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KULTUR, ECONOMICS AND THE GERMAN DRIVE FOR WORLD-POWER STATUS **The national task of the Navy as an instrument of culture**

‘A people which is not strong and competent at sea in the universal age no longer has a rôle in world history, a people without a fleet has lost its worth and importance for the development of culture in the twentieth century...’ *National-Zeitung, 19 December 1897*

‘Gegenüber dem Beistand des Materiellen von der ewigen Anbetung der Macht des Geldes halten wir heute noch daran fest, daß Seele und Geist etwas in der Welt bedeuten. Denn unser Deutsches Reich... ist die Folge lange Kulturarbeit.’

In contrast to the supporters of the purely material and the eternal adoration of the power of money, we still hold fast today to the fact that soul and spirit mean something in the world. Because our German Reich ... is the result of long cultural work. *Armeemuseum, Ingolstadt, author's note.*

This essay is primarily concerned to explain the national impetus to expansion which culminated in *Weltpolitik* as expressed in the task of the Navy. As the Australian historian John Moses put it, one cannot escape the conclusion that the long-term indoctrination of a particular political ideology 'carried out with all the impressive argument of a well established scholarly tradition' did not have a formative influence on the political will of the German people.¹ Without an understanding of this the long-term preparation for what was seen in leading circles as an inevitable conflict with Britain cannot properly be understood. Gerhard Schreiber wrote that there exists an unbroken power-political continuity between the imperialistic aims set by the naval program, and the consideration of German world pre-eminence which found its final expression in the Third Reich. When the long expected conflict came, it was seen not merely as a struggle for territory, but for the 'existence or non-existence of German culture, indeed of culture itself.'² The War united most historians in a solid defence of the 'German idea' of history against western natural law doctrine.³ The specific naval mode of thinking realised itself in a rigorous 'navalism' with the obligation to raise Germany from a Continental power to an overseas world power.⁴

By the turn of the century, events such as the standoff with the USA in the Philippines, the agreement on the future division of the Portuguese colonies, friction with Britain and the USA over Samoa, the Yangtze Agreement to maintain the 'Open Door' policy in China and German naval participation in the blockade of Venezuela showed that Germany was emerging from the position of

¹ J. A. Moses, *The Politics of Illusion: the Fischer Controversy in German Historiography* (London, 1975), 9.

² *Koloniale Rundschau*, August-October 1914, 449.

³ See Klaus Schwabe, 'Zur politischen Haltung der deutschen Professoren im Ersten Weltkrieg', *Historische Zeitschrift*, Vol. 193 (1961) 601-634.

⁴ Gerhard Schreiber, 'Zur Kontinuität des Groß- und Weltmachtstrebens der deutschen Marineführung', *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen*, 26, No. 2, 1979, 101.

a Continental power to that of a world power and thus the relative positions of others, primarily Britain, would be challenged.⁵ It is widely understood and accepted, especially since the pioneering studies by Paul Kennedy, Volker Berghahn, Holger Herwig and others on Anglo-German antagonism in general, and naval rivalry in particular, that Germany's industrial growth and consequent economic prosperity⁶ were the essential preconditions for its ability to challenge Britain's predominance at sea and thus also a major factor in precipitating the First World War.

Economics and ideology

Common to both Britain and Germany was the growth in technology which transformed industry and led to mass production, the expansion of overseas trade and the search for new markets, raw materials and investment opportunities.⁷ The rapid rise of German industry and the energy of the commercial sector made expansion inevitable.⁸ Even moderates like Ernst Troeltsch and Friedrich Meinecke saw the solution for domestic social and economic problems in an expansive foreign policy, promoting democratisation of government mainly as a method to strengthen the nation in the international power struggle.⁹ and this became the test of a nation's fitness to participate on the world stage. In Germany, a deterministic view of its future as a mercantile and naval power guided the arguments for a strong Navy.

This creates the need to put German naval aims in a clearly recognisable context. They were not an end in themselves, nor primarily economic, though commercial rivalry figures large in the contemporary writing. Even the historian Hans Delbrück, who thought primarily in terms of *Weltpolitik*, wrote that there was a new force abroad which would have an as yet unknown influence on the history of nations: the 'mercantile jealousy of England against Germany', whose rapidly expanding industry and trade was seen as a threat. Even though France had come up against Britain with recent colonial-political successes, its stagnating economy was not a consideration.¹⁰



Naval Secretary and architect of the battleship program **Alfred von Tirpitz** viewed the Navy as an ideological instrument, an integral part of a system designed to obtain and secure Germany's position among other world powers. The real concern behind Tirpitz' claim that Germany must become a world power or be reduced to a poor farming country was to provide the means to prevent any economic rivalry permitting Britain to crush German competition

⁵ G. Schöllgen, 'Die Großmacht als Weltmacht. Idee, Wirklichkeit und Perzeption deutscher "Weltpolitik" im Zeitalter des Imperialismus', *Historische Zeitschrift*, Bd. 248 (1989), 80; on changing German self-perceptions, Wilhelm Deist, *Flottenpolitik und Flottenpropaganda. Das Nachrichtenbüro des Reichmarineamtes 1897-1914* (Stuttgart:Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1976), 8-9.

⁶ The statistical work of A.K. Cairncross in the 1950s showed the apparent absence of connection between the export of capital and the 'scramble for colonies'. Diplomatic historians have rejected a monocausal explanation of imperialism, seeing it as primarily a political phenomenon. See E. Stokes, 'Late Nineteenth-Century Colonial Expansion and the Attack on the Theory of Economic Imperialism: A Case of Mistaken Identity?', *The Historical Journal*, XII, 2 (1969), 285f.; B. Seidel, 'Die Wirtschaftsgesinnung des Wilhelminischen Zeitalters', in H. J. Schoeps, (Ed.) *Zeitgeist im Wandel. Das Wilhelminische Zeitalter* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1967), 173-198.

⁷ The many-sided economic, social and political processes are examined in Karl Erich Born, 'Der soziale und wirtschaftliche Strukturwandel Deutschlands am Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts', *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, November 1963, 361-376; W. R. Lee, 'Economic development and the state in nineteenth-century Germany', *Economic History Review* 41 (1988). 346-367.

⁸ See Wolfgang Zorn, 'Wirtschaft und Politik im deutschen Imperialismus', in Gilbert Ziebura (Ed.) *Grundfragen der deutschen Aussenpolitik seit 1871* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1975), 163-189.

⁹ See Georg Iggers, 'The Dissolution of German Historism', in Richard Herr & Harold Parker (Eds), *Ideas in History. Essays presented to Louis Gottschalk by his former students* (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 1965), 294.

¹⁰ Hans Delbrück, 'Politische Korrespondenz', *Preußische Jahrbücher*, October 1897, 175-6.

as it had done with other rivals in the past.¹¹ This position was something to which many Germans believed the nation was divinely entitled by the unique nature of German culture and its mission, and goes a long way in explaining the motto *Gott mit uns*. Space prevents a consideration of the important part of theology in relation to *Kultur*.¹² This played a large part in the thinking of the political economist Paul Rohrbach as but one example.¹³ The phenomenon was to be found in almost every culture: 'We are the pick and flower of nations, above all things qualified for governing others...'¹⁴ In this way ideas and steel united under the blanket ideology of *Weltpolitik* which appeared to incorporate all other political and military problems. This at times ruthless expansion was rationalised in terms of science and exploration, a civilising mission and religion.

While Germany came to rival Britain in both industrial output and maritime and naval strength by virtue of its commercial growth, it was also a highly ideological power.¹⁵ This made Imperial Germany unique in the concert of powers. One cannot understand the imperative of German expansion in the Wilhelmine period without considering the essence of *Kultur*. The nation's intellectual elite perceived this as a spiritual force which was far more vigorous than that possessed by any neighbouring Power. British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey's view was that '...Germans felt *Kultur* to be a superior thing that ought to dominate the world'.¹⁶ Everything created by the German mind and hand was a unique, immutable product of this spirit. Ships, for example, were not merely expressions of the technical excellence of German workmen but what Tirpitz termed *Kulturgeräte* (instruments of culture).¹⁷ Thus Germany possessed not only the necessary prerequisites for its advance to a world-power position, but the will to do so. As Heinz Gollwitzer indicated, essential for this advance was 'the conscious emergence from the status of a European great power...and entry into the measures of strength of the world powers'.¹⁸

Concepts of 'culture', power, and *Deutschtum*¹⁹ and *Nation* were supported by the writings and lectures of academics. The *Bildungsbürgertum* (the educated class) gave the naval movement an intellectual respectability and a cultural-missionary task was developed for Germany's adoption of *Weltpolitik*. The thinking of many academics increasingly came to be influenced by the concept of *Weltmacht* -world power- where politics was seen as a struggle between nations. Hence the institutions of the state and the outlook of the population had to be amenable to the purposes of

¹¹ Alfred von Tirpitz, *My Memoirs* (London:Hurst & Blackett, 1919), Vol. I, 179, 183.

¹² See J. Moses & P. Overlack *First know your enemy. Comprehending Imperial German War Aims & Deciphering the Enigma of Kultur* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2019).

¹³ A short consideration is in Wolfgang Marienfeld, *Wissenschaft und Schlachtflothenbau in Deutschland 1897-1906, Beiheft 2 der Marine-Rundschau*, April 1957, 'Deutschlands Machtbildung zur See vor dem Forum christlicher Gegenwartsaufgaben und christlicher Philosophie', 49-52.

¹⁴ Gilbert Murray quoted in W.L. Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism* (New York, 1965), 96, discussed by Kennedy, 'Nationalistic History',90.

¹⁵ See Klaus Bade, 'Das Kaiserreich als Kolonialmacht:Ideologische Projektionen und historische Erfahrungen', in J. Becker & A. Hillgruber (Hrsg.) *Die deutsche Frage in 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (München, 1983), 91-108. On the dichotomy between power and philosophy see H.-J. Schoeps, 'Das Wilhelminische Zeitalter in geistesgeschichtlicher Sicht', in *Zeitgeist*, 11-39.

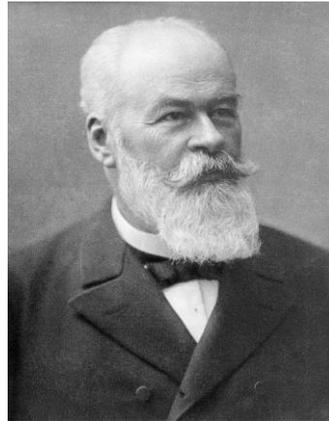
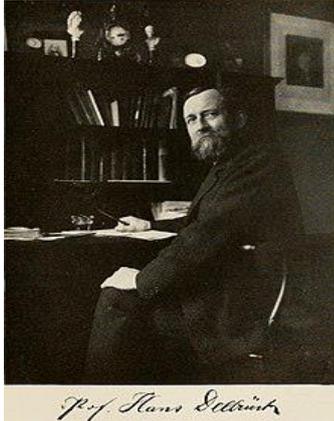
¹⁶ See *Twenty-Five Years 1892-1916*, 8th ed., (London:Hodder & Stoughton, 1935), II, 235; also R. Hinton Thomas, 'German and English Intellectuals:Contrasts and Comparisons', in E.J. Feuchtwanger (Ed.) *Upheaval and Continuity. A Century of German History*, (London:Wolff, 1973).

¹⁷ Tirpitz, *Memoirs*, I, 16.

¹⁸ H. Gollwitzer, *Geschichte des weltpolitischen Denkens*, Bd.2: *Zeitalter des Imperialismus und der Weltkriege* (Göttingen, 1982) 19, in Schöllgen, 82. This theme is also treated in Fritz Fischer, *War of Illusions:German Politics from 1911 to 1914* (London:Chatto & Windus, 1975); P.M. Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860-1914* (London/Boston:Allen & Unwin, 1980); and Peter Winzen, *Bülow's Weltmachtkonzept. Untersuchungen zur Frühphase seiner Außenpolitik 1897-1901* (Boppard:Boldt,1977). Winzen credits Bülow as developing his own foreign policy based on his conception of Germany as a world power, and in this tried to avoid entanglements, the policy of the 'free hand'.

¹⁹ Tirpitz' beliefs on *Deutschtum* are in *Memoirs*, 87-81, and outlined by his close colleague Adolf von Trotha in *Großadmiral von Tirpitz. Flottenbau und Reichsgedanke* (Breslau: Korn, 1933) especially 93 ff. 'Die Stellung des Deutschtums zwischen den Weltvölkern'. See also Trotha's *Die Einheit des Deutschtums und das Weltmeer* (Leipzig, 1934).

power politics.²⁰ The role of the *Flottenprofessoren*, the 'fleet professors' who though small in number had considerable influence, cannot be stressed strongly enough.



Tirpitz specifically directed August von Heeringen (later Admiral), in charge of the Navy Office's propaganda department, to gain the services of historian **Hans Delbrück** and **Gustav Schmoller**, the influential professor of political science and economics in Berlin from 1882, in order to explain to the masses 'the economic necessity of the Navy and its importance as a political power factor'.²¹ In 1913 Frederick Wile, the Germanophobe correspondent of the *Daily Mail*, wrote in a book about German academics which was also published in Germany that 'No other caste surpasses its influence on matters of state'.²² The influence of intellectuals on the development of expansionist ideology was considerable in the Wilhelmine period, when the construction of a battle fleet as a power-political instrument was seen as the means to guarantee Germany's world-political position. The historian Ernst Francke wrote that in the exercise of world-policy, Germany stood alone and only the Navy was the instrument of power which could bring peace and decide wars. Without being strong at sea, Germany could neither represent its economic interests, not be respected as a friend or feared as a foe, neither secure peace nor win in the fate-deciding moment. 'We must participate in world-policy as a great Power...It concerns the existence and future of the Empire.'²³

For a large number of economists and historians, the necessity and importance of a strong German Navy was strengthened in their view that not merely a military-political Power had been created, but that a power with a higher political ethic had joined the play of world policy. There was a strong sense of cultural mission, a deep conviction of the value of German ways, the loftiness of German culture, and of the justice of German policy.²⁴ Innumerable academics writing on the naval question reiterated the high spiritual and moral qualities of the German people, and from this the justification to create naval power not just for the defence of international law, but also to bring German culture to the world. An inevitable corollary of this cultural mission was the conviction that Germany should not restrict itself to Europe: it was only as a world power that Germany could fulfil its task. This thought was exemplified by Hans Delbrück speaking on European expansion:

It is of decisive significance for the future of humanity that in this process a certain balance among the large nations be observed...The world may...not be allowed to become either completely English or Russian...This is the reason why Germany must pursue a colonial

²⁰ See Felix Gilbert, 'Political Power and Academic Responsibility: Reflections on Friedrich Meinecke's *Drei Generationen deutscher Gelehrtenpolitik*', in Leonard Krieger & Fritz Stern (Eds), *The Responsibility of Power. Historical Essays in Honor of Hajo Holborn* (London:Macmillan, 1968), 411-3.

²¹ BAMA, Nachlaß Tirpitz, N253/40, Heeringen-Tirpitz, 6 July 1897, in Deist, 102.

²² F. W. Wile, *Rings um den Kaiser* (Berlin,1913), 133, (*Men around the Kaiser*) in R. vom Bruch, 'Krieg und Frieden. Zur Frage der Militarisierung deutscher Hochschullehrer und Universitäten im späten Kaiserreich', in Dülffer & Holl, 76; Deist, 100-110, 'Das gebildete Bürgertum'. Eckart Kehr's early research on the role of university academics in support of the naval program, particularly historians and economists, has been elaborated by Marienfeld, 103f.

²³ Ernst Francke, 'Weltpolitik und Seemacht', *Nauticus. Jahrbuch für Deutschlands Seeinteressen*, 1903, 147.

²⁴ Schäfer, *Deutschland zur See. Eine historische-politische Betrachtung* (Jena,1897), 63, in Marienfeld 47. On the *Kulturmission: Bade, Kaiserreich*, 98.

policy on a large scale...in which the German nationality, the German language and German spiritual life must have the possibility of continuing development.²⁵

Delbrück frequently wrote that the Navy was intended 'to produce a change in the power relationships of the world to Germany's advantage... and to eliminate English maritime supremacy...' ²⁶ Karl Helfferich, a more intellectual representative of German heavy industry and finance, spoke of the 'struggle for existence among nations', accepted the possibility of (short, limited) wars, and assumed the alternative to successful *Weltpolitik* was national decline.²⁷ Delbrück wrote that the Navy was a means by which the interests of all small nations could be maintained between the two great empires; it was not developed to protect commerce, but to win 'a just share of world power'. Friedrich Meinecke wrote that 'Our historical thinking and our cultural ideals are based on respect for the diversity and equality of strong and free states...' ²⁸ If Germany did not play this rôle, then within a few generations the world would see an Anglo-Russian conflict for cultural supremacy.²⁹



Johann Graf von **Bernstorff**, later ambassador to the United States, wrote in 1899 that for Britain there would be nothing better than if Germany, France and Russia weakened themselves in war. Conflict with either would mean disaster 'as England would ruthlessly dominate all our overseas trade'.³⁰ It was Germany's 'task in history to transform the balance of power in Europe into a balance embracing the whole world'.³¹ The implication of this was Britain's loss of maritime supremacy. Schmoller also advocated that for the sake of the cultural advancement of humanity, the division of the world between Britain and Russia had to be hindered.³² Even the tradition of economic history which Schmoller inaugurated subordinated economics to political and power-political factors.³³ As Fritz Fischer succinctly put it, 'Against the "cultural monopoly of the Anglo-Saxons"...and the 'Russo-Muscovite world' the German professors called for a policy which would make Germany's special cultural and political heritage safe and thereby guarantee at once the multiplicity and individuality of all peoples and the balance of power in a new world system of states'.³⁴ In this system, Delbrück expected that 'German influence, German capital...German

²⁵ H. Delbrück, *Preussische Jahrbücher*. (PJ) 'Politischer Korrespondenz', Bd. 95 (1899), 383. On Delbrück see Gordon Craig, 'Delbrück: The Military Historian', in E.M. Earle (Ed.) *Makers of Modern Strategy. Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944) Chap. 11, 260f. See Eyre Crowe on Delbrück and the cultural mission: 'Memorandum on the Present State of British relations with France and Germany', 1 January 1907. BD, III, Appendix A, 414. Crowe, Senior Clerk in the Foreign Office 1905-1912, Assistant Under-Secretary 1912-5, was the leading expert on Germany. His mother and wife were German, and he had been educated there, giving him a rare insight into the German way of thinking. His memoranda detail the very thesis put by Fischer in *The War of Illusions*. See Zara Steiner, *Britain and the Origins of the First World War* (London: Macmillan, 1977), 183-4.

²⁶ Dehio, 79.

²⁷ J. G. Williamson, *Karl Helfferich 1872-1924. Economist, Financier, Politician* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 53, 58. Helfferich was a director of the Deutsche Bank and heavily involved in *Mittleuropa* projects and the Baghdad railway. His brother Emil, in commerce in Singapore, was a useful agent for the Navy.

²⁸ H. Delbrück, *Vor und nach dem Weltkrieg* (Berlin, 1926), written in 1912, 370, in Dehio, 80; Meinecke, *ibid.*, 58.

²⁹ H. Delbrück, PJ, Bd. 116 (1904), 376.

³⁰ Graf Bernstorff, 'Kernpunkt der Flottenfrage', *Die Deutsche Flotte. Beilage zur Deutschen Kolonialzeitung*, 14 December 1899, 4.

³¹ Walter Vogel, *Das neue Europa* (1921), 51, quoted in Dehio, 60.

³² G. Schmoller, 'Die Wandlung in der europäischen Handelspolitik des 19. Jahrhunderts', *Jahrbuch für Gesetzgebung, Verwaltung und Volkswirtschaft im Deutschen Reich*, Jg. 24 (1900), 382. Schmoller was born in 1832 and trained for a civil service career in Württemberg, but felt more at home in the Prussian-administered universities of Strassburg and Berlin. See C.E. McClelland, 'Berlin historians and German politics', *Journal of Contemporary History* 8, No. 3, (July 1973), 9ff.

³³ See Iggers, 294.

³⁴ Fischer, *Germany's Aims*, 9.

intelligence would be permitted free competition in the countless lands today outside European culture'.³⁵ Now the illusions had vanished: the radical defects of the British system, 'the trampling on nations subjugated and despised' would lead to a situation in which even Greater Britain would be unable to cope with Europe and America.³⁶ The adoption of world-policy was thus bound up with higher spiritual and moral values which provided an inherent justification.



FRIEDRICH VON BERNHARDI
GERMANY AND THE NEXT WAR

General Friedrich von **Bernhardi** wrote that in the struggle to free the countries of Europe from British economic and political domination, Germany would represent the common interest in fighting for freedom of the seas. It would be joined by many others in the campaign 'against the overweening ambitions of one nation'.³⁷ His aggressive pronouncements caused some heartburn in Government circles, and the *Kölnische Zeitung* printed a reprimand of sorts in which it stated that there were things better left unsaid - not, as the *National Review* noted - 'things that are untrue, but truths which it is unwise to proclaim.' Bernhardi reflected the views of the majority of politicians who concealed what the soldier was not afraid to proclaim.³⁸ Delbrück described Germany's rôle thus: while it would never be powerful enough to threaten Britain directly, it was strong enough to force British policy to take due regard of Germany, 'and that is the thing, no more but no less too, what Germany wants to achieve with the construction of its warships', otherwise 'the world today would be on the path of becoming British within thirty years'.³⁹

From the very beginning Tirpitz regarded Britain as Germany's main opponent not for military, but for economic and cultural reasons: 'We no longer feel inclined to accept the pretensions of England to Anglicize one continent of the world after another'.⁴⁰ As Wolfgang Mommsen put it, 'The topos of the inevitability of an impending major war was propagated most effectively...invoking the great German cultural tradition of Weimar, and thus appealed very successfully to the educated bourgeoisie'.⁴¹ Otto Hinze, who collaborated with Schmöller in editing the *Acta Borussiae*, saw Germany as having to expand into a naval and world Power which could play an active part in international relations. Germany had a right and a duty to resist Britain's *Alleinherrschaft* (supremacy), and the naval program was a basic prerequisite to facilitate this.⁴² Delbrück wrote in 1899 that Germany wanted to be a world power. 'The whole future of our people among the great nations depends upon it. But we can pursue this policy with or against England.'⁴³

³⁵ H. Delbrück, 'Weshalb baut Deutschland Kriegsschiffe?', PJ, 1909, 154.

³⁶ Theodor Mommsen, 'German Feeling toward England and America', *North American Review* (NAR), February 1900, 241.

³⁷ F. von Bernhardi, *Germany and the Next War* (London:Arnold, 1913), 158. Bernhardi was chief of the War Historical Section of the General Staff 1898-1901, from 1909 Commanding General of the VII Army Corps. On Bernhardi's influence see Klaus Wernecke, *Der Wille zur Weltgeltung. Außenpolitik und Öffentlichkeit im Kaiserreich am Vorabend des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Düsseldorf:Droste, 1970), 160-7; Fischer, *War of Illusions*, 242f.

³⁸ *National Review*, October 1913, 210-211. His views were credited with the heightening of anti-British hostility: 'Our World Policy. Germany's Ambitions', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 August 1914.

³⁹ Delbrück, 'Weshalb baut...', 151-2.

⁴⁰ H. Delbrück, 'England, the Transvaal and the European Powers', NAR, January 1900, 28.

⁴¹ W. Mommsen, 'The Topos of Inevitable War in Germany in the Decade before 1914', in Volker Berghahn & Martin Kitchen (Eds), *Germany in the Age of Total War* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), 32.

⁴² Otto Hinze, 'Der britische Imperialismus und seine Probleme', *Zeitschrift für Politik*, I (1908), 297-8; 345, cited in W.M. Simon, 'Power and Responsibility: Otto Hinze's place in German Historiography', in Krieger & Stern, 204-5.

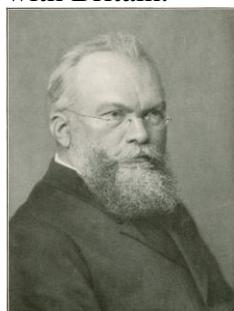
⁴³ Quoted in I. Geiss, *July 1914* (London:Batsford, 1967), 23.

England must have no illusions. At the time of the South African War he pronounced that if Russia, France and Germany concluded a Continental alliance against England, 'this news would be welcomed everywhere with joy...' ⁴⁴ In 1912 he stated that 'We shall even go as far as war, if this is necessary'. ⁴⁵

Germany's phenomenal industrial expansion raised problems which had not had to be faced before, and the most eminent political economists such as Gustav Schmoller, Max Weber, Paul Voigt, Max Sering, Adolf Wagner and Ernst Francke believed in the absolute necessity for obtaining as great a share as possible of world markets. Voigt, a lecturer in economics at Berlin, expressed the core of their position in a collection of essays in 1900 called *Handels- und Machtpolitik (Economic and Power Policy)*:

If Germany...does not wish to be forced by the rising great Powers on the twentieth century into the position of a second-rate Power...the enlargement of its sphere by a customs union with neighbouring states and by an increase in its colonial possessions is the most important task of German economic and trade policy. ⁴⁶

The works of the political economists and historians are full of references to the need for markets and territory for an expanding population and economy. This inevitably brought a clash of interests with Britain.



If *Deutschtum* were not to be replaced by *Angelsachsentum* in the course of time, Germany had to ensure that its excess population was channelled into its own colonial regions whose connection with the Motherland and defence was guaranteed. ⁴⁷ This thinking was supported by **Karl Lamprecht**, Professor of History at Leipzig. In his essay 'The Development of the Economic and Spiritual Horizon of our Nation', he emphasised the need for German participation in the coming new division of power in the world, which had already been heralded by the renewed scramble for colonial territory. ⁴⁸ The conviction was firming that a great future would be possessed only by those who were capable of participating in the general competition to come. Historiography at this time was dominated by the 'young Rankeans' as Lamprecht termed them, who believed that with Ranke's methodology they had identified the operative forces of history which had an eternal validity. Ranke saw nation-states as being in constant rivalry, and his successors saw the state as the synthesis between power and spirit (*Macht und Geist*). This led to a rejection by Wilhelmine neo-Rankeans of the application of the moral concepts of natural law to the behaviour of states, which were subject only to their own unique laws. This was also clearly the policy of the government. ⁴⁹ As Georg Iggers noted, these neo-Rankeans made 'a conscious attempt to utilize him for their ends in propagandizing an expansive, semiautocratic nation-state.' For Leopold von Ranke, founder of modern source-based history, national states were spiritual entities which

⁴⁴ Delbrück, 'The Transvaal...', 26.

⁴⁵ 'L'Allemagne veut des colonies' *Le Matin*, 15 July 1912, in Wernecke, 308.

⁴⁶ P. Voigt, 'Deutschland und der Weltmarkt', in G. Schmoller, M. Sering, A. Wagner (Hrsg.) *Handels und Machtpolitik. Reden und Aufsätze im Auftrage der "Freien Vereinigung für Flottenvorträge"*, (Stuttgart, 1900), I, 207. Francke, who was a friend of shipping magnate Albert Ballin, described as typical for the age the 'formation of world empires tending to become self-sufficient economic areas.' 'Weltpolitik und Sozialreform', *ibid.*, 111.

⁴⁷ Gustav Erdmann, *Deutschlands Seeherrschaft im XX. Jahrhundert* (Berlin/Leipzig: Luckhardt, 1900), 14. A perceptive British insight into the German mind is in "X", 'The German Danger in the Far East', *National Review*, October 1900, 178-195.

⁴⁸ Karl Lamprecht 'Die Entwicklung des wirtschaftlichen und geistlichen Horizonts unserer Nation' in *Schmoller*, 59. A recent biography is Roger Chickering, *Karl Lamprecht-A German Academic Life, 1856-1915* (New Jersey, 1993). See also Louise Schorn-Schutte, *Karl Lamprecht: Kulturgeschichte zwischen Wissenschaft und Politik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1984)

⁴⁹ See Moses, *Politics of Illusion*, 13-14, 18, 23.

combined the real and the ideal in one. Ranke's underpinnings were religious: influenced by the philosophy of Friedrich Schelling, he sought to comprehend God's actions in history. The neo-Rankeans adopted this apotheosis of power, writing history on the basis of forces operating in the modern world. And here can be seen the origin of Wilhelmine *Weltmissionsglaube*- Germany's divinely ordained world mission.⁵⁰

Vice-Admiral Viktor Valois wrote that if colonial supporters were disappointed that not much had been achieved, they could console themselves with the thought that 'in the end the division of colonial possessions...will not be settled by colonial agreements. Only on the great European battlefields of the future will the dice fall'.⁵¹ Bülow stated in the Reichstag in November 1899 that it was said in every century a great partition, a liquidation, took place in order to distribute influence, power and possessions anew in the world. Were they again standing before a new division of the world?⁵² The idea that Germany was the heir to South Africa, for example, was constantly discussed in the German press, and extended negotiations ending in frustration also ensued over the fate of the Portuguese colonies.



The national task of the Navy as an instrument of culture

'Die Marine ist die Wiege unserer nationalen Zukunft' - 'the Navy is the cradle of our national future', wrote the naval journal *Nauticus* in 1899. If the Army had been the basis of Germany's national rebirth, then the Navy was seen to be the cradle of the national future. As Delbrück wrote in 1912, it was yesterday's truth that the German Navy was created to protect trade. He gave imperialism a metaphysical basis: 'The earth was given to mankind not to pursue trade on it, but to dominate it.' Now a stage had been reached where Germany could aim higher, to 'give us that share of the control of the world which is due to nations with high cultures by virtue of their character and the fact that they are destined for greater things.'⁵³

In the final analysis, a strong navy 'is an essential requirement for German greatness and prosperity'.⁵⁴ Future considerations loomed large. In the Far East a 'second England', which matched it in naval power and pretension, was arming. In the west, the United States had since 1898 appeared on the battlefield and was seeking to secure its share of world power and markets.⁵⁵ With the similar growth of German trade and industry as a justification for the nation's assumption of what was considered an appropriate position in the councils of the existing Powers, a strong Navy to protect its interests became a political necessity. For Tirpitz there was only one solution, namely, vigorously to promote Germany's maritime interests 'without loss of time, energetically and systematically'. The Navy was not an end in itself, but a 'function of maritime interests'.⁵⁶

In April 1898, Tirpitz wrote a lengthy memorandum to the Kaiser concerning the direction Germany should take, and stated that the nation's great economic development in the previous decade was closely related to the development of its power-political position:

⁵⁰ Georg Iggers, 'The crisis of the Rankean paradigm in the nineteenth century', *Syracuse Scholar*, Vol. 9, Issue 1, January 1988, 4-5. See also Ludwig Dehio, 'Ranke and German Imperialism' in *Germany and World Politics in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Norton, 1967), 38-71.

⁵¹ *Kreuzzeitung*, 8 May 1912, in Wernecke, 148.

⁵² Bülow, *Reden*, I, p. 98, quoted in Berghahn, *Tirpitz-Plan*, 181.

⁵³ H. Delbrück, 'Deutsche Ängstlichkeit', *Preussische Jahrbücher*, Bd. 149, August 1912, 362-3.

⁵⁴ 'Deutschland und der Weltmarkt', in Schmoller, 206-7.

⁵⁵ 'Germanicus', 'Frankreichs Flottenfrage und die junge Schule', *PJ* Bd.96, 1899, 260.

⁵⁶ Tirpitz, *Memoirs*, Vol. I, pp. 56, 58. Tirpitz' neo-Rankean world-view is discussed in Hans-Heinz Krill, *Die Ranke-Renaissance-Max Lenz und Erich Marcks* (Berlin, 1962) 196f., noted in Moses, *Politics of Illusion*, 24.

The considerable connection which exists especially between sea power and the development of economic interests, will come to the fore much more sharply in the future. In the economic struggle in which peoples will have to participate in the next century, it will become ever more necessary to represent Germany's maritime interests with military power.⁵⁷

According to *Nauticus*, only appropriate armaments would keep open the entrance to the world and its markets.⁵⁸ Already as a young officer, Tirpitz had misgivings about the Navy's underdevelopment. In his early years, he had the opportunity to travel widely, including South America, the West Indies, later as commander of the *Preußen* in the Mediterranean and the Near East, finally in 1896 as Chief of the then East Asian Cruiser Division. It was the latter which gave him first-hand experience of Anglo-German economic rivalry in a rapidly expanding market which influenced his subsequent views.⁵⁹ Because his interests were not confined to technical or military aspects, but open to learning from history it is not surprising that he veered toward policy and politics. The Army was the root, the Navy the branches stretching out into the world.⁶⁰ In the course of the years Tirpitz arrived at the conviction, not least under the pressure of restrictions from other colonial powers, that the attempt to create for Germany 'real world-political freedom' through the construction of a fleet could not be avoided. There was but one alternative to this, which was completely unacceptable: if one chose not to expand the Navy, and effectively took the path of retreat, then Germany would also have had to turn back trade and industrial production, promote emigration again, and let its foreign interests decline. Germany would then sink back into the condition of a poor, agricultural country.⁶¹

As Berghahn's seminal work indicated, the First Navy Law was clearly only the initial step in Tirpitz' mind towards providing Germany with the means successfully to compete in the struggle to achieve a world power position, and to counterbalance Britain. Ludwig Dehio noted that '...the aim of German imperialism was still to become one of a circle of world powers, without necessarily destroying English maritime supremacy...each attached a totally different sense to the terms "hegemony" and "balance of power" '. Yet Bernhardt had made it clear before the War that Germany would have to destroy the European balance if it wanted to become a world Power, likewise Rohrbach more subtly in *Deutschland unter den Weltvölkern*.⁶² 'Who did not wish that there might be an earthly Power capable of halting the English!' wrote Schäfer. Only the levelling justice of the centuries, the power of an ethical world order which existed despite everything, would bring them to answer.⁶³ The Chief of the Naval Cabinet, Admiral Georg von Müller, saw clear alternatives for Germany: either to forge ahead 'not even shirking a great war', or else to limit the nation to being a Continental power.⁶⁴ A powerful Navy provided the means to implement *Weltpolitik* and was the only guarantee for Germany's continued economic expansion. The world's

⁵⁷ Tirpitz-Kaiser, 24 April 1898, in Chlodwig Fürst zu Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, *Denkwürdigkeiten der Reichskanzlerzeit* (Stuttgart/Berlin: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1931), 441.

⁵⁸ *Nauticus*, 1900, 51f., Berghahn, *Tirpitz-Plan*, 132. *Nauticus*, published annually, and *Marine-Rundschau*, a monthly periodical, were the two major propaganda organs of the Navy Office. Of *Nauticus*, Tirpitz wrote that after the passage of the First naval Law, the 'great anonymous journalist, Herr Nauticus' was liberally toasted. *Memoirs*, 114.

⁵⁹ Tirpitz, *Memoirs*, Vol. I, 6; Trotha, 51f., 98, with a 1916 letter to Hindenburg concerning British dominance by means of monopoly finance; Ulrich von Hassell, *Tirpitz. Sein Leben und Wirken mit Berücksichtigung seiner Beziehungen zu Albrecht von Stosch* (Stuttgart:Chr. Belsersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1920), 119-120.

⁶⁰ Tirpitz, *Memoirs*, Vol. I, p. 48. See p.111 for his admiration of Treitschke. After the War, Tirpitz' son wrote that the naval program was the attempt 'to underpin the economic expansion of the German Empire by the foundation of a strong sea power.' W. von Tirpitz, *Wie hat sich der Staatsbetrieb beim Aufbau der Flotte bewährt?* (Leipzig,1923) 10, in Berghahn, *Tirpitz-Plan*,133. As Bülow put it, this was 'the immediate and great task of post-Bismarckian policy.' Ph. Zorn & H.von Berger, *Deutschland unter Kaiser Wilhelm II* (Berlin, 1914), Vol. I, 12, Berghahn, *ibid.*)

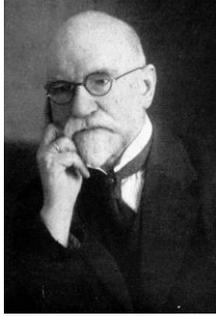
⁶¹ Tirpitz, *Memoirs*, Vol. I, 66; 175.

⁶² Dehio, *Germany and World Politics*, 15-16; 103.

⁶³ Schäfer, *Deutschland*, 129.

⁶⁴ Walther Görnitz ed., *Der Kaiser...Aufzeichnungen des Chefs des Marinekabinetts Admiral Georg Alexander von Müller über die Ära Wilhelms II* (Göttingen:Musters Schmidt, 1965), 40. Immanuel Geiss pointed out that the implication of *Weltpolitik* - the War - was clearly recognised in Wilhelmine Germany: I. Geiss, Ed., *July 1914. The Outbreak of the First World War: Selected Documents* (London:Batsford, 1967, 23.

oceans were now the most important arena in which the nations met, and 'it is sea power which now more than ever before will decide world history.'⁶⁵



For Paul **Rohrbach**, German economic interests were inextricably linked with the German cultural mission: there had to be an 'active participation of the German mind in the current reshaping of the world.'⁶⁶ The consequences of this power were fully recognised. Germany must become a 'world nation', a process which if hindered 'must be decided...by the language of guns.'⁶⁷ That Britain inevitably would have to surrender its position was clear: Theodor Mommsen wrote that 'The repetition of Jameson's Raid by the English Government...dictated by banking and mining speculations, is the revelation of your moral and political corruption and of your military and political weakness.'⁶⁸ A strong Navy was the means by which Germany could achieve its rightful world-political position, safeguard trade, and fulfil the cultural mission of supporting Germans outside the Empire so that they and their influence could play a rôle in the *Kulturmission*. This is clear in the military-political reports of the Cruiser Squadron captains visiting Australian ports. However, given that most had emigrated to escape this atmosphere, it is unsurprising that there was little enthusiasm.

The writing of most academics is heavy with foreboding and inevitability. Voigt concluded one article with the sentiment that 'no laughing day of golden peace is dawning.' Indeed, Wilhelm Widenmann, the Naval Attaché in London, used the term 'latent war'.⁶⁹ The coming century would see strenuous struggles and portentous decisions. Germany would only be able to maintain its place in the sun, its station among the nations of culture, its economic and political influence 'if the whole people from Kaiser to worker is permeated with the meaning of the fearless old Hansa motto: *Navigare necessse est, vivere non necesse*.'⁷⁰ Germany's expansion into the world was to be accompanied by a resurgence in the 'spiritual' life of the people; its position among the world powers could not be maintained without 'inner health and strength.' This was the core of Germany's destiny: the uplifting of its own national culture would assist in fulfilling its cultural mission to the world.⁷¹ When the long expected conflict came, it was seen not merely as a struggle for territory, but for the 'existence or non-existence of German culture, indeed of culture itself.'⁷² The War united most historians in a solid defence of the 'German idea' of history against western natural law doctrine.⁷³ It was because Germany embodied higher cultural and ethical values that a Germany

⁶⁵ Paul Voigt, 'Deutschland und der Weltmarkt', *PJ*, Bd.91, Heft 2, 1898, 279.

⁶⁶ *Der Deutsche Gedanke in der Welt* (Düsseldorf/Leipzig:1912), 228. This book received a naturally favourable review in the *Koloniale Rundschau*, Heft 5, May 1913, 383-4, particularly as it was 'less a scientific work than a book for wide sections of the population.' Rohrbach traveled extensively in Asia (especially China) and Africa, and in 1903-06 was Settlement Commissioner to Southwest Africa. After returning to Berlin, he became a lecturer of colonial economy at the Handelshochschule Berlin. Rohrbach had moved to Berlin in 1890 where he met Delbrück, who persuaded him to write for the *Preussische Jahrbücher*, and who sent him on a series of study trips to Russia, the Near East, Asia, Africa and America. His reports on these trips gave him the reputation for being a colonial expert.

⁶⁷ P. Rohrbach, 'Zum Weltvolk hindurch', *PJ*, Bd. 110, 1914, 12; *Der Deutsche Gedanke*, 191.

⁶⁸ T. Mommsen, 'German Feeling...', 243.

⁶⁹ Wilhelm Widenmann, *Marine-Attaché an der kaiserlich-deutschen Botschaft in London 1907-1912* (Göttingen: Musterschmidt, 1952), 312. Widenmann expected a conflict and his reports were extremely anti-British.

⁷⁰ Voigt, 'Deutschland und der Weltmarkt', 280. The *Koloniale Rundschau* commented in 1914 that the heroic defence of Tsingtau was proof that Germans would be given nothing in the world, it had to be fought for. *KR*, Heft 11/12, Nov.-Dez. 1914, 563.

⁷¹ Schmoller, 132.

⁷² *Koloniale Rundschau*, August-October 1914, 449.

⁷³ See Klaus Schwabe, 'Zur politischen Haltung der deutschen Professoren im Ersten Weltkrieg', *Historische Zeitschrift*, Vol.193, (1961) 601-634.

victory was believed certain: in 1714 Spain's world domination had been shattered, in 1814 that of France. Why would it be any different with Britain? As far as the academics were concerned, the war was a battle of opposing cultures and moral forces. These ideals were incorporated in the appeal composed by Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff, a scholar much admired among British classicists, signed in August 1914 by 93 leading intellectuals, and later, due to the efforts of Schäfer, some 4,000 signatures were added.⁷⁴

In the prisma of *Weltpolitik* the legend creators of the future, the political economists and historians, superseded those of 1871 who represented a limited past and outlook. The unity of ideology and material reality in the form of naval armament was the high point of Wilhelmine policy which lasted until 1909, ended by the Dreadnought and the Reich's financial crisis. There was no longer 'the clarity of ideological integration and farsighted *Weltpolitik*, but the material limitation of armament within national and international constraints.'⁷⁵ Admiral Georg von Müller wrote as early as 1896 that world history now was governed by economic conflict. The free expansion of the cramped Central European peoples, following the division of the habitable areas of the earth, was limited above all by Britain's 'world domination', and would be threatened by further limitation.

The war, which can follow from this conflict situation, and how many believe must follow, has for us the...goal of breaking England's world domination, and thereby the freeing of necessary colonial possessions for the necessary expansion of European states.⁷⁶

While the inhabitants of the Pacific Dominions were not privy to Müller's view of a 'freeing of colonial possessions', they were certainly correct in their early, if at times overwrought, recognition of threat.



In his famous inaugural lecture at the University of Freiburg in 1895, **Max Weber** called for a new policy of striving for world power. 'We must understand that the unification of Germany was a youthful folly...if it should be the conclusion and not the starting point for a German *Weltmachtpolitik*.' There was a heavy burden of responsibility before history.⁷⁷ Elsewhere he explained the necessity for a strong Navy: Germany's foreign interests were to a large degree purely geographically determined. For every power, the near proximity of another provided a restriction in the freedom of its political decision-making. Germany had three larger land powers as neighbours, but the greatest naval power in close proximity. 'From this follows the necessity of a particularly strong armament.'⁷⁸ This call was taken up by the liberal imperialists, who were rivalled by the more extreme Pan-Germans, to whose ideas Weber had once adhered, and these two groups created the climate of educated public opinion and the ideology which caused an actual change of foreign policy.

German manufacturers and merchants faced difficulties which specifically affected their operations. In overseas markets already dominated by other colonial powers, from the beginning they were operating from a position of weakness. Germany was believed to be entitled to overseas possessions following its emergence as a unified nation. Because history, by delaying unification had imposed on Germany a handicap, it therefore obligated other nations to accommodate Germany's needs.⁷⁹ Wilhelmine economists saw trade as a form of warfare or as another expression of the Darwinian struggle for survival. Schmoller, writing on Germany's economic future, saw no

⁷⁴ Fischer, *Germany's Aims*, 156.

⁷⁵ Michael Geyer, *Deutsche Rüstungspolitik 1860-1890* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984), 71-2.

⁷⁶ Görlitz, 37.

⁷⁷ 'Der Nationalstaat und die Volkswirtschaftspolitik', J. Winkelmann, Ed. *Max Weber. Gesammelte Schriften*, 3rd ed, Tübingen, 1971, 23, 25.

⁷⁸ 'Deutschland unter den europäischen Weltmächten', *ibid.*, 158.

⁷⁹ This is expounded by Paul Rohrbach in *Der deutsche Gedanke in der Welt*, Dusseldorf/Leipzig, 1912, 5-10.

economic or social progress without increased naval power. The basis of its economy would be too narrow and insecure if not supported by an instrument which could protect imports and exports, merchant shipping, and colonies.⁸⁰ Tirpitz in his memoirs spoke of 'the insecure politico-economic foundation of our whole civilisation and power'.⁸¹

For Schmoller, international rivalries had become economic ones which impinged on national sovereignty and where mercantilism increasingly prevailed. The academic economists and historians believed that the secret of British success lay in sea power, and Germany had to replicate this. With its imperialism, Britain was aiming to create from its scattered possessions an enormous, self-contained world empire closed to other nations. It might well be said that it was only extreme journals like *The Saturday Review* which paraphrased Cato's statement against Carthage: 'Germania esse delenda' and which advocated the ruin of German industry and trade, but in reality this was symptomatic of an underlying mood. In a vitriolic denunciation of contemporary Britain, Schmoller condemned the men of force and piratical nature such as Cecil Rhodes, who worked insidiously and poisonously, buying the press and corrupting Ministries. Where these were controlled, ethics and respect for law disappeared. There existed within the German spirit a *Weltmissionsglaube*, a belief in a world mission.⁸² All of this thinking led back to the call for a strong Navy:

We wish...to expand our trade and industry so that we can live and support a growing population...we want to oppose the extended robber-mercantilism of the three world powers which excludes all other states and seeks to destroy their trade. It is only to achieve this modest goal that a large fleet is necessary.⁸³

Germany had so to strengthen itself that in world and colonial trade it had the respect of the great powers, who then would seek its support. It is in this crucial underlying psychological sentiment as expressed by Schmoller and others that one of the basic causes of German outward expansion is to be found: as a latecomer to the community of national states and having missed the most important allocation of colonial territory, Germany felt it had to assert itself to be taken seriously in the concert of powers. In addition, smaller states would see it as the protector of freedom and a shield against force. Just as Frederick the Great assembled the German states to oppose Austria's lust for annexation, so now the German Empire had to be the pivot of a coalition to balance the world empires and in particular, 'hold the balance in the last deciding battle between England and Russia.' This could only be achieved with a strong fleet. Indeed, as part of an overall plan, it would assist in restoring Germany's position in Europe:

With it we will peacefully yet strongly and 'toujours en vendette' again be able to hold the balance in Europe as in the days of Frederick the Great and Bismarck. Those were also the days in which we made the greatest economic progress. We will never again experience such days of influence and progress if we do not achieve a respected, and under circumstances feared, position on the seas.⁸⁴

While the academics were condemning Britain, there were a few diplomats within the fold such as Paul Graf Metternich in London, Johann Graf von Bernstorff in the USA, Richard Kühlmann, Otto Hammann and others who had considerable reservations about the direction of Wilhelm II's 'new course' and the looming possibility of conflict and were convinced that only an understanding like Bismarck's Congress of Berlin could preserve world peace.⁸⁵ However, these voices were submerged in the euphoria of the 'fleet professors' and Germany's *Weltmissionsglaube*.

⁸⁰ G. Schmoller, 'Die wirtschaftliche Zukunft Deutschlands und die Flottenvorlage', in G. Schmoller, M. Sering, A. Wagner, eds., *Handels- und Machtpolitik. Reden und Aufsätze im Auftrage der "Freien Vereinigung für Flottenvorträge* (Stuttgart, 1900), Bd. 1, 17.

⁸¹ Tirpitz, *Memoirs*, Vol. 1, 111.

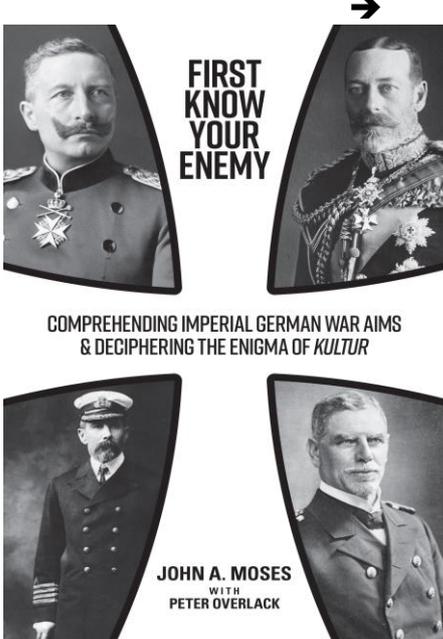
⁸² Schmoller, 'Die wirtschaftliche Zukunft', 22-29. In a similar vein, see Paul Rohrbach, *Deutschland unter den Weltvölkern*, (Stuttgart, 1921), 40ff; 185, 189.

⁸³ Schmoller, 'Die wirtschaftliche Zukunft', 33.

⁸⁴ Schmoller, *ibid.*, 34.

⁸⁵ See Maximilian von Hagen, 'Deutsche Weltpolitik und kein Krieg', *Historische Zeitschrift*, Bd. 179 (1955), 298. Paul Graf Wolff Metternich zur Gracht was ambassador in London 1901-1912. Johann Heinrich Graf von Bernstorff was

In the search for the deeper causes of the 'War to end all wars' the reading public has been presented with countless titles by military, diplomatic and intellectual historians. Some of these have, however, been motivated by a desire to show how their authors would have preferred the past events to have been, so as to promote some present-day agenda. This is the fallacy of 'presentism'. John Moses was trained at the Universities of Munich and Erlangen by professors committed to the Rankean tradition of showing 'how it actually was', as far as humanly possible, based on diligent archival research and with the strictest objectivity and emotional detachment. Consequently, both Moses and Overlack have been at pains to identify the essential *peculiarity* of the Kaiser's Germany and have focused sharply on the question of how its war planning impinged on Australasia.



FIRST KNOW YOUR ENEMY

COMPREHENDING IMPERIAL GERMAN WAR AIMS & DECIPHERING THE ENIGMA OF *KULTUR*

JOHN A. MOSES
WITH
PETER OVERLACK

For Moses and Overlack, there is a big difference between conscientiously recognising that our personal prejudices may influence the ways we understand history, and intentionally distorting history to match our personal prejudices. The fact that there are many ways to think about history doesn't imply that all ways of thinking about history are equally valid. Moses and Overlack are determined to present the German threat as it was, as it was perceived by the Australians and New Zealanders of 1914, and as it was meant by the Germans themselves. They explain why (most of) Australia and New Zealand supported the war effort and had good reasons for doing so.

Review by Salvatore Babones, 'The Anzacs' Battle with the Historians' *Quadrant Online* 25th April 2020
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