of what, in the language of post-colonialism today, we would call cultural genocide. The forced Germanization of Poles took two major forms during this decade: religious and linguistic. While the Protestant war on Catholicism was centuries old in Germany, the *Kulturkampf* in Prussian Poland took on a distinctly ethnic element, as Catholicism was tightly bound to Polish nationalism. Bismarck's anti-Catholic policies removed and often imprisoned Polish priests, replacing them with Germans.[21] Simultaneously, between 1874 and 1876, German completely replaced Polish in the elementary and secondary schools of Posen, and German became the only permissible language of public administration. Yet, as was argued in an 1883 article, due to intermarriage and assimilation, German Catholics were simply becoming Polish.[22] Administrative moves were not changing the national battle on the ground.

Removal

Before our story turns to the "inner colonial" settlement program that began in 1886, we must first discuss an initial, more radical, approach undertaken to answer the "Polish Question": expulsion. In March 1885, Russian and Austrian Poles were expelled from Prussian Poland, resulting in approximately 32,000 people being removed, a third of

[20] On the demographic situation in the Prussian provinces, see Matthew G. Bias, "The Bamberger Myth: The Poznanian Bambergers, the Construction of Nationalism, and the Mythologization of History in Poznania, 1871–1918" (PhD dissertation, George Washington University, 2020). See also, Mark Tilse, *Transnationalism in the Prussian East: From National Conflict to Synthesis, 1871–1914* (New York: Palgrave, 2011).

[21] Richard Blanke, *Prussian Poland in the German Empire (1870–1900)* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), ch. 1.

[22] Fr. J. Neumann, "Germanisirierung oder Polenisirierung? (Ein Beitrag zur Nationalitäts- und Grundeigentumsstatistik der Provinz Posen," *Jahrbücher für Nationalökonomie und Statistik* 41 (1883): 457–463. For a thorough discussion on the process through which German Catholics in the Province of Posen "polonized," see Bias, "The Bamberger Myth."

whom were Jewish.[23] Ludwig Windthorst, the leader of the German Catholic Centre Party, in describing what was happening to the relatives of his many Polish voters, made an obvious and loaded connection: "The methods we see and hear of being used here against the Poles are reminiscent of the war of extermination against the Indians."[24] In the discussions and decisions made around the legality of the Prussian government's decision to forcibly expel 32,000 Poles, we see the outlines of the very issue that would plague inner colonizers working within the "legal confines" of Germany. Poles who were Prussian subjects had, ostensibly, the legal rights of every other German, and were thus not "Indians."[25] People with rights tended to get in the way of the nationalizing plans of people like the inner colonizers. This roadblock to eastern settlement would only be solved by way of military conquest in 1915. Russian Poles, however, lacking the legal protection of Prussian citizenship, who found themselves in Prussia in 1885 (or later in our story, behind German lines in 1915), were, effectively, as bereft of legal recourse as Indigenous peoples on the Western Frontier of North America. With the realization that Prussian Poles could not simply be expelled, the conditions were set for an alternative, and legal, mode of Germanization: settler colonialism.

In 1884, the Prussian Minister of the Interior, Robert von Puttkamer, contacted Christoph von Tiedemann, an advisor to Bismarck and the *Regierungspräsident* of Bromberg, in West Prussia, and requested he write a report on the reasons for German emigration from the East. In his findings, Tiedemann described three reasons for "flight": (1) the lack of salaried employment, (2) the promising outlook of a better life elsewhere, and (3) an unhappiness with current economic relationships in the East. Tiedemann pointed out, however, that a lack of employment simply could not be true, as thousands of Poles and Jews crossed seasonally into Prussian Poland each year. Instead, he insisted, both Polish and German landowners preferred to hire migrant workers because they were cheaper and undemanding (*anspruchslos*).[26] Here, one can see the seeds in

[23] Joachim Mai, *Die preußisch-deutsche Polenpolitik 1885/87. Eine Studie zur Herausbildung des Imperialismus in Deutschland* (Berlin: Rütten & Loenig, 1962).

[24] Matthew Fitzpatrick, *Purging the Empire: Mass Expulsions in Germany, 1871–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 112.

[25] Roland Baier, *Der Deutsche Osten als Soziale Frage: Eine Studie zur preußischen und deutschen Siedlungs- und Polenpolitik in den Ostprovinzen während des Kaiserreichs und der Weimarer Republik* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1980), 9, fn. 6.

[26] Helmut Neubach, *Die Ausweisungen von Polen und Juden aus Preussen 1885/86: Ein Beitrag zu Bismarcks Polenpolitik und zur Geschichte des deutsch-polnischen Verhältnisses* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1967), 14–17. We see here the tension between capitalism, in the form of the free movement of labour, and ethnic nationalism. One need only

Tiedemann's thinking behind two of the anti-Polish measures that would be pursued in the next year, expulsion and inner colonization. He would be Bismarck's main advisor on both projects.

Sering's academic article praising the nationally-invigorating practice of farmer settling had appeared at this time, in 1884, alongside Friedrich Fabri's call for temperate land for colonization.[27] Then, in two installments on January 3 and 10, 1885, an article by the philosopher Eduard Hartmann appeared in the Berlin weekly *Die Gegenwart*. The front-page piece, entitled "The Regression (Rückgang) of Germanness," began by pointing out that the "language borders" in the East were in flux, and that the Germans there were failing to do their national duty of maintaining Germanness. Germans, Hartmann continued, had held sway in the East because of a strong middle class, but now, due to emigration of that same talent overseas, and because of the growing (and fanatically nationalist) Polish middle class, the East was truly threatened. The answer, he believed, was the Germanization of that area of the Empire. He then wrote his most inflammatory passage, providing a keyword, "ausrotten," or exterminate, that would become an oft-repeated description of what Polish nationalists said Germans were trying to do to them: "If the Slavs exterminate Germanness within their own borders, we must practice our own reprisals, e.g., exterminate Slavicness within our own borders, otherwise the influence of Germanness in the history of cultured peoples (*Culturvölker*) will decrease considerably." His main plan for Germanization, and thereby extermination of Polishness, was an explicitly settler colonial one, not only in the Prussian East, but fascinatingly one that also involved Poles going overseas:

> As important as the question of overseas colonization is, I consider the inner to be more important. It is not enough to appropriate all Polish estates and make German farms of them. A stream of immigrating German colonists must be brought to those estates through sufficient awards and simultaneously space in our colonies and preferential emigration given to the Polish farmers there. … However, the government can only do this if it is supported by a change in public opinion, and if amid the stormy call for overseas colonization heard among the patriots of all parties, a new, unified call, a piercing scream through the old party patterns, demanding *inner colonization* to save the threatened Germanness and secure our political future, is heard.[28]

substitute "Polish" with "Mexican" for modern American politics to see this problem has never gone away.

[27] Sering, "Die Landpolitik," and Bade, *Fabri*.

[28] Neubach, *Die Ausweisungen von Polen und Juden*, 35 (original emphasis). Although Neubach nicely details the press coverage leading up to 1885, this is also where he is most misleading. He wants a complete separation of "expulsion" from "inner

Matthew Fitzpatrick has analyzed the *Reichstag* and Prussian *Landtag* debates of January and February 1886 concerning the legality and morality of the mass expulsions which had just taken place. It was again Windthorst who pointed out to his colleagues that the Prussian Constitution of 1815 made it clear that Prussian Poles were legally exempt from expulsion. Conservatives then argued that it was indeed the incoming, quickly-breeding Poles who were in fact "colonizing" Germans. Yet, for all the vehemently racist, anti-Polish rhetoric, Fitzpatrick is exactly right to argue that, in the end, Germany was a *Rechtsstaat*, a country of laws. The fact that only Russian and Austrian Poles (i.e., non-citizen "Indians") were expelled, not Prussian Poles, "illustrates the existence of functioning constitutional limits on the power of the chancellors, the assemblies, and the emperors of Germany."[29] For the next thirty years, as opposed to the North American reality (and German fantasy) of the complete "denationalization" of territory (Indian Removal) followed by complete "nationalization" of said territory, a hybrid form of settler colonialism, "inner colonization," was born right in this moment of legally thwarted "denationalization."

The Turn to Inner Colonization

When Bismarck made clear his intention to forcibly remove Polish and Jewish seasonal workers of Russian and Habsburg citizenship, and close the border to their return, he had not yet shown any interest in inner colonization. But alternative ideas were clearly in the air as some newspapers managed to combine Bismarck's push for expulsions with possibilities for such settlement: the *Posener Zeitung* of 29 March 1885 happily opined that these expulsions would make room for Germans otherwise planning to go overseas. But, of course, the author noted, on the face of it, simply banning seasonal workers would not result in any "new land." The newspaper *Nationalzeitung* seemed to have realized this when it argued that more than expulsions were needed: in fact, they perspicaciously advised that a series of government supported laws to encourage inner colonization was required.[30] This theme was central to Hartmann's

colonization." While emphasizing the fact that Jews were included in the 1885 expulsions, he crucially fails to mention that Hartmann argues that the Jewish middle class was a critically important element of Germanness in the East. Further, Neubach does not indicate that Hartmann's article's focus on "Ausrottung" is related to inner colonization, not expulsion.

[29] Fitzpatrick, *Purging the Empire*, 261.

[30] Much earlier, in 1879, the Baltic-German author and later co-founder of the German Colonial Society, Ernst Carl von der Brüggen, writing in the *Preussische Jahrbücher*, had

January 1885 demands, and fit with Sering's 1884 piece on American settler colonialism and the wandering German *Volk*. Of course, the *Jahrbuch*, and Sering, were fundamental elements of Schmoller's universe, and the institution at the centre of their world, the VfS, had placed the question of land and settlement at the heart of its agenda at this time as well. Indeed, it is important here to trace the seeds of inner colonization among these scholars during the years leading up to this moment in 1885.

Schmoller, and Sering's *Habilitation* advisor, Nasse, had founded the VfS in 1873 and Nasse had been Chair since 1874. Thus, at the head of the institution was an expert on peasants and land who argued in favour of state intervention to help those peasants acquire land. As has been mentioned, Schmoller and Nasse, along with professors like Knapp, were deemed *Kathedarsozialisten*, or Socialists of the Chair, due to what was characterized as an almost Marxist desire for the state to intervene and help the (agricultural) lower orders. Both socialists and the VfS were disturbed by the way in which the modern industrial economy and land ownership patterns had resulted in a large (and dangerous) population of landless agrarian labourers.[31] At the VfS conference in December 1881, the decision was made to focus on the situation of the peasants. The result was a three-volume study that appeared in 1883 that was created and overseen by Nasse during the very period that Sering was his student. The series is a massive survey of land distribution throughout Germany and pays special attention to where small farmers own their land, and where they tend not to. Unsurprisingly, the findings strongly supported the notion that east of the Elbe, where the *Junker* and their large farms reigned, one could find the highest percentage of landless labour.[32] On October 6 and 7, 1884, the annual meeting of the VfS was devoted to these volumes and this theme. Johannes Conrad gave the first talk and laid out what would become the driving rationale for inner colonization: if we cannot do something to convince the peasants to stay on the land, they will leave Germany.[33] In the discussion that followed, many of the themes that would come to be central to inner colonization

claimed that the Prussian East was empty and in need of settlers, and that these settlers required a "right to light and room," and that state-backing was required for such a program. See Ernst Carl von der Brüggen, "Die Kolonisation in unserem Osten und die Herstellung des Erbzinses," *Preussische Jahrbücher* 44 (1879): 32–51, cited in Blanke, *Prussian Poland*, 45.

[31] Erik Grimmer-Solem, *The Rise of Historical Economics and Social Reform in Germany 1864–1894* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 223–235; Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa*, 77.

[32] *Bäuerliche Zustände in Deutschland.* 3 volumes. (Berlin, Duncker & Humblot, 1883).

[33] For more details on this 1884 meeting, see Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa*, 80, fn. 81.

were mooted, from inheritance law (Anerbenrecht), to land credit, to the crucial question of whether or not small farms can compete with large farms. In the audience were many of our current, as well as future, key players: Brentano, Knapp, the National Liberal Miquel, Nasse, Friedrich von Schwerin, and Sering (then listed as a *Privatdozent*, basically an adjunct professor, in Bonn). Schmoller was not present.

In 1885 it was decided that inner colonization would be the focus of the following year's VfS annual meeting, and by early 1886 the practice was being debated in the Prussian *Landtag*. But it was the meeting of the Royal Agricultural Economic College, on November 9–12, 1885, in the House of Lords, Berlin, that appears to be the first formal occasion in which the government-supported settlement of Germans on German land, both to "Germanize" threatened national space, but also more generally to solve the increasingly tenuous "peasant question," was taken seriously. Chairing the meeting was the Prussian Minister of Agriculture, Robert Lucius von Ballhausen, a close friend of Bismarck's. While inner colonization was already in the air by 1885, Lucius seems to have been generally excited by what he heard at this gathering. According to Tiedemann, in the "Winter" of 1885, he was quite suddenly asked by Bismarck to write up a memorandum on the Germanization of the East, with inner colonization as a central element. I thus contend that Lucius reported directly to Bismarck about the themes of this conference and that Bismarck then turned to his colleague Tiedemann to get to work on the project that ultimately was underway within months in the Prussian East. The 10am session on November 10 began with Freiherr von Hammerstein-Loxten of Hannover giving a strong endorsement of the social benefits of colonization. He claimed that, already in 1879, there had been moves to drain swamps in the area around Hannover in order to settle small plot farmers and create a stronger "class of workers" (Arbeiterstand) on the land. In the ensuing discussion, Nasse's work on inheritance law was mentioned a few times, as was the difficult problem of affordability, and how to help keep the farmers on the land. At this point, Chief Forest Master Danckelmann could not restrain himself from making a dig against the National Liberals, claiming that the latter simply believed that if farmers were going under, they should simply go under. Schmoller then entered the debate and put forward the idea of providing both government lands and state money to purchase property for settlers:

> Our only prospect of great success is if the royal government is seriously determined to colonize again in a grand manner, and I believe that one can go further than Herr von Hammerstein has gone, in relation to the crown lands: we

could actually offer a portion of the crown lands. Yes, I would even say that we could use government funds to buy these estates and colonize these estates, wherever they are.[34]

Schmoller then went into some detail about the accomplishments of Frederick the First in re-settling a Prussia still reeling from the effects of the Thirty Years' War. In retrospect this was an unsurprising comment, as Schmoller was deep into research for an article that would appear in a VfS volume the following year, "The Prussian Colonization of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries." Going beyond Danckelmann's critique of the National Liberals, Schmoller claimed that settling small German farmers would both strengthen the nation and put a stop to the nation's greatest danger: Social Democracy. Schmoller then ended his speech by juxtaposing the situation of 1648 to that of 1885: earlier the western sections of Germany were newly empty and in need of settlement. Today, Schmoller claimed, the West was full but, in the East, there were loads of possibilities.

The *Junker* Nikolaus von Below immediately chimed in, stating that he was initially very excited by this idea, but then pointed out what would be the perennial *Junker* position and a huge thorn in the side of inner colonizers: because such a program would tend toward breaking up the great noble German estates of the East it was rather undesirable. Minister Lucius then entered the discussion and made clear his excitement for such a scheme. Ever the careful politician, he pointed out that such a program would be expensive and that "Domänen" (crown lands) were not ideal for this, as they were mostly forested and thus poor for settlement. But yes, he agreed, such a grand scheme would have to be coordinated by the state and, yes, it would have to begin in the East. Alas, such a monumental undertaking would have to go through many phases, and thus Lucius indicated that he would not at this moment be able to take a public position. The following morning, smelling blood in the water, the economist August von Miaskowski began by supporting Schmoller's position of the day before, stating that getting farmers back onto the land would form a dam against the flood of Social Democracy. He then continued with the dam metaphor, arguing that an inner colonial scheme would also stem the flood of Poles streaming into the German East.

Inner colonization was always a highly contested issue and right here at its moment of conception we find a sustained and powerful critique. Ferdinand Knauer, a farmer (and specialist on turnips), rose to declare

[34] Gustav Schmoller, *Verhandlungen des Königlichen Landes-Ökonomie-Kollegiums*. III. Session der III. Sitzungs-Periode (Parey: Berlin, 1885), 279–280.

that he was totally against inner colonization. Because the minister had explained that there were no available crown lands, Knauer asked what was to be done, as giving land for free to poor peasants would result in their building a house, buying equipment, and inevitable indebtedness. He claimed that, while it was desirable to settle workers and create farmers, the first could be done but no one could do the second.[35] Finally, he pointed out what would always be a deadly critique of inner colonization: for the government to maintain the settler colonies it created, it would have to make it illegal to sell that land. This, he charged, would create a class of slaves, people both imprisoned on land they could not sell and indebted to the banks. At least Black slaves, Knauer argued, were fed. White slaves, he claimed, would not perform as well. A politician from the West, von Hövel, attempted to ameliorate this withering critique, agreeing with Miaskowski that the settlers sent to the East would not merely be farmers but also a form of border watch, and thus this idea was not merely agrarian but also political, and it would be money well spent. Such a sentiment clearly superseded the resistance of Knauer, and the meeting ended with the body formally asking Lucius to pursue inner colonization.

Tiedemann, and the Memorandum

The founding document of inner colonization in Posen and West Prussia, the "Memorandum regarding Measures for the Germanization of the Province of Posen," was drafted by Bismarck's advisor, Christoph von Tiedemann, in December 1885, and completed the first week of 1886. By the time an excited Minister Lucius would have pushed the idea on Bismarck in mid-November, the Chancellor would definitely have heard stirrings of such a plan. Whether or not he was aware of the newspaper stories, he may well have known that Rudolf von Bennigsen had made an impassioned speech at the National Liberal Convention in Hanover on September 20, arguing that agricultural unrest in Spain, Italy, and England only emphasized the need for some form of inner colonization in Prussia. But Bennigsen's main target (like Sering's) was the *Junker*. He asked to have some large estates turned over to settle small farmers in order to create and maintain "a group of competent, conservative citizens" (einen Stamm tüchtiger konservativer Bürger erhalten).[36]

[35] The question as to whether one could create farmers by giving them land, or that one was simply already born a farmer, would be a central tension throughout the history of inner colonization.

[36] Mai, *Polenpolitik*, 100.

And then, on September 24, at the meeting of State Ministers, Gustav von Gossler claimed that twelve estates totalling 17,000 ha were already available. Despite the fact that at this moment the targeted real estate was German and not yet Polish, Bismarck indicated that he liked the idea, if only there were monies available to purchase these estates.[37] In any case, it seems likely that, by mid-November, an excited Lucius firmly placed the extra incentive of stemming the Slavic Flood in Bismarck's ear, and that this then led the Chancellor to ask his advisor Tiedemann to write the memorandum at the end of the year.

Unfortunately, Tiedemann has not left us any details, not even a bibliography, of the intellectual inspiration for the memorandum he wrote. Nevertheless, his short essay was the final push that got Bismarck moving, and as such we shall examine it in some detail.[38] Tiedemann began by stating that "half measures" had had no effect with regard to the Polish problem and only resulted in an ever weaker and more compromised Germany. According to Tiedemann this threat was menacing: "The Poles *want* no peaceful, equal coexistence with the Germans. They want to be the hammer or the anvil." Any attempt to assuage the Poles through religious, legal, or educational allowances of the use of Polish, argued Tiedemann, only resulted in an increasingly robust Polish national identity. At the same time, the Polish population continued to increase, they were becoming better farmers, and had created a Polish middle class in the cities, an increasingly affluent population that preferred to buy and sell only from fellow Poles. Tiedemann further claimed that it was the Germans who were being colonized, as Poles in the East "pursue in fact only *one* goal: the systematic polonization of the province." He then turned his sights to the most problematic Germans, the arrogant *Junker* who acquired land with the hopes of making some money before retiring to Mecklenburg or Westphalia while the hardworking German farmers of the East had virtually no political power and were thus leaving in droves. Tiedemann complained that, while Polish landowners filled every position on their estates with Poles, the German *Junker* did exactly the same! Tiedemann argued that the seemingly extraordinary step of expulsion did nothing to alter the situation in the East, as only foreign Poles had been removed. Instead, Tiedemann concluded that the government must "whenever possible and to a much greater degree than in the past, remove the most

[37] Mai, *Polenpolitik*, 101.

[38] Christoph von Tiedemann, "Denkschrift betreffend einige Maßregeln zur Germanisirung der Provinz Posen," BArch L N2308–66. This and the following paragraph are based on this document.

dangerous domestic Polish elements from the province, and replace them with German elements." On an abstract level, Tiedemann was making the direct Lockean link between land and citizenship: it was not the possession of citizenship papers that differentiated Prussian from Russian Poles when it came to expulsion, it was the landowning or landless nature of the Pole. Indeed, the entire history of the Program of Inner Colonization was predicated on this deeply, classically liberal understanding of soil and belonging, that if you take away Polish-owned land, you take away Polishness. While there would always be a tension over what to do with the biological bodies of Poles in the question of removal or assimilation, the basic spatial goal stated that if the soil was Germanized, the people standing on it would be Germans. Here again we have the classic "territoriality" of settler colonialism emphasized by Patrick Wolfe. In Australia, the Lockean claim that Indigenous people did not farm the soil, did not "work" the land, was all that was required to claim the territory for European arrivals. Here in the German East, a more complicated rationale was called for to justify the German colonizer given that the Poles held the legal title to their land and that land needed to be transferred before Polishness could be properly erased. A similar problem was encountered by the British in New Zealand. Unlike Indigenous practice as seen by the British in Australia, in New Zealand the Maori farmed land and demarcated "property," practices that made any simple declaration of *terra nullius* impossible.[39]

After walking through basic bureaucratic steps, such as replacing all civil servants with Germans, restricting the use of Polish in school and church, and recruiting the poorest Poles into the army, Tiedemann arrived at what he saw as the key to the problem in the East, ownership of the land. Here Tiedemann directly referenced the Flotwellian system laid out in Chapter 2, the use of government monies to buy up failing estates. He stated that, with rapidly sinking wheat, cattle, and potato prices, the cost of purchasing land had never been so low. Further, he claimed that it was "an open secret" that, since 1884, fully half of the mortgaged large estates were in arrears. By purchasing these estates and parcelling them, the state could settle German farmers and establish or reinforce German elements in certain areas of the province. But, Tiedemann warned, it would be difficult to attract farmers to Posen, should the current system of "English rotten boroughs," with absent *Junker* having so much electoral power, remain in place.

[39] Stuart Banner, *Possessing the Pacific: Land, Settlers, and Indigenous People from Australia to Alaska* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), chs. 1–3. The much less populated South Island was, however, declared *terra nullius* in 1840.

Writing in 1907, Tiedemann looked over his diary notes from this period and was able to paint a vivid picture of a whirlwind of excitement.[40] He completed the memorandum on January 6, 1886 in Bromberg and sent a copy to Bismarck on January 8. The Chancellor asked for a second copy the next day and on January 10 indicated to Tiedemann that he was very interested in the proposal. That same day Bismarck had copies sent to all the ministers. Four days later Bismarck read the memorandum as part of his Throne Speech. Tiedemann wrote in his diary that there was much enthusiasm in the *Landtag* over the passages he had written, though he noted that, when asked (by many) if he was responsible, he feigned ignorance. After dinner the following evening, Tiedemann and Bismarck discussed the settlement idea in detail and the Chancellor requested that Tiedemann return to the Chancellery in order to be a close advisor on the Polish Question. At this same meeting, Tiedemann suggested that ten million marks was the minimal amount required to buy up Polish estates but Bismarck demurred, indicating that such a sum would be very difficult to get out of the Finance Minister and *Landtag*, but that, in any case, Tiedemann should speak to the leader of the National Liberals and co-founder of the Colonial Society, Johann von Miquel. Tiedemann noted that, on January 16, he had spoken to Miquel, and claimed that Miquel "was immediately all over (Feuer und Flamme) the idea of the settlement of German farmers." When Tiedemann then asked him if ten million was possible, he answered, "Perish the thought! If we're going to do it, let's do it. (Bewahre! Wenn schon, den schon.) A hundred million at least, then set up an emergency commission (Immiedatkommission) to get things moving."[41] With surprisingly strong political support in hand, Tiedemann worked on a settlement law the evening of January 19 and the next day discussed it in detail with Bismarck.[42]

In his still classic analysis of this crucial episode, Richard Blanke acknowledges that, although the Flottwell program of buying up Polish estates was the direct historical reference and comparison made by Tiedemann in his memorandum, "the idea of parceling these estates and colonizing them with German settlers, the introduction of economic

[40] The following account comes from a document entitled, "Ein Beitrag zur Entstehungsgeschichte des Ansiedlungsgesetzes," BArch L N2308–231.

[41] Miquel was thus a prime mover. See Fitzpatrick, *Purging the Empire*, 121.

[42] Ludwig Bernhard, *Die Polenfrage: Die Nationalitätenkampf der Polen in Preussen*, 3rd ed. (Munich: Duncker & Humblot, [1907] 1920), 119. Tiedemann's diary entries for this episode are published here.

weapons into the Polish question generally, was quite new to him."[43] Blanke is in fact surprised that Tiedemann's radical move toward ethnic homogeneity, a move more radical than Bismarck would normally have favoured, was not only completely supported by the Chancellor, but that the Chancellor went further, wondering "whether the reestablishment of the penalty of property confiscation can be recommended for the provinces of Poznania and West Prussia."[44] The Emperor balked, and full legal expropriation of Polish land would have to wait until its eventual legalization, in 1908. Over the next two weeks Tiedemann's ideas were transformed into a set of proposals. In a fascinating episode uncovered by Joachim Mai, Heinrich von Sybel, the famous historian and head of the Prussian Archive, was asked to supply historical information and documents regarding "German colonization in Posen," and he indeed sent said material to the Cabinet offices the morning of January 24.[45] At the cabinet meeting later that day, several measures were adopted, including most importantly the proposal for an inner colonization law.

After this flurry of action, Bismarck was fully prepared for the *Landtag* debate on the Polish Question, on January 28/29, 1886. This was the most extended and serious debate about Poland in Bismarck's entire career. On the first day, in a classic strategic move conflating the ethnic enemy with one's political opponents, Bismarck stated that he would not normally fear two million Poles, but the fact that they had so many German supporters in the *Landtag* was what made the situation dangerous.[46] In his two-hour speech the next day, considered by Polish leaders to have been a declaration of war,[47] he responded to the issue of Prussian Poles as citizens by provocatively stating: "In war, too, some things happen whereby one completely loses sight of 'equality before the law'." Indeed, Bismarck went so far as to claim that the incoming German inner colonizers would be marrying German women. Such a statement only punctuated the neo-feudal element that would always besmirch inner colonization. For some though, as opposed to feudalism, the whole government-funded scheme smacked of socialism. In addition to this socialist smear, Windthorst of the Catholic Centre Party again pointed out that the Prussian Constitution of 1815 made it plain that one could not legally treat any Prussian citizen differently than another. Matthew Fitzpatrick argues that, throughout this period, the expulsion debate was closely intertwined in Bismarck's mind with the settlement

[43] Richard Blanke, "Bismarck and the Prussian Polish Policies of 1886," *Journal of Modern History* 45 (1973): 223.
[44] Blanke, "Prussian Polish Policies," 223. [45] Mai, *Polenpolitik*, 109.
[46] Baier, *Der Deutsche Osten*, 11. [47] Blanke, *Prussian Poland*, 60.

scheme, and that ultimately the Chancellor favoured the former. In any case, the very National Liberal allies Bismarck was courting were keen, especially Miquel and Bennigsen.[48]

Lucius quickly put together the Settlement Law that was introduced on February 23 and 24.[49] Previously, on February 22, in the *Landtag*, Lucius had "extol[led] the virtues of creating a citizen yeomanry and stemming the flood of migrants to America by offering land in the east."[50] Ultimately the *Landtag* voted in favour of the law on April 7 by 214 votes to 120, and it took effect on April 26.[51] The Centre, the *Freisinnige* (a left liberal splinter party) and Poles voted against it. The Law's main component involved the establishment of a fund to allow the Prussian government to buy up failing properties and either parcel out the property and settle Germans on it, or at the very least to keep it in the possession of the German government. The tension in the law then centred on the circumstances under which the German farmers would take possession of the parcels. Conservatives had backed a form of *Erbpacht*, a hereditary lease system that would allow the *Junker* to create parcels of land with cottages and gardens and have Germans either pay a rent or provide labor in order to stay. Such a feudalist system was abhorrent to the very National Liberals Bismarck was counting on. They in turn favored a *Rentengut* system whereby parcels would be permanently carved out of existing estates and the new German owners would slowly but surely buy the property through a kind of installment plan, aided by low-interest state loans. Only such a system, they argued, would create the independent, self-sufficient yeomen farmers they idealized, the ones that Sering had met on the Western Frontier, the American farmers Lucius feared Germans wanted to become. Indeed, such a system was much more akin to the Homestead Act: whereas the Flottwell project simply shifted ownership from Polish to German landlords, now the government was providing land to incoming German settlers who would not be overwhelmed with any large, upfront costs.[52]

[48] Fitzpatrick, *Purging the Empire*, p. 121. See Hans Herzfeld, *Johannes von Miquel. Sein Anteil am Ausbau des Deutschen Reiches bis zur Jahrhundertwende*. Vol. 2 (Detmold: Meyersche Hofbuchhandlung Staercke, 1939), 77–80, and Hermann Oncken, *Rudolf Bennigsen. Ein deutscher liberaler Politiker* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1910), 525.

[49] Baier, *Der Deutsche Osten*, 13.

[50] Fitzpatrick, *Purging the Empire*, 120.

[51] Max Weber's father was involved in the committee that wrote the law and he voted for it. Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa*, 100; Hajime Konno, *Max Weber und die Polnische Frage (1892–1920): Eine Betrachtung zum liberalen Nationalismus im wilhelminischen Deutschland* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2004), 37.

[52] Blanke, *Prussian Poland*, 60

Lucius had been given two weeks to draft the law and leaned very heavily upon the *Rentengut* concept. Indeed, Bismarck was disappointed with the draft as it pushed *Rentengut* for all of Germany and did not even mention the Poles. This would never pass muster with Bismarck's Conservative allies, and Lucius was thus forced to redraft the legislation, this time with the help of Tiedemann. The revised bill saw a blend of *Rentengut* and *Erbpacht*, was restricted to the Eastern Provinces, and specifically mentioned that the purpose of the law was to increase the German population therein. Finally, Lucius lost the argument that he and the Agricultural Ministry were the proper keepers of such a program, and instead an independent Settlement Commission was to be set up, reporting annually to the *Landtag*.[53]

On June 21, 1886 the Settlement Commission was set up, consisting of fourteen members, including the *Oberpräsidenten* of Posen and West Prussia, commissioners from several Prussian ministries, as well as "a few appointed trusted big landowners or agricultural economists."[54] The first president of the Settlement Commission was Count Robert von Zedlitz-Trützschler,[55] and his first task was to advertise the opportunities on the new frontier. By December 1886 there were 705 applications, 40 of which came from Germans abroad: in Russia, Austria and even the United States. Half of the applicants requested large farms of over a hundred hectares, while the rest asked for five- to fifty-hectare farms. Zedlitz put each applicant into one of four categories based on their likelihood to stick it out and initially only rewarded those from the first two categories, consisting of those already in agriculture as well as expert craftsmen. In order to provide the new settlers with the best chance of success, they were placed near already fairly dense German concentrations, "compact, nationally homogenous, and well-equipped communities."[56] Larger failed Polish estates were purchased and broken up into smallholdings for incoming settlers, while medium to small Polish farms were purchased and then simply left whole for incoming colonists.

[53] Blanke, *Prussian Poland*, 65. The excitable Bismarck of early January was progressively less keen on settlement as the realities of the program became more firm. Polish nobility was always enemy number one for Bismarck and they had in fact lost land since 1860. The peasants had however increased their share of the land, and it was at them that the Settlement Commission was targeted. See Blanke, *Prussian Poland*, 66.

[54] Witold Jakobczyk, "The First Decade of the Prussian Colonization Commission's Activities, 1886–1897," *The Polish Review* 17 (1972): 4–5. The members were not paid, and merely had their travel expenses reimbursed.

[55] His memoir appeared in English as Count Robert Zedlitz-Trutzschler, *Twelve Years at the Imperial German Court*, trans. Alfred Kalisch (New York: G. H. Doran, 1924).

[56] Jakobczyk, "First Decade," 6.

German Catholics were given land in the program, but not Poles. In March 1887 it was decided that twenty-five hectares was the ideal size of a small holding, allowing self-sufficiency and participation in community life. Further, at this early stage, the government had more land than settlers and so they made sure to "bid up" failed German estates, that is, keep the prices higher than Poles were willing to pay, while simultaneously going after Polish land.[57]

With the seemingly sudden adoption of inner colonization, the members of the VfS were exuberant to find themselves ahead of the curve, having already in 1885 dedicated the upcoming volume (number thirty-two) to this theme and having scheduled their annual meeting of 1886 in Frankfurt to discuss the volume and inner colonial issues. The long piece that Schmoller had been working on in the Fall of 1885 was the lead chapter in the edited volume, entitled "The Prussian Colonization of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries." In classic historical school fashion, he used a detailed analysis of previous inner colonization to find lessons for the present.[58] Although he spoke in detail of the great inner colonial schemes following the Thirty Years' War and ending with Frederick the Great's death, he found it important to note that the German people were colonizing again. He emphasized that, with most of the world already carved up, the best option was an "inner colonization" in the East. Schmoller began his historical lesson by describing an ideal situation for inner colonization (and, as we will see in Chapter 5, one that Sering would find in the Latvia of 1915), in the desolation and emptiness caused by warfare. From 1640 to 1786 half a million Germans were settled on land previously devastated by war. In his discussion of Frederick's colonization of the East, he pointed out that, while Germans from the West were brought to the "younger," less cultivated lands of the East, Jews were not approached. This was not out of anti-Semitism, he claimed, but because they were not "natural" farmers. Schmoller then laid out the assimilationist ideas of Frederick, which aligned closely with his and Sering's own opinions, noting that "[t]he tendencies of the King are apparent in sayings such as: the Polish man should be brought to the German way of doing things (*zu deutscher Landesart gebracht werden*), the Polish inhabitants should be mixed in (*melirt*) with the German, and, the Polish colonist brought into the

[57] Jakobczyk, "First Decade," 7. Regarding the problem of speculation, thirty-five farms were provided to Germans coming from Russia, but very quickly eight of them were sold for a profit.

[58] Gustav Schmoller, "Die preussische Kolonisation des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts," in *Zur inneren Kolonisation in Deutschland. Erfahrungen und Vorschläge*. SdVfS 32 (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1886), 1–43.

vicinity of the German." Schmoller then argued that the basic agricultural policies of any settlement structure are crucial and foundational, and he cited the American Western Frontier as the example *par excellence*. Under Frederick the Great there was a lot of help from the state, but the incoming settlers were not allowed to leave unless they found someone else to take over their farm.[59] By the middle of the Nineteenth Century, Schmoller claimed this had been a great success, resulting in 400,000 settlers, among them 263,000 on small farms only six to ten *Morgen* in size.[60] And, importantly for Schmoller, such a scheme did not create a feudally dependent class of landless labourers. Beyond Schmoller's piece, the volume contained three more articles about elements of inner colonization, how to deal with *Erbpacht*, etc. A chapter from H. Rimpler, "Concerning inner Colonization and Colonization attempts in Prussia," walked through various forms of land parcellation in Prussia over the last century and quoted from an upcoming book by the VfS member Max Sering, which stressed the energetic, independent spirit among North American farmers, achieved due to their owning their own houses on their own land. This could be achieved on German soil as well, argued Rimpler.[61]

For some reason, Sering was not in attendance at the VfS annual meeting in Frankfurt on September 24/25.[62] But in the audience one could find his mentors Schmoller and Nasse, his future partner and prime driver of "inner colonization," Friedrich von Schwerin, as well as one of the primary political backers of the settlement scheme, Miquel. Day two opened with a talk by another of Schmoller's young, star students, Werner Sombart, who spoke about "Inner Colonization with Regard to the Preservation and Propagation of Medium and Small Rural Properties."[63] Sombart opened with the proud reflection that no one could have known on the previous December 28, as they were organizing this year's conference, that their choice of "inner colonization" would be so

[59] Schmoller here noted that Frederick wanted German-only villages in West Prussia, while under the new law it was unclear if this would be the case.

[60] A *Morgen* was about 0.3 ha.

[61] H. Rimpler, "Ueber innere Kolonisation und Kolonisationsversuche in Preußen," in *Zur inneren Kolonisation*, 157.

[62] "Verhandlungen der am 24. und 25. September 1886 in Frankfurt a.M. abgehaltenen Generalversammlung des Vereins für Socialpolitik," SdVfS 34 (Duncker & Humblot: Leipzig, 1887).

[63] Baier, *Der Deutsche Osten*, 49. Fascinatingly, Sombart's father, Anton, had himself undertaken an inner colonization project on his estate in Steesow, parcelling out the property to twenty farming families. Werner wrote about this episode in Werner Sombart, ed., *Volk und Raum: eine Sammlung von Gutachten zur Beantwortung der Frage: "Kann Deutschland innerhalb der bestehenden Grenzen eine wachsende Bevölkerung erhalten?"* (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1928), 133.

timely. Indeed, it was only four months later that the Prussian government passed the *Hundertmillionengesetz* (the "Hundred Million Law," referencing how much money had been thrown at the Program). Sombart wanted to speak to the difference between "outer" and "inner" colonization, explaining that, while overseas colonization contained both "business" colonialism as well as "plantation" colonialism, it was the third sort, "agricultural" colonialism, that was closest in form to "inner colonization." Alas, this last form of colonialism was ultimately resulting in the loss of the Germans who went overseas in order to participate in it, and "therefore [he] would like to say: stay in the [German] countryside and feed yourselves honestly" (*deshalb möchte ich sagen: bleibt im Lande und nährt euch redlich*). With so many farmers moving to the "almost unhealthy" (*fast ungesund*) cities and with cereal production on the decline, Sombart claimed Germany needed to anchor farmers to the land. Yes, he admitted, production tables might tell you that *Junker* farms produced more than small farms, but a host of smaller farmers were better at dealing with crises and, in any case, *Junker* tended to be more indebted than small farms. Schmoller then followed his student with his own paper pointing to the crisis that resulted from large landowners and landless labourers, a situation that obliterated the "middle class" (*Mittelstand*) and meant that no group was invested in the specific, local situation. In what seemed to come directly from Sering's upcoming book manuscript, Schmoller stated that it was the growth of "gargantuan farms" (*Riesenfarmen*) in the American West that was starting to cause similar problems there. Fascinatingly, Schmoller did not bring up ethnicity. Thus, in the discussion that followed, the esteemed economist Johannes Conrad invoked the Polish threat and said that yes, breaking up the estates of Poles to settle Germans made sense, but Schmoller seemed to want to do it everywhere, and this was simply too hasty. Further, Conrad argued that there was no need to tie anyone to the land. After all, in the West of Germany, small, "free" farms had done quite well. Schmoller responded, noting "[w]hoever takes a look at the history of colonization must admit that unbridled freedom of ownership by small day labourers and colonists will necessarily lead to decline or failure." To Conrad's worry that he was trying to push inner colonization throughout Germany too quickly, Schmoller stated that he wanted to see how things worked out in the East and then, perhaps in two or three generations, the inner colonial scheme could be spread throughout Germany.

Sering's Years in Bonn, 1884–1889

It is surprising that Sering missed this VfS meeting in Frankfurt given that he lived so close by, just down the Rhine at Bonn. There is however

evidence that these early years of his first steady academic appointment were rather difficult for the young professor. In several letters to Schmoller from 1884 and 1885 Sering complained about his low pay and the teaching load that was preventing him from finishing his book on his North American sojourn.[64] After moving and settling down in Bonn over the winter, Sering taught his first class during the summer semester of 1884, "General National Economics." In the following winter he taught "Special National Economy," before teaching his specialization the following summer: "Concerning Colonization and National Economics in North America."[65] While the article that appeared in 1884 had pulled him away from the manuscript, his only other major task was to write his Inaugural Address when he was named Extraordinary Professor of the Royal Prussian Agrarian Academy, based at the Poppelsdorf campus of the University of Bonn.

A solid and secure place in academia finally came to Sering in the Summer of 1885. He was actually offered two positions, one at Bonn and one at Freiburg. By December of that year Sering told Althoff that he was grateful to him for the professorship at Bonn, as he was very happy there.[66] Sering seems to have had a strong relationship with Nasse and additionally was investigating the local industry in the Rhineland.[67] But the actual reason he chose to stay in Bonn might not have been purely academic. Around this time Sering met Anna Busch, daughter of a Professor of Surgery at Bonn, Wilhelm Busch. In 1887, likely after he had finally submitted his manuscript, they went off to Florence and became engaged at Christmas.[68]

At the time, Sering was putting a huge amount of energy into teaching in order to, in his words, restore the Seminar to its former glory. Further, he was working on the vast manuscript of his North American book. As a result, from 1884 to 1887, he produced no publications. He wrote to Althoff that he was taking students on fieldtrips to nearby industry and that he believed that what he was teaching was very

[64] Regarding course preparation, Sering claimed that he was studying two to four days per hour of lecture. Sering to Schmoller, December 31, 1884. See also, Sering to Schmoller, August 11, 1885, and July 18, 1885.

[65] This information, and indeed every course Sering taught at Bonn, was provided for me by the University of Bonn Archive, email from Catalina Davids, October 29, 2012.

[66] Sering to Althoff, August 20, 1885; Sering to Althoff, August 24, 1885.

[67] Sering to Schmoller, March 5, 85; Sering to Schmoller, August 4, 1885.

[68] Sering to Althoff, Christmas, 1887. It appears that Sering's sister, Alma, died in early 1885, as in March he thanked Schmoller for his condolences. Sering to Schmoller, March 5, 1885. Indeed, in a letter of March 1884, Sering had indicated that both of his sisters were ill and needed to spend summers "in der Höhe." Sering to Schmoller, March 26, 1884.

important.[69] He continued with a critique of what he was sometimes forced to teach students due to their being tested on subjects that (he believed) were totally irrelevant. He linked this to a high drop-out rate and a fear that students were leaving the university at Bonn and going elsewhere. One possible answer, he suggested, was to change the title of graduating students to "Dr. of Political Science."[70] Perhaps due to the amount of work, he indicated that in early to mid 1887 he had had some unnamed health troubles.

Sering's book ultimately appeared in 1887 under the title *Die landwirthschaftliche Konkurrenz Nordamerikas in Gegenwart und Zukunft. Landwirthschaft, Kolonisation und Verkehrswesen in den Vereinigten Staaten und in Britisch-Nordamerika. Auf Grund von Reisen und Studien dargestellt* (The Agricultural Competition of North America in the Present and Future. Agriculture, Colonization, and Transportation in the United States and in British North America. Presented based upon Journeys and Studies).[71] In the prologue he apologized for the gap in time between the journey the study was based upon and its appearance, claiming that he had been "busy." I have already introduced most of the central themes of his book, in Chapter 2, so here I will merely outline and discuss certain points in some more detail. In that same prologue Sering stated that North America was extremely important to global trade and that Germans must understand its economy. In the opening chapter he described the physical layout of Canada and the United States and, although he cited Ratzel twice in footnotes, he did not theorize that influential thinker's *Grossraumpolitik* to any extent. In the second chapter he went into detail about the expansion to the West and made a fascinating comparison that was surely shaped by the very discussion of inner colonization, parcellation, and obstinate *Junker* that was occurring as he wrote the manuscript. Sering directly juxtaposed the "hardworking" New Englanders, small plot farmers who, due to their successful breeding, had been the vanguard in settling the West, to the "*Grossgrundbesitzer*," the large land-holding elite of the South, with their thinly-populated, former slave-holding estates, a class who contributed

[69] Sering to Althoff, April 20, 1887; Sering to Althoff, November 17, 1887.
[70] Sering to Althoff, May 11, 1888.
[71] Max Sering, *Die landwirthschaftliche Konkurrenz Nordamerikas in Gegenwart und Zukunft. Landwirthschaft, Kolonisation und Verkehrswesen in den Vereinigten Staaten und in Britisch-Nordamerika* (Leipzig: Duncker and Humblot, 1887). In an August 14, 1885 letter to Schmoller, Sering responded to inquiries from his mentor about "trade policies" of the current government by interestingly claiming that he felt it rather inappropriate to publicly criticize the people who paid for his trip to North America, and indeed hoped that the arguments that he would eventually publish in the book would not be politicized.

nothing to the growth of the nation. Sering attributed the rapid and successful settler expansion on the Prairies to the extensive transportation network, but noted that there remained "much space" (*viel Raum*) in the North American West.[72] In the section "Internal Migration of the Native Born," Sering reinforced the point that it was not European migrants alone who were settling the West, but skilled Americans with money already in their pockets. And, while Sering admitted that it was in fact a form of overpopulation in the Northeast that was producing this internal settler colonialism, he reminded his readers that the German migrants who were intermingled with North Americans on this trek to the West were not crossing the ocean as a result of overpopulation. In contrast to much of the colonial rhetoric in Germany that was focused on overpopulation as the main "push" factor, Sering pointed out that most of the Germans leaving Germany came from the relatively thinly populated provinces of Posen and West Prussia, while the industrialized West of Germany produced the least emigrants. It was not overpopulation, he argued, but instead the hopelessness of never owning your own piece of land that pushed people out of Germany's northeast. It was in speaking to Germans in North America that Sering heard them say, over and over again, that they had come in order to be free of such difficulties at home.[73]

In chapter three, Sering discussed the politics of colonization in the United States. It was here that Sering critiqued American settlement compared to that in Canada, basically arguing that the freewheeling nature of the Wild West caused many problems that were avoided by the more hands-on governmental approach in Canada, especially the formal use of "colonial societies."[74] He made much reference to Henry George's 1881 work *The Land Question*, and how a hands-off approach leads to farmers seeing land as simply something to be bought and sold, resulting in wild and dangerous speculation. Sering then went into a long description of the American Homestead laws, a discussion that was largely conducted with reference to the work of Rudolf Meyer.[75] Meyer was a big fan of the Homestead Act, but claimed that small farmers did not need protection, as the strong "peasant class" would be fine. Sering criticized this position, and indeed federal homestead laws in general,

[72] Sering stated that he very much liked Friedrich Kapp's *Geschichte der deutschen Auswanderung in Amerika* (New York: E. Staiger, 1868).
[73] Sering, *Die landwirthschaftliche Konkurrenz*, 99–102.
[74] Sering, *Die landwirthschaftliche Konkurrenz*, 134.
[75] Interestingly, when Sering had earlier written to Schmoller from Montreal, he claimed that the work of Meyer was "useless" (gar keinen Werth). Sering to Schmoller, September 14, 1883 and again on December 31, 1884.

arguing that they did not protect farmers enough. As a counterexample, he cited the Texas homesteading law, which completely protected farmers from foreclosure. Nonetheless he had to admit that this would be going too far in Germany, as the banks would never agree to such an arrangement. At this point Sering was forced to discuss the intractable problem of *Erbpacht* vs *Rentengut*, his contradictory belief that farmers must be both free to be independent and productive, and legally prevented from selling or abandoning their land.

For most of the remainder of the book he detailed the discoveries on his journey, and most of this was covered in Chapter 2. Sering ended his study with the following conclusion: yes, the circumstances in North America were so very different from what one found in Germany that one could only indirectly import certain ideas or models in order to more directly compete on the world stage. Yet, the one clear advantage North Americans had over Germany, and one that Sering argued Germany must somehow emulate, was its free, hardy, energetic farmers. There was much that was positive in Germany's ancient agricultural system, Sering claimed, especially an old and abiding love for the soil that was outside of any consideration of its monetary value. But surely an American-style system of land ownership in which small farmers and large farmers were colleagues, independent and hardworking fellows who would work together for the strength of the Fatherland was a direction toward which Germany should be working.[76]

By August 1887, Sering seemed to have been truly burnt out by the mammoth task of finishing the book. Yet, after years of complaints about teaching, in a full pivot, he seems to have come to relish his lecturing duties. He wrote to Schmoller that teaching was stressful but enjoyable and that he seemed to finally have a solid understanding of the field. He brought up his recent exhaustion again in November, and again the "enjoyment" of his teaching duties. In addition to his focus on teaching, Sering was intent on getting a new appointment, ideally in

[76] While the focus of this book is on land, Sering also pointed out other remedies to Germany's agricultural situation that he believed would make it more competitive in the global market, such as the use of oil seeds, brewing, and how better to use animals. Further, in a move deeply contrary to *Junker* tradition, he advocated for collectives that would share equipment and cooperate on retail sales. See Grimmer-Solemn, *Learning Empire*, 710–716. In the same year, 1887, Knapp published *The Freeing of the Peasants in the Older Section of Prussia* (*Die Bauernbefreiung in dem Älteren Teil Preussens*) (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot) and in Schmoller's review he called for the re-peasantization of the working class by sending them to smallholdings in the Prussian East. Nothing illustrates the tension at the heart of inner colonization more than this: "free" landowning peasants were still somehow to be entailed, tied to the land. Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa*, 76–79.

Figure 3.1 Max Sering in 1890
(Photo by Bildagentur-online/Universal Images Group via Getty Images)

Berlin.[77] On the academic side, although he did not publish during his last two years in Bonn, from 1887 to 1889, we can be sure that his interest in settler colonialism and agrarian politics was being shaped by the Program of Inner Colonization underway along the eastern frontier. In fact, inner colonization would be the theme of Sering's next book, which would ultimately appear in 1893. In 1889, when Schmoller left the Agrarian College at the University of Berlin, Sering was named his successor. The time was thus ripe for making permanent personal arrangements; he married Anna Busch that year and together they moved as a newlywed couple to the capital.[78]

[77] Sering to Schmoller, November 10, 1887.
[78] Sering to Althoff, August 1, 1889. Anna's Rhenish provenance was evidenced later in life at receptions at the Sering residence, as "decent wine" (anständiger Wein) was always available. Irene Stoehr, "Stille Dienst, hohler 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), 28.

Sering to Berlin, Inner Colonization, and the Caprivi Years: 1889–1894

Sering's appointment was as Full Professor at the Royal Agrarian College (*Königliche Landwirtschaftliche Hochschule*) in Berlin, which was a part of the Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, with most classes held in the city, and greenhouses and test fields located in the leafy, rural suburb of Dahlem. The young couple's first apartment was on Courbierestrasse, near the Kurfürstendamm, just south of the Tiergarten. Interestingly, the agrarian Sering's residences would begin in the city and slowly but surely march toward the forests of the Grünewald at the city's western edge. He was halfway there in 1898, when he moved to the Uhlandstrasse in Wilmersdorf, and then, in 1909, he moved to his final home, a short walk to the edge of the forest, at Luciustrasse 9. In his new position, Sering was to give a lecture on National Economics every summer, and every winter a lecture series on "The Nature of Agriculture, Agricultural Politics and the Legalities of Land Improvement" as well as the "History of Agriculture." That first winter of 1889, Sering founded the Seminar in Political Science (Staatswissenschaft), with five students. Out of this Seminar appeared the series "Inheritance in Agrarian Property in Prussia" (Vererbung des ländlichen Grundbesitzes des Königreich Preussen), overseen by Sering, to which he would contribute his 1906 volume on Schleswig-Holstein, discussed in Chapter 4.[79]

On December 12, 1889 the new University of Berlin professor Max Sering gave his inaugural address, entitled "The Social Question in England and Germany." Ever the comparative historian, here he laid out what was the perfect economic model for some VfS members: an industrialized, individualistic England. But he focused on how its biggest failure had been the elimination of its agrarian middle class. Socialists of the Chair never shied away from citing Marx and Engels, and here Sering acknowledged the usefulness of Engels' descriptions and analyses of the "new industrial aristocracy" in the 1840s, but pointed out that Engels had of course been wrong that this would lead to revolution. Sering noted that Germany enjoyed a large and powerful agrarian sector but warned that it should be handled carefully, for not only was it very recently a feudal system with many of those old habits still in place, it

[79] Michael Doeberl, Otto Scheel, Wilhelm Schink, Hans Sperl, Eduard Spranger, Hans Bitter, and Paul Frank, eds., *Das Akademische Deutschland*, 3 vols. (Berlin: Weller, 1930), Vol. 1, 641–646. See also, Ludwig Wittmack, ed., *Die Königliche Landwirtschaftliche Hochschule in Berlin. Festschrift zur Feier des 25jährigen Bestehens* (Berlin: Parey, 1906), 165–176.

had also followed a much longer route to democracy, with its influential agrarian elite reluctant to give up power.[80] Sering declared that, while the anti-Socialist Law had been a mistake,[81] social reform laws had had a clear and direct effect upon working conditions, forcing industry bosses to treat their workers better. Thus, argued Sering, neither the dictatorship of socialism nor the extreme of individualism (Manchesterism) would be good for Germany. Rather, Sering advocated for a "middle ground."[82] This was akin to Sering's slowly forming concept of how to treat the settlers of inner colonization: free, but not totally free.

Sering pushed this middle of the road position regarding socialism with the introduction he wrote in a VfS volume he edited, *Workers' Committees in German Industry. Surveys, Reports, Statutes* (*Arbeiter-Ausschüsse in der deutschen Industrie. Gutachten, Berichte, Statuten*). Here he walked through many examples of unions forming due to the bad behavior of employers. He thus supported some forms of unionization, unless they were too "utopian," that is, Marxist.[83] In February 1890, he continued to reference his North American findings when he presented at a conference on animal husbandry, discussing what he had seen in the Chicago slaughterhouses. He found German meat producers' fears of being flooded by cheap American pork to be misplaced because the United States had now run out of free land and raising animals was only going to get more expensive. Further, the skyrocketing American population would keep meat prices up for years.[84] Some of these ideas would reappear in his forthcoming book, which he spent the next two years completing.

Inner Colonization during the Caprivi Era

By the early 1890s most easily available Polish land had been purchased and Poles were actively preventing Polish estates from being sold to the Commission. At the same time, the anti-Polish atmosphere in Germany was softening, especially with the replacement of Bismarck by the new

[80] Max Sering, "Die Sociale Frage in England und Deutschland. Akademische Antrittsvorlesung," *Schmollers Jahrbuch* 14 (1890): 37–55. Interestingly, Sering is here laying out a version of the modernization theory that would become so popular among 1970s German historians.

[81] Sering, "Sociale Frage," 51–52. [82] Sering, "Sociale Frage," 54–55.

[83] Max Sering, ed., *Arbeiter-Ausschüsse in der deutschen Industrie. Gutachten, Berichte, Statuten*. SdVfS 46 (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1890), "Einleitung," 1–26.

[84] Max Sering, "Die nordamerikanische Schlachtviehkonkurrenz," *Mitteilungen der Deutschen Landwirtschafts-Gesellschaft* (1890): 183–194.

chancellor, Leo von Caprivi. The Reinsurance Treaty with Russia had lapsed, and a strategic decision was made to appease Poles, who of course also made up a major (and troublesome) minority in the Russian Empire. In 1892, Zedlitz rose to become Minister of Culture, and he brought with him a far less anti-Polish attitude and was just as interested in buying up German farms as Polish. Gosslar, whom he replaced, became the *Oberpräsident* in West Prussia and, in contrast, brought with him a virulently anti-Polish attitude. There was thus a conflict, at the federal versus provincial level, in terms of dealing with the Poles. In that same year, Caprivi, with the support of Miquel, lifted the ban on using Commission funds to purchase German estates,[85] and in fact by 1898 the Settlement Commission was buying primarily German farms. Further, Caprivi relaxed the ban on Polish seasonal workers, and permanently ended it in 1894. In 1890 and 1891, a series of *Rentengut* laws were set up, along with a separate governing body called the General Commission (as opposed to the already existing Settlement Commission), and this organization's *Rentenbank* began helping anyone, including Poles, to buy land. Thus, the General Commission in some ways found itself directly competing with the nationality-focused Settlement Commission. To add to the confusion, the Poles had set up their own *Landbank* to financially support failing Polish estates, and even this bank received help from the General Commission! From 1890 to 1894, although the Germans continued to purchase far more land than their Polish competitors, 31,620 ha versus 8,000 ha, the Settlement Commission only brought in 925 German families.[86]

The Rise of Radical Nationalists and Colonizers

Around this time, we have the first rumblings from a character who would prove to be a major ally of Sering's in the world of inner colonization: Alfred Hugenberg. This future press mogul and "enabler" of Hitler, wrote a dissertation, completed at Sering's alma mater in 1888, that was entitled "Inner Colonization in Northwestern Germany." It appeared as a book in 1891.[87] In 1890, Hugenberg helped found what would become the Pan-German League, in large part out of his frustration with the

[85] Both Miqueal and Caprivi feared that this was simply welfare for bankrupt *Junker*. Blanke, *Prussian Poland*, 121–126, 137.
[86] Blanke, *Prussian Poland*, 127–139.
[87] Alfred Hugenberg, *Innere Kolonisation im Nordwesten Deutschlands* (Strasbourg: Trübner, 1891).

failing goals of the overseas colonization crowd. His main areas of "colonial" interest from the beginning were all threatened German borderland territories (not just the Schleswig-Holstein featured in his dissertation), and in 1894 he was in the East, helping found the Eastern Marches Society, which would become an important lobbying group for bolstering the German East.[88] Further, he actively worked for the Settlement Commission, in Posen from 1894 to 1899. An even closer and more important future ally of Sering's was working for the Settlement Commission as well, Friedrich von Schwerin, future *Regierungspräsident* in Frankfurt an der Oder. Hugenberg and Schwerin would ultimately join Sering in 1912 to form the troika that ran the Society for Inner Colonization. Their opinions about the East and settler colonialism were being formed in the early 1890s as emigrationist "population release," in the form of unemployed workers going to North America, had largely come to an end, while the fantasized German overseas colonial empire merely consisted of a few random spots around the world, from Togo to New Guinea. Although the idea that Germany's true colonial empire was in fact East Central Europe would become widespread only in 1915, the kernels of such thinking, in the very minds of those who would plan that empire during the First World War, were forming at this moment. Early on, the discussion consisted of space, German speakers, settlers, "other races," as well as the more intractable question of the *Junker* and their role in the nationalist struggle. For instance, in 1893 the Peasants' League was founded, ostensibly to give voice to the very people inner colonizers lionized and wanted to provide smallholdings to. Yet, this was in fact a *Junker* lobby organization, a force for elite conservatives in Germany that would consistently be a thorn in the side of the inner colonizers.[89] Thus, a complicated political mix of radical nationalists, conservative agrarians, and liberals with colonial dreams, were constantly fighting over how to proceed with settler colonialism in the eastern borderlands.

Meanwhile the VfS continued to push agrarian reform with a focus on the East. The VfS series volume 43, appearing in 1890, was a long history of the agrarian colonization of the eastern provinces, from the Teutons to

[88] See the seminal works on the German Right: Geoff Eley, *Reshaping the German Right: Radical Nationalism and Political Change after Bismarck* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), and Roger Chickering, *We Men Who Feel Most German: A Cultural Study of the Pan-German League, 1886–1914* (Boston: George Allen & Unwin, 1984).

[89] See the still seminal, Hans-Jürgen Puhle, *Agrarische Interessenpolitik und preußischer Konservatismus im wilhelminischen Reich (1893–1914): Ein Beitrag zur Analyse des Nationalismus in Deutschland am Beispiel des Bundes der Landwirte und der Deutsch-Konservativen Partei* (Bonn-Bad Godesberg: Neue Gesellschaft, 1975).

the present.[90] By the time of the annual meeting in September of that year, Nasse had died and Schmoller had become chairman. Rural municipalities in Prussia continued to be the theme, with Sombart providing a long history lesson for those in attendance. The audience again contained many of the key figures who would surround Sering over the ensuing decades, such as Brentano, an intellectual enemy of Sering's, and Sering's future supporter, Alfred Hugenberg. Schwerin was not in attendance that year but was an important member. Several volumes poured out of the VfS, and in 1892, with volume 55, Max Weber made his first intervention in the land question of the East, *The Relationships of Rural Workers in East Elbian Germany*. At this early stage Weber's target was mainly the *Junker* and their use of the land, but the following year he would join the Pan-German League and by 1895 would take a virulently anti-Polish stance regarding the German East.[91]

The series' next volume was Sering's *The Inner Colonization in Eastern Germany*.[92] Right at the outset of this work Sering made clear who he saw as the biggest problem in the East: the *Junker*. Only secondarily did he fear the Pole. He claimed that agriculture was crucial to the nation but it was dying, and he laid the blame for this on the *Junker*. Throughout his inner colonial career, Sering never wavered from this basic position and so he never fit cleanly into any political camp. Regarding the nationalist right, he was always an assimilationist when it came to the Poles. In Polish farmers, Sering would always see something akin to the promise of the Métis of St. Laurent, and not the doom of the Umatilla of the Washington Territory. Although he wanted to break elite agrarian power, the freedom provided to peasants was always to be circumscribed. He was, thus, too anti-*Junker* to be accepted comfortably within the ranks of the Conservatives, and while he appeared in many ways to be a National Liberal, he nevertheless made enemies within the ranks of the latter over the course of the 1890s. His book began with the "flight from

[90] Friedrich Keil, *Die Landgemeinde in den östlichen Provinzen Preußens und die Versuche, eine Landgemeindeordung zu schaffen* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1890). The belief that only "temperate" colonies, where traditional German farming could be practiced, were best, was always a tension in colonial thinking. See Woodruff D. Smith, *The Ideological Origins of Nazi Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 25.

[91] Like many key inner colonizers, Weber's interest in the threatened East began with his military service, based in Posen, in 1888. See, Gary A. Abraham, "Max Weber: Modernist Anti-Pluralism and the Polish Question," *New German Critique* 53 (1991): 41–42.

[92] Max Sering, *Die innere Kolonisation im östlichen Deutschlands* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1893). Many letters to Sering from North America experts, leading up to the publication of this book, can be found in "Ausarbeitung ueber die USA," in BArch K, N1210/142.

the land," the move of agrarian workers from the soil to industrial cities, and all the problems that arose therefrom. Sering employed the language of the "degeneration" argument of the period, calling emigration from farmland a "disease" (*Kranksein*) within the organism of the nation that would lead to the weakening of the physical and moral health of the Fatherland. This young "Socialist of the Chair" went so far as to say that Marx was somewhat correct in describing the proletarianization of agrarian workers, especially in the wake of the Stein Hardenburg reforms that had simply turned many of them from feudal serfs into landless labourers.[93] And, in the crucial link to the spirit of the American West, Sering claimed that this landlessness led to the very best German farmers taking their chances on the far side of the Atlantic: "Going to North America provided the elite of farmers the prospect of acquiring their own piece of public land as a homestead."[94] Sering argued that only with the recent slowdown of opportunity in the now closing West did Germany have the chance to keep the best at home, by doing the same settler work *within* the Fatherland. Through the creation of small plots of land for these settlers, farmers would stay and produce enough for themselves and the cities. Further, claimed Sering, not only would they produce crops, but they would have enough children to both maintain their family farms *and* send them to industrial cities to increase the manufacturing power of Germany. Sering went so far as to suggest that the model provided by typical Poles, a people who tended to have smaller farms and therefore, in his opinion, a higher birthrate and resulting stronger nationalism, meant that Germans could actually learn from these Slavs! He ended this first hundred-page section with a juxtaposition, pointing out that Americans only had gigantic farms where the population was thin, whereas in the German East exactly the opposite was true. It was clear which of the two Sering believed to be the correct model.

In later sections, Sering revisited many of the lessons from his 1887 book in order to point out what not to do, such as allowing too much freedom to sell land and cause speculation.[95] Conversely, Sering highlighted the threat of too many restrictions on peasants, such as those

[93] He discussed the legal system and how it was too capitalistic, encouraging the amalgamation of land into huge farms, and thereby causing many problems.

[94] Sering, *Die innere Kolonisation*, 15.

[95] Sering, *Die innere Kolonisation*, 159–160. Guettel cites this as evidence that North America is not a model for Sering. It is clearly an inspiration, a model that needs to be tinkered with and altered for the situation in Germany. Jens-Uwe Guettel, *German Expansionism, Imperial Liberalism, and the United States, 1776–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 170, fn. 9. See also, Gregory Zieren. "Max Sering and the 'Americanization' of German Agriculture, 1883–1933." Presentation for The German Association of American Studies. Bremen, Germany, June 8, 2001, 10.

currently in effect in certain parts of Prussia, which prevented prosperity.[96] The attitude of peasants was seen to be crucial, as Sering claimed that "spirit" was more important than the "possession of large means," and that such a spirit could be found among the settlers of North America. Indeed, Sering argued that this settler élan was the key to success in any inner colonial scheme. With regard to the success of creating a settler space of smallholdings out of a sea of gigantic *Junker* estates, he again invoked the West, stating that the fact that North America was largely settled with homesteads was strong evidence that such was a solid form of "land consolidation" and colonization.[97]

In his section entitled "State Colonization in Posen and West Prussia," Sering made a direct comparison to what he liked and did not like on the American frontier, and how he believed the Germans should do a better job in the eastern provinces. He ended with an argument as to why the very Germans who were looking to settle the American West should instead settle the German East. Despite exhibiting charts that indicated what was always a problem with settler colonialism in the East, that most inner colonial settlers tended to already be "from the East" (an "inner migration"), Sering continued to claim that nevertheless many settlers came from the West and Southwest of Germany. To parochial Germans who could not see how Germans from these divergent regions could get along, with Rhinelanders expected to live next door to Swabians, Sering invoked the North American West and how he saw nationalities from all over Europe getting along just fine as neighbours.[98] Further, Sering claimed that the settlers who were going East appeared to have taken the American sentiment of "settlement and improvement" very seriously, as solidly-built houses were being erected in the Eastern Provinces. Sering pointed out that certain inner colonial settlers were failing, but he put this up to that fact that they were of the wrong "stock," those not used to hard labour. More government control was required over who should and should not be a settler, something Sering had not seen in what he regarded as the willy-nilly settlement of the American West. Beyond the problem of strangely accented neighbours, Sering wrote that others feared that climate would be an issue. For instance, how would a Badener adapt to the Posen soil and climate. "But," wrote Sering, surely "the settlement of Posen and West Prussia is preferable to migration to America." Indeed, Sering claimed that a Westphalian

[96] Sering, *Die innere Kolonisation*, 166.
[97] Sering, *Die innere Kolonisation*, 180. Here, Sering directly cites his earlier work, *Die landwirthschaftliche Konkurrenz*, 107ff.
[98] Sering, *Die innere Kolonisation*, 204–205.

returning from the American frontier would tell the Badener that Posen was a better destination, and such advice, stated Sering, was "undoubtedly correct." In any case, America had run out of land, Sering argued in his final pitch, "the prices farmers get for their product are much lower, the selling conditions are more difficult, colonists do not receive any governmental help, and overall getting used to life under such strange circumstances is incomparably more difficult."[99]

But Sering recognized one big advantage the American West had over the German East: the Americans had no ruling class, no *Junker*. Added to this was the current (1893) confused system of a General Commission providing help to *anyone* who wanted to settle in the East, including Poles. Sering was at pains, however, to diffuse any belief that he was anti-Pole in some racist sense. Whereas the Settlement Commission seemed to be set up to create conflict between Germans and Poles, Sering was an assimilationist who ultimately saw inner colonial settlement as raising the cultural level of the Poles (à la the Métis). Such "pro-Polish" language also fit his anti-*Junker* program, for he pointed out that monies should be used to buy up bankrupt Polish estates, but also bankrupt German estates. After all, Sering's major goal was to break up the large estates of *all* landed aristocracy in the East, German but also the old Polish nobility, the *szlachta*. He drove home his point by stating that individual German settlers were much better fighters for Germanness than *Junker* who employed Polish seasonal workers, mainly from Russia.

The general meeting of the VfS for September 1892 was cancelled due to a cholera outbreak in the host city of Posen. At the opening of the eventual meeting in Berlin the following March, Schmoller felt the need to insist that it was in fact cholera and not a lack of interest that had forced the change of date and venue. It was a pity, he went on, that the planned visits to colonies and colonists to coincide with the theme of inner colonization had to be called off. Knapp gave the opening talk, referencing the initial VfS publications on the agricultural workers question, and registering his initial surprise at just how good Max Weber's volume was, and then that Sering's was fabulous. Although Knapp focused on Northern Germany, he mentioned that inner colonization would slowly but surely "westernize" (verwestlich) the East and all would be fine in the end. Weber then took the stage, lightening the mood by claiming that his task for the "enquete" was to be the "enfant terrible" of "the gentlemen farmers" (*die herren Landwirte*). But he then made good on this claim by stating that the *Junker* were indeed "unser **größter**

[99] Sering, *Die innere Kolonisation*, 230.

Polonisator."[100] Landless German workers in the East desired freedom but they were forced to find it elsewhere, because, Weber argued, the *Junker* wanted cheap labour that they could fire whenever they wanted, and who were guaranteed to leave at the end of the season. Such workers were of course Poles. If this pattern was not broken, warned Weber, Germany's food security would be threatened and the national "cultural level" (*Kulturniveau*) would plummet. Weber was initially pleased that the flow of foreign Polish workers had been stopped in 1886 but, since 1890, due to *Junker* pressure, the flood was again underway. This "terrible child," Weber, could not help himself and doubled down: "All in all, then, Gentlemen: the large landowners are the one element that in the East at this moment polonizes the most."[101] One can imagine Sering squirming in his seat during this diatribe. Sering believed everything Weber was saying, yet strove (now and throughout his life) to dilute his anti-*Junker* poison in a spoonful of honey. Weber then made an interesting move, tying conservative *Junker* to the free-trade industrialists, pointing out that when the *Junker* asserted that they should be able to hire whomever they wanted, they were behaving like the worst of the Manchesterites. Weber then wandered into biological racist territory where few others were willing to go, arguing that their own German workers could not compete with foreign Poles because Poles had an advantage due to their "different body composition, differently constructed stomachs" (*verschiedenen Koerperkonstitutionen, verschiedenen konstruierten Mägen*).[102] Weber hoped that Prussian Poles had somewhat assimilated, but greatly feared that these half-Germanized Slavs would quickly dis-assimilate, if they were allowed to spend too much time with foreign, seasonally-working Poles. He then turned to the issue at hand, the sedentarization of the rural workers, and whether or not to be optimistic about inner colonization: "for a more optimistic take on this please refer to my esteemed older and more experienced friend, Professor Sering." Because the current system allowed for the settling of small Polish farms, Weber was worried that they might do better than small German farmers because of, well, those Polish stomachs. Poles only needed the potatoes produced on small sandy lots, whereas, Weber

[100] "our greatest Polonizer," bold in the original. Friedrich Knapp, "Verhandlungen der am 21. und 22. März 1893 in Berlin abgehaltenen Generalversammlung des Vereins für Socialpolitik," SdVfS 58 (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1893), 72.

[101] "Verhandlungen der am 21. und 22. März 1893," 73.

[102] "Verhandlungen der am 21. und 22. März 1893," 74–75. For details on Weber's early years, and the development of his disdain for Poles, see Konno, *Max Weber und die Polnische Frage*, 31–39.

argued, the smallholding German farmers also needed cereals! Weber ended by claiming that, although inner colonization could fail in numerous ways, it was currently the best system for fighting the fight in the East and should be supported.[103]

Shortly after this Berlin meeting, Sering departed for his second journey to North America, this time as part of the German delegation to the Chicago World's Fair.[104] It appears as though Sering arrived in Chicago only in August, and was thus not present on July 12 when Frederick Jackson Turner presented his Frontier Thesis at the Fair. But Sering was surely made aware of this lecture that announced that the American frontier was now "closed," for it appeared in Sering's writings the following year. Sering was of course ten years older in 1893, and this time he travelled with a delegation and only visited a fraction of what he saw in 1883. We could thus expect that this journey was of vastly less importance in his life, yet it barely seems to have registered at all. There is virtually no trace of this journey in the archives and almost everything that we know about it comes from four lectures he gave that were published together as a booklet, "The Decline in Grain Prices and Foreign Competition."[105] He began that piece with a full discussion of "the most important grain area on Earth: North America," and how colonists had been pushed out of the eastern states to the wide-open spaces and possibilities of the Western Prairies. He referred to his

[103] In the ensuing discussion, Johannes Conrad wanted to add to Weber's words, claiming that emigration was especially worrisome, because while independent Germans were leaving, Poles did not have the "motivation" (*Streben*) to undertake such an endeavour. Also, Conrad claimed that when he was young, Poles used to stay in the same house until it fell down, and a German would then buy it. Today, Germans emigrate and Poles move into their good houses. There was then much discussion about whether or not to bring in Chinese or African labour to keep out the Poles, which only led Professor Adolph Wagner to plead that surely they would not introduce an even more (culturally) dangerous element to the East! At this point Weber disingenuously chimed in to say that, while he agreed with many of the positions of his liberal friends, he did not share their hatred of the *Junker*. The next day Sering was first up to speak and walked through his inner colonial ideas from the book, ending his talk with a reference to what "Mein Freund Weber" had stated the day before, urging those assembled to be "optimistic." But inner colonization was more than optimistic, more than a temperament, Sering claimed, it was realistic. In response to the talk, the discussion at the end of the second day was basically one long hymn of praise to Sering and his ideas. "Verhandlungen der am 21. und 22. März 1893," 76–128.

[104] There is a "Letter of Introduction" to the Chiefs of the Bureaus of Statistics and Labor, for Sering, by Carrol D. Neufeld, Commissioner, US Department of Labor, among Sering's papers. "Ausarbeitung ueber die USA," in BArch K, N1210/142. On the back of this letter, there is an outline for a letter from Sering, stating that he is visiting the country as part of Germany's world's fair delegation.

[105] Max Sering, *Das Sinken der Getreidepreise und die Konkurrenz des Auslandes. Vier Vorlesungen von Prof. Dr. M. Sering* (Berlin: Telge, 1894).

wanderings of ten years earlier, and the fantasy of emptiness, still vivid in his description of passing many train stations "in the middle of the wild prairie, already replete with the famed grain elevators, yet without any settlement in sight." He then framed the American Civil War in rather interesting terms: it was a battle not over slavery, but rather how the vast open land of the West would be carved up. Would it be for the small to mid-sized farms of the Northerners, or would it be turned into the plantations of the large landowners (read *Junker*) of the South? For Sering, the Homestead Law (and not Emancipation) was the true victory of the Civil War. He then picked up on Turner's thesis and claimed that the American West was now closed and that the only land left was in Western Canada. But, as he had mentioned in his 1887 book, too much speculation had ultimately made for very expensive land and the weather made for a rather short growing season. In fact, Sering pointed out, so few migrants were heading to the Canadian Prairies that the Canadian government was now allowing in none other than Russian Poles.[106] While the character of American farmers was somewhat framed by the fact that they were land speculators, Sering was at pains to point out that they were good, upstanding men, and the "wife and daughters of the American farmer were perfect ladies who never performed field work." Sering indicated that, during this recent journey, he had focused on production and transportation costs and was surprised at the degree of mechanization of American farms: reaping machines (*selbstbinnenden Mähmaschinen*) were making it possible for one American farmer to do the work of two. Germany should adopt such machinery he argued, and with such improvements Germany could in fact keep up with the agricultural production of all "upstanding cultured peoples" (*hochstehende Kulturvoelker*). The problem globally, however, was that Germany had to also compete with nations "of a lower cultural level than us, who threaten to pull our standard of living down to theirs, and it is these very people who command weapons that would render impossible any honourable fight. Above all I speak of Russia and Argentina." The Russians, he argued, practiced "agrarian communism" and were producing a lot of cheap grain; while the Argentines were able to grow grain all year long. Both countries were also plagued by many problems in their agriculture, however, and it was unclear how much of their potential they would

[106] Carl E. Solberg, *The Prairies and the Pampas: Agrarian Policy in Canada and Argentina, 1880–1930* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univesity Press, 1987), 92. The vast bulk of these Ukrainians came from Galicia and Bukovina in the Habsburg Empire. Erik Grimmer-Solem postulates that Sering's 1887 work may well have influenced Turner. Friedrich Ratzel liked the work of Sering, and Ratzel definitely influenced Turner. Grimmer-Solem, *Learning Empire*, 59.

ultimately be able to exploit. Sering ended the article by admitting that Germany was everywhere challenged by low global prices for basic things, while maintaining an advantage in higher priced items. His immediate solutions were to impose a wheat tariff and bimettalism.[107] Such suggestions brought Sering into the "Question of the Land," a rollicking political debate that would consume the latter 1890s and bring Sering onto the national stage, as will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.[108]

1894–1900: The Hohenlohe Years

Caprivi was replaced by Prince Hohenlohe as Chancellor in 1894. Hohenlohe had been governor of Alsace-Lorraine and was already averse to issues of borderland nationalities.[109] In any case, the whole project in the East was under serious assault as he took power. In 1894, the famous historian Hans Delbrück published *The Polish Question* in which he pointed out that, thus far, an average of 12,000 marks had been spent per settler in the East, and that at the current rate it would take a century to settle a hundred thousand Germans there. He found the ethnic side of the issue to be the most difficult and thought Caprivi's approach, helping all settlers regardless of nationality, was likely the best path forward, as it would ultimately win the loyalty of Prussian Poles, as opposed to making enemies of them.[110] Indeed, frustration with settlement actually led Bismarck to declare in 1894 that the whole scheme was a waste of time and that the use of Polish peasants in the traditional way was fine. To add insult to injury, the price of land began to skyrocket in the 1890s, making the whole program more and more expensive, and leading even Miquel to get cold feet. In 1896 he suggested both commissions should simply

[107] Grimmer-Solem, *Learning Empire*, 61–71.

[108] It appears that during the Caprivi years the *Junker* attempted to outflank Sering and the inner colonizers by using "American" language with what were ultimately feudal plans. The so-called Homestead Movement was the introduction of a law in 1890 in Prussia under which, à la the American West, peasants were to be given homesteads. However, the peasants were to be tied to the land, paying some form of long-term lease to their *Junker* overlords. From 1892 to 1897 there was a flurry of back and forth in the newspapers with conservatives trying to look progressive, by the use of these terms, and people like Sering constantly having to go on record saying that this homestead movement had nothing to do with homesteads! Sering criticized the movement in, "Die Entwürfe für eine neue Agrargesetzgebung in Österreich," *Schmollers Jahrbuch* 18 (1894): 383–407.

[109] Blanke, *Prussian Poland*, 177–179.

[110] Blanke, *Prussian Poland*, 183–185. In BArch K, N/1210/18, there are several letters and newspaper articles in and around 1894, that charge "inner colonization" as being a liberal scheme to exploit peasants by making them indebted. In several of the pieces, Sering was named as one of the exploiters, and he personally underlined many of the charges with a pen.

merge and provide help to all farmers in the East. At the same time, the Prussian government had to admit to the problem that would always dog "inner" colonization and both its open and "closeted" ethnic nationalists: Prussian Poles were citizens, and therefore there was no legal way to deny them money if it was being provided to their fellow German citizens.[111] To add insult to injury half of the already purchased land sat empty, as it was an uphill battle to attract Germans to Posen and West Prussia. There was discussion at this time about lowering the government standards for settlers, lowering the down payment, and looking more within East Elbia for settlers as opposed to western Germany.[112] By this period, emigration from Germany had largely stopped, but massive migration into German cities had only increased. Many had to admit that Caprivi's economic reforms had been successful, Germans were staying in Germany, and crucially the American West no longer attracted the landless labour of the German East. Instead, Germany's booming industrialization was employing that rural labour faster than ever.

Sering Ascends to the National Stage

In an academic scene where colleagues such as Max Weber, Werner Sombart, and especially Lujo Brentano were increasingly anti-*Junker*, Sering had to constantly thread the needle between being clearly frustrated with the *Junker*, while also wanting to sway these rural conservatives to his way of thinking. At the Prussian Agrarian Conference of 1894, Sering had begun to use doom and gloom language on a new scale. He declared, "We must prevent the rape of the land by mobile capital"[113] and that if the peasants were not supported by the government it would signal the ruin and demise of Prussia. Weber would complain that this conference was a litany of conservative agrarian voices and that the only two fighting against the tide were Sombart and Sering, the latter with his "concretely designed project."[114] Ever the diplomat, however, in Sering's report on the conference for *Schmollers Jahrbuch*, he told his readers to ignore whatever they had read in the press regarding quarrels, as all members had gotten along just fine.[115]

Ironically, that very Fall at another agrarian conference, this time in Vienna, Sering was about to begin one of the only open, nasty quarrels in

[111] Blanke, *Prussian Poland*, 186–188. [112] Blanke, *Prussian Poland*, 189.
[113] Kenneth D. Barkin, *The Controversy over German Industrialization, 1890–1902* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 147.
[114] Max Weber, "Die Verhandlungen der Preussischen Agrarkonferenz," *Sozialpolitisches Centralblatt* 8, no. 45 (6 August 1894): 533–537.
[115] Max Sering, "Die preußische Agrarkonferenz," *Schmollers Jahrbuch* 18 (1894): 943–968.

his life. Lujo Brentano, the most liberal and pro-industrial of the "Socialists of the Chair" undertook a relentless attack on what was inarguably the weakest link in Sering's approach to settler colonialism, whether or not peasants were to be tied to the land. Brentano was of course a "laissez-faire" man, a Manchesterite to use the nastiest label of the era, and he argued that German peasants should be free to sell their plot of land whenever they desired and that anything less than this was a reversion to feudalism. The two professors carried out their fight in several journals over the next three years and, it has to be said, Brentano touched a nerve, as Sering would not be as enraged again until his final battle, at the end of his life, with the Nazi Darré. And it is easy to see why Sering was so defensive, for, as already pointed out, this would always be the central problem with a government-controlled settler colonial program that had "nationalizing the soil" as its fundamental precept. For men so passionate about their goal of settling the land and preventing Germany from becoming a completely industrial state, the stakes could not be higher. Sering's fight with Brentano was but a preamble to his role on the national stage in a loud and lingering debate that would tackle the central issue surrounding the rural or industrial future of Germany, the so-called Question of the Land.