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SOME PROBLEMS OF GERMAN HEGEMONY

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To deal with the problems of German hegemony at the present moment is a rather delicate task. There is no doubt that the German government has been successful in transforming the larger part of non-Russian Europe into a powerful structure under its leadership, the legal forms varying from incorporation, as in the cases of Austria and the Sudeten German territory, to an alliance of formally equal partners, as in the case of Italy. The success has not been consolidated, however; and it is impossible, therefore, to give a definite account either of the new institutions or of the principles on which they are based. The well known reasons are of an internal and an external nature. Internally, the German expansion is a phase of the National Socialist revolution, and the future developments of this revolution are not foreseeable. Externally, the result of the expansion is conditioned by the power struggle of the war; and the outcome of the war is again entirely unpredictable. All that a scholar can do responsibly at such a juncture is to outline and depict some of the essential features of the situation which will probably have a bearing on any future settlement whatever the outcome of the armed struggle.

I

The first point which deserves a few words of comment concerns the general power structure of the Western World. By the term Western World we mean in this context the American and European world of power units west of Russia with their affiliated and dependent dominions and possessions. We are in the habit of considering this group of sovereign states (assuming the picture before 1938) as legally coördinated units, differing in their power rank, but otherwise qualitatively equal and thus potential members of an international organization with ultimately peaceful relations between them. This habitual outlook underlies more or less explicitly the programs for international
organization, the projects for a reconstruction of the international order once the war is over, the classification of the states into some which are willing to cooperate and others which are styled aggressor nations, and the distinction between the peoples, which are essentially good, and their governments, which sometimes are bad and have to be abolished.

This static pattern of a world of fixed national state units, preferably organized internally on democratic lines, however, does not take into account the very dynamic historic structure of the Western World. The Western state units are not distributed as color splotches on a map, destined to stay where they are to the end of the world, but are arranged in layers as the sediments of the great Western imperial drive, which emanated from the European center and pierced to the American and Oceanic periphery. The German center of Europe is the old empire core, a residue, one might say, burdened with the imperial tradition which received its twist towards the national state development as recently as 1866. Around this empire core lies, then, the zone of the old national states which separated gradually from the empire (their relation to the Emperor was still a topic of discussion for Bodin in 1576). Carrying on the original imperial drive they created empires of their own. The third zone is formed by the overseas extension of the European national states, by the former colonies, some of which have grown into the British dominion states, some into independent states of the Latin American type, and one, the United States, into a great power in her own right. And the United States, finally, have developed an imperial zone of their own in the West Indies, Alaska and the Oceanic insular world.

The wars of this imperial expansion took place, in the nature of the case, in the national state zone, between Spain, France, Holland, and England, and ultimately in the colonial zone, the last being the American wars, the British-American, the Mexican-American, and the Spanish-American wars. The old European empire core was of comparatively little importance in this power settlement, occupied as it was during the critical centuries with the gradual liquidation of the structure of the old Empire and the consequences of the 17th century catastrophe. But just
when the imperial drive of the national states and the colonial zone began to settle down and the approximate spheres of interest became fixed, this old core happened to arrive, under the impact of the Prussian creation, at the national state stage of development, and as a consequence of economic unification, industrialization, and population increase since 1870 became the most powerful continental state.

The new power found itself squeezed in on a limited territory between Russia and the zone of the national states which hold the European coast line, and began almost as soon as it was founded to embark upon the policy of national state imperialism following the pattern of the border zone powers. There are two phases clearly to be distinguished in the new imperial drive emanating from the European center. The first, lasting to 1914, is characterized by the predominance of the sea-power idea, leading to the foundation of the motley colonial empire and the naval competition with Great Britain. The second, developing since the first World War, is governed by the idea of overland expansion; it was typically represented during the War by Naumann’s Mitteleuropa book and the symbol of the Berlin-Bagdad axis, and since the World War it has expressed itself in the intensified economic relations with Southeastern Europe and in the National Socialist policy of the drive to the East (the Drang nach Osten). The profound resignation in the early ideas of Hitler on German foreign policy, in his frequently expressed desire to come to terms with Great Britain in exchange for a free hand in the east, is not always realized. It was the renunciation of the sea-power dream in emulation of the Western nations.

The new orientation towards a continental imperialism entailed the consequences which we associate with the problem of German hegemony and led up to the present war. Germany’s central position in Europe, if accepted passively, meant, in power terms, its suffocation in comparison with the imperial expanse of the border states; if used as a basis for overland expansion, it involved German hegemony over all the lesser powers of Eastern Europe, and even if confined to the center and the east, it implied an immense political diminution for the Atlantic
empires of France and Great Britain, because a power dominating Central and Southeastern Europe holds the inner strategic lines of the Western World. A Europe under German hegemony would leave France as a third-rate power on the brink of the continent, in permanent danger of being squeezed out of existence if the German policy, however peaceful at the moment, should under another government take a different turn. In this case also Great Britain would be left in a precarious position on an island west of Europe, with a possibly hostile power dominating the Atlantic sea coast on the one side and menacing the Eastern Mediterranean on the other. The problems involved in this power pattern are quite independent of the German inner-political structure.

Developments since 1938, and particularly the collapse of France, have made obvious the further potentialities of a Central European hegemonic power: if the drive penetrates the national state zone, it immediately touches the position of the outer colonial zone of the Western World. And if the British European position should become untenable, the Western hemisphere would find itself between the European-African coast on the one side, and the Japanese dominated Asiatic coast on the other side in an isolation which might not be to the liking of even the most ardent American isolationist.

The problem which emerges from this general historic structure of the Western World may be formulated as the necessity for finding a working settlement between the imperialism of a Central European hegemonic power and the border zone empires of the Western World. The settlement can obviously assume one of three forms: (1) a power compromise which would involve a serious change in the relative power status of the Western Empires; or (2) and (3) the permanent annihilation of either the Central European power or the European sea powers.

II

Let us now proceed to the power problems of that vast Eastern European region which is the potential field of a German hegemony.

It may be best to start with a restatement of the basic political
fact which creates the problem under discussion, namely, the existence since 1870 of a German Empire. That a Western nation-state with the material momentum of a great power, which is in addition the original home of the imperial idea of which the French, British, and American imperialisms are derivatives, will show in its foreign policy certain similarities to that of the other Western great powers is obvious to every student of politics. The assumption that a power of this type would behave as if it were a minor political unit like Norway or Switzerland is so far-fetched that, as a scholar, I am ashamed to stress the point; and I would not do it if it were not for the vast number of persons who on every occasion break into word or print with their ideas about a streamlined peaceful world order and base their programs precisely on this assumption. The idea that anything but force can prevent a German hegemony over Europe east of France is just as unrealistic as would be the idea that anything but force could have prevented the expansion of the American colonies over the continent, or the French and British penetration of Africa and Asia.

The question of the German hegemony, now, has received an entirely new cast through the results of the first World War. The decisive factor was the dissolution of the Austrian Empire and the creation of the succession-states on a national state pattern. From the point of view of a German hegemony the existence of the Austrian Empire meant that the nationalities of Central Europe had a definite organizational framework, and that the German military and economic hegemony could pursue its aims through agreements with the Empire, leaving the nationality problem to Austrian domestic policy. The danger zone of conflicts with small national states was removed to the Balkans. It is impossible to dwell here upon the Austrian nationality policy; I merely wish to emphasize that it had its historic importance not only as an Austrian question, but as an instrument of the German hegemony.

It may be worth-while, however, to touch on one point, to which I have to revert in a later context, namely, the nationality policy of the Social Democratic Party. The Austrian Social Democratic Party held a key position in the formulation of
nationality policy because on the one hand it was by principle the international organization of the proletariat and on the other hand it had to grapple with the fact of nationalities in its own ranks. The most important contributions to the solutions of the Central European nationality problems came, therefore, from the labor leaders; the treatises of Karl Renner and Otto Bauer and the resolutions of the Party Congress in Bruenn of 1899 are still the classic formulations and proposals regarding the delicate task of organizing a multi-national region. The Social Democratic leaders were not Communist totalitarians, and they recognized, therefore, the necessity of national autonomy within the super-national organization. (The permanent value of their proposals may be judged in the light of the fact that the highly nationalistic Sudeten German organizations in Czechoslovakia could advance as their main demand autonomy on the basis of a national cadaster—the solution of Karl Renner in 1902.) This nationality policy of the Austrian Social Democrats became one of the main points of disagreement with the Russian Bolshevists. The Russians were in favor of a totalitarian communist solution. Stalin’s article in 1913 on “The National Question and Social Democracy” gives a masterly account of the relative positions; it should be re-read in the light of the German totalitarian development, for the National Socialist hegemony, if it should be established in Europe, will not follow the Austrian Social Democratic proposals, but the totalitarian lines indicated by Stalin.

Inserted between the Austrian Social Democratic ideas and the new problems created by a totalitarian Germany is the post-War organization of Central and Eastern Europe. Assuming the hegemonic drive of the German great power as a datum, the arrangement could last unperturbed only as long as Germany was so weak that the drive could not be resumed. The world of the Eastern European minor powers was, politically speaking, a power-vacuum which depended for its continued existence on a balance of the surrounding great powers. (There were several such dead power angles in Europe: the Scandinavian countries in the dead angle between Russia, Germany, and Great Britain; the Low Lands in the dead angle between Germany, France, and
Great Britain; Switzerland in the dead angle between Germany, France, and Italy; the pre-War Balkan states in the dead angle between Austria, Russia, and the Mediterranean powers.) With Austria as the mediating agency in Central Europe dissolved, Russia comparatively impotent, Italy diverted toward the African adventure, and France and Great Britain strategically far removed from the immediate danger zone, it was a foregone conclusion that the region would be politically reorganized under German leadership if Germany was ever economically and militarily strong enough to apply itself to the task. The existence of this power vacuum depended on the British-French power monopoly in Europe in the years following the first World War. From the point of view of peaceful relations and change, the situation was, however, considerably worse than before 1914, because the super-national Austrian organization had been destroyed. Unsatisfactory as this organization was in many respects, it presented at least a preliminary solution which could be used as a starting point. Now the first step that had to be taken was to induce the sovereign minor powers to give up their sovereignty to the extent at least of a federation with a common economic and foreign policy, in short to retrace the steps after the Austrian breakdown. While this reorganization under peaceful German pressure might have been in the realm of possibility, after the generation of the national self-determination fanatics had disappeared from the scene, the totalitarian evolution in Germany introduced a new factor which made a peaceful solution improbable under any circumstances.

I wish to eliminate the totalitarian factor for the moment, however, and to consider one or two hypothetical alternatives to the present situation which might result from the present war. Let us suppose that Germany suffers a crushing defeat which would incapacitate her as a great power; let us assume further a restored France and an Italy left in possession of its European territory. A number of interesting questions will then arise, such as: who will prevent a crushed Germany from entering into a close relationship, or even a union, with Russia; or who will prevent the expansion of Russia into Scandinavia, Slovakia, and the Balkans? Or let us make the other assumption of an in-
conclusive German defeat as in 1918: who will prevent the rise of a situation similar to the present? The purpose in formulating these hypothetical cases is to demonstrate the impasse character of the organization of 1919. The existence of a German great power in Central Europe means a German hegemony over the continent; the destruction of the German great power means that the sea-powers have to organize the continental region on the basis of military occupation and defense themselves—unless they wish to surrender the continent to Russia. The co-existence of a non-hegemonic German great power with a power-vacuum to the Southeast, the day-dream of Western statesmen, is impossible. There is one thing even a scientist can predict: the world of Central and Eastern European small powers as we knew it in 1938 will not rise again. There will be no Austria, Poland, or Czechoslovakia, no Baltic states and no Hungary and probably no Balkan states as sovereign states in a future Europe. All reconstruction ideas which imply such assumptions can be dismissed for good. A symptom that this situation is realized is seen in the fact that the British Government is extremely careful not to commit itself on the question of war aims.

III

A new factor was introduced into the problems of German hegemony, as mentioned before, through the National Socialist revolution and the trend towards totalitarianism. This point requires some comment, because on its understanding depends the attitude one will take toward the problems of European reconstruction.

The National Socialist revolution is deeply rooted in the peculiar German socio-political structure which is little understood in the West—if it had been better understood by so-called statesmen some of the mistakes of 1918 would not have been made. The democratic constitution of 1919 was adopted by a people which was far from having the historically settled democratic temper of the Western nations. The German national state was founded only in 1870 and the nation did not grow, therefore, politically within the dynastically established state structure, having the prestige of centuries, like the French and
British. Consequently, the German state had not produced, in the transitional period from the feudal to the absolute monarchy, a ruling class comparable to the Western, nor did it have a people which had acquired its democratic liberties in a struggle with the ruling class on a nation-wide scale. The three main-stays of Western democracy—the state authority of old standing, the political technique evolved by a ruling class, the tradition of political liberties established and confirmed through revolutions—were present only in the incipient and fragmentary forms of a recent national foundation, the Prussian tradition of government, the modest democratic experiences of the Southwest German countries, and the movement of 1848.

It is important, moreover, to be aware of the time difference in the formation of political attitudes for the masses in Great Britain and France on the one hand and in Germany on the other. The English movements that created the liberal and democratic tradition were the revolution of the 17th and the Wesleyan reform of the 18th centuries, which imbued the masses of British and, for that matter, American lower middle-classes and workers, deeply with religiously based rules of democratic conduct. For the French a similar result was achieved through the secularized personal and community ideas of 1789. The political formation of German masses is mainly due to the 19th century ideas which largely had lost contact with the Christian principles of respect for the individual and were predominantly collectivist. The working class was mainly formed by the Marxist class-ideas, the lower middle class by the collectivist nationalism of the late 19th century. The Christian principles and the ideas of 1848 were of secondary importance, though they were far from negligible as is proved by the rôle of the Centrist Party and of the personality of Chancellor Bruning in the Weimar Republic, as well as by religious resistance to National Socialist rule. A thorough democratization would have been a difficult task requiring several generations in these circumstances. It could have been performed perhaps in the protective shelter of the monarchy and of the efficient progressive civil
service after the belated constitutional reform of 1918, but such possibilities were cut short by the events following the military disaster.

A full understanding of the effects of the breakdown of 1918 on Germany requires a radical change in the viewpoint to which we are accustomed, just as in the Austrian case. We are habituated to regard the fall of the Central European Empires under the category of a progress towards national self-determination and democracy. For the Austrian case I have already suggested that the erection of the nationalities into sovereign nations was distinctly a retrogression from a state of super-national organization already achieved at the time. For Germany I now wish to make the same point. Such possibilities as there were for a democratic development have received a severe setback, if they have not been entirely destroyed, through the ill-considered introduction of formal democracy and the consequent rise of National Socialism. The first and most momentous event was the destruction of the monarchy with its standards of personal conduct. It seems to me highly improbable that a man with the personal behavior and characteristics of Hitler could ever have achieved any importance in a society whose standards of personal conduct were determined in the last instance by the Prussian court. The second destructive measure was the abolition of the German army and of general conscription. Armies are usually thought of as instruments of military power; they are, or let us say more cautiously, they can be, however, also the effective instrument of national education and democratization if they are under proper guidance. A military training of two years for young men, if used skillfully, creates habits of conduct which determine decisively their future behavior pattern. I am inclined to attribute the particularly repulsive atrocities of the National Socialists to the fact that they were committed by civilians who had not gone through the school of the Prussian army. The third destructive factor was the introduction of the democratic constitution itself, which meant

1 The constitutional reform need not have taken even the forms of amendments as it did in 1918. The Bismarck constitution could have been used without changes for a parliamentary form of government, if the Reichstag had cared to use it that way.
in practice the creation of the ideal instrument through which anti-democratic masses could gain a power position in the state by legal means, a position which they otherwise could have gained only through methods which would have brought them into conflict with the law. And, finally, the conservative bourgeoisie who could have formed the nucleus of a future democratic development was ruined financially and socially by the inflation. The critical point of a coup d'etat from the top or a revolution from the bottom was reached when the Communist and National Socialist Parties together held the majority in the Reichstag and through the use of their so-called blocking majority, made impossible the working of the constitution.

What actually has happened through the advent of National Socialism is still a matter of dispute among the experts, and probably will be for a long time to come. All I can do is to point to a few of the obvious facts and outstanding interpretations. There should be mentioned first, perhaps, the long-range view that the revolution has brought to the top a stratum of German society which has never been touched by the German civilizational evolution through the centuries and which thus represents an almost pure medieval pre-Christian attitude. While I believe this view to be basically correct, I think it needs some qualification through reference to the 50 per cent population increase between 1870 and 1910. This increase occurred for the most part in the social danger zone; and one might say that the new masses have added primarily to the section of the people which was not integrated sufficiently in the national community. The task of educating and democratizing these new masses would have been tremendous even if the old authorities had kept the lid down effectively; when the lid was removed in 1918 the danger of explosion became infinitely greater, particularly when the national disaster and the economic depression added to the instability of the social system. The result, however, is fairly clear, and unforgettable to anybody who has seen Germany before and after 1933 and Austria before and after 1938: the revolution in Germany as well as in Austria had the characteristics of an invasion of the country by a foreign nation. Men of strange conduct, of strange standards of value, men with whom
no personal contact was possible because there was no community of educational background and cultural tradition invaded all institutions. While a judgment as to the extent of the phenomenon is impossible at present, its nature seems to be beyond doubt: there has occurred a severe break in the civilizational tradition which possibly may go so far as to constitute a basic change in the identity of the German nation.

These comments are necessary as preliminary to the appreciation of important new factors in the problem of German hegemony. We can bring out the new characteristics best perhaps by a comparison with the approach of Stalin, mentioned before. The Stalinist formula for a super-national union is the preservation of a national form with, however, a socialist content. This means in practice that the member nations of the Soviet Union should consist of persons who speak their different languages, but have the status of workers in a completely industrialized and mechanized society and confess the Communist creed. The entire historical structure of the group, socially and spiritually, has to be wiped out as being "bourgeois." In this respect the National Socialist hegemony has the same structure as the Russian: the historic national civilization has to be destroyed to the bottom, in Germany herself as well as in the territories of the conquered nations, and to be replaced by National Socialist content. There is, however, an important difference. The Communist policy, due to its Marxist origin, is essentially international and egalitarian; it purports to transform the backward nations into members in the uniformly industrialized society, and the constitution is based on the principle of regional national representation for all members of the Soviet Union. The National Socialist hegemony, on the other hand, takes the principle of German national superiority as its starting point and shows no tendency, ideologically or practically, toward a union of national regions with proportional representation in a super-national council.

With regard to the institutional features of the future hegemony, if it ever should materialize, we can distinguish as yet only the bare outlines. The technique of National Socialist destruction of nations is by now common knowledge and I need
not dwell upon it. As soon as we go beyond the sphere of revolutionary technique it becomes, however, increasingly difficult to distinguish between those features in the new organization which are destined to be permanent and others which are determined only by the exigencies of a situation at a given moment. Where the revolutionary and military expansion was successful, it resulted in a radical change of personnel in all governmental key positions, in an equally radical transformation of all instruments which have an influence on the formation of public opinion, and in the transformation of the institutions of higher learning. The measures employed are well known and range from simple dismissal to detention in concentration camps, killing, and forced emigration. How deep the destruction has gone, and whether anything of the old order will be saved from the wreck, is anybody's guess.

The effect of the destruction on the non-German European nations is entirely incalculable. We have always to remember that the present transformations are not simply changes of governments or constitutions, but social and civilizational revolutions, and that the effects will not become fully visible for another generation. One of the most important questions will be whether the establishment of new orders which are “National Socialist in content” will not produce a still more fanatical will to self-assertion on the part of the national groups, once the domestic accounts are settled and the new leaders have their hands free to get at one another's throats. This question is worth some attention considering that even Stalin, with his backing of an internationalist ideology, had to raise a threatening finger repeatedly on party congresses and to speak menacingly of a “bourgeois deviation” of anybody who might interpret the “national form” as permitting him a nationalist policy.

The question needs all the more careful consideration because the features of an incipient hegemonic organization which have become visible do not make for frictionless coöperative relations between Germany and the conquered Eastern European nations. Under varying titles we find a German political organization superimposed over the national institutions; with a governor, protector, or commissioner as the head with powers of advice
and approval over the decisions of the national government, ultimate powers of approval of the acts of the national legislatures, and powers to issue executive orders in his own right; we find the institution of German courts with jurisdiction over whatever are classified as political offenses of the foreign nationals, and over cases involving Germans as parties; we find the German secret police operating freely in the national territories; and we find ample German garrisons. In the economic field the conquered nations are organized into the German Four Year Plan with a tendency toward concentrating the industrial sector of the whole system in the German national territory, and toward using the conquered nations as producers of raw materials at whatever prices the German Government sees fit to fix. As far as we can discern at the moment there is in the making an increasingly chaotic situation, pregnant with revolutionary movements among the conquered nationalities and consequent bloody suppression, in the event of a National Socialist victory in the war; and equally pregnant with gigantic massacres among the Germans and sympathizers of Germans in event of a National Socialist defeat.

Let me summarize now the rather gloomy outlook for reconstruction on the basis of this analysis. There are two principal hypothetical cases about which we must be clear. The first is the assumption of a complete military defeat of Great Britain which would actually bring the fighting to an end. In this case the German hegemony would extend over all of Europe including the British Isles; and it would extend also over all of Africa and the Near East. If this should be the result, the internal problems will arise which I have indicated as connected with the present idea of German superiority and the attempt at organizing the foreign nations as politically and economically inferior groups. It does not seem feasible to make any predictions concerning this possible development. And quite obviously we need not worry about reconstruction in this case because nobody will care what we think about it. If the German hegemony should be established to approximately the extent just suggested, this country will not be quite as great a power as it is now, and we shall be very busy reorganizing it along lines now beyond our wildest imagination in order to preserve it as an independent democratic power at all.
The second hypothetical case would be a complete German defeat. The problems which would arise in this event have been outlined above. In order to prevent a Russian expansion it would be necessary for the sea powers to occupy the continent and to organize the indescribable wreck themselves. Any conjecture as to this order is futile, if for no other reason than that we do not know what will be left to be organized.

Some would be inclined to propose a third case, the case of a stalemate. I do not consider this a possibility, because I frankly cannot imagine the conditions of a stalemate. That either Great Britain or Germany will cease fighting as long as they have any striking power left seems to me improbable in the light of the present data. And the striking power will exist—barring the case of an abject military defeat—as long as the social organization of either power holds out. The alternative to a military defeat, then, would be a simultaneous social upheaval in both countries which would disorganize the war machinery. But this case is beyond discussion, because it would bring new factors into the situation which cannot even be surmised at present.