Germany's Third Empire

Arthur Moeller van den Bruck

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This work is often referred to in passing, but seldom read. Moeller appeared in the period after the First World War as one of the theorists of the broad Conservative Revolution in Germany. Internationally renowned for his translations of Dostoyevsky, this text is also a literary feast. However, the present book may be read for its analysis of civilization-crisis and visionary alternatives. In that sense it passes into the heritage of all who struggle against the international capitalist ascendancy of our times.

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GERMANY'S THIRD EMPIRE

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PREFATORY LETTER TO HEINRICH VON GLEICHEN

Dear Gleichen,

This book contains an analysis of the political parties. It is addressed to Germans of every party. It discusses their ideologies, and their party types.

The attempt this books makes was not possible from any party standpoint; it ranges over all our political problems, from the extreme Left to the extreme Right. It is written from the standpoint of a Third Party, which is already in being. Only such an attempt could address itself to the nation while attacking all the parties; could reveal the disorder and discord into which the parties have long since fatefully fallen and which has spread from them through our whole political life; could reach that lofty spiritual plane of political philosophy which the parties have forsaken, but which must for the nation's sake be maintained, which the conservative must preserve and the revolutionary must take by storm.

Instead of government by party we offer the ideal of the THIRD EMPIRE. It is an old German conception and a great one. It arose when our First Empire fell; it was early quickened by the thought of a millennium; but its underlying thought has always been a future which should be the end of all things but the dawn of a German age in which the German People would for the first time fulfill their destiny on earth.

In the years which followed the collapse of our Second Empire, we have had experience of Germans; we have seen that the nation's worst enemy is herself: her trustfulness, her casualness, her credulity, her inborn, fate-fraught, apparently unshakable, optimism. The German people were scarcely defeated—as never a people was defeated before in history—than the mood asserted itself: "We shall come up again all right!" We heard German fools saying: "We have no fears for Germany!" We saw German dreamers nod their heads in assent: "Nothing can happen to me!"

We must be careful to remember that the thought of the Third Empire is a philosophical idea; that the conceptions which the words "Third Empire" arouse—and the book which bears the title—are misty, indeterminate, charged with feeling; not of this world but of the next. Germans are only too prone to abandon themselves to self-deception. The thought of a THIRD EMPIRE might well be the most fatal of all the illusions to which they have ever yielded; it would be thoroughly German if they contented themselves with day-dreaming about it. Germany might perish of her Third Empire dream.

Let us be perfectly explicit: the thought of the Third Empire—to which we must cling as our last and highest philosophy—can only bear fruit if it is translated into concrete reality. It must quit the world of dreams and step into the political world. It must be as realistic as the problems of our constitutional and national life; it must be as sceptical and pessimistic as beseems the times.

There are Germans who assure us that the Empire which rose out of the ruins on the Ninth of November is already the Third Empire, democratic, republican, logically complete. There are others who cry out against them. These are our opportunists and eudaemonists. There are other Germans who confess their disappointment but trust to the "reasonableness" of history. These are our rationalists and pacifists. They all draw their conclusions from the premisses of their party-political or utopian wishes, but not from the premisses of the reality which surrounds us. They will not realize that we are a fettered and maltreated nation, perhaps on the very verge of dissolution. Our reality connotes the triumph of all the nations of the earth over the German nation; the primacy in our country of parliamentism after the western model—and party rule. If the THIRD EMPIRE is ever to come it will not beneficently fall from heaven. If the THIRD EMPIRE is to put an end to strife it will not be born in a peace of philosophic dreaming. The THIRD EMPIRE will be an empire of organization in the midst of European chaos. The occupation of the Ruhr and its consequences worked a change in the minds of men. It was the first thing that made the nation think. It opened up the possibility of liberation for a betrayed people. It seemed about to put an end to the "policy of fulfilment" which had been merely party politics disguised as foreign policy. It threw us back on our own power of decision. It restored our will. Parliament has become an institution of our public life, whose chief function would appear to be—in the name of the people—to enfeeble all political demands and all national passions.

When the Revolution overwhelmed the War, burying all prospects and all hopes, we asked ourselves the inner meaning of these events. Amidst all the insanity we found a meaning in the thought that the German nation would be driven into becoming politically-minded: now, at last, belatedly.

We said to ourselves then that this war was going to be our education.

Today we ask in despair: Has it, in fact, been so?

In bitterness we venture to hope: It will prove to have been so.

In this faith,

Yours,

MOELLER VAN DEN BRUCK

Berlin

December, 1922

Germany's Third Empire
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...certainly benefit these other countries. But we must be prepared to find that there will be nations in the west who will offer efficiency, of over-population, an age in which all participants lost the War. There can be no justice for men if there is not justice for nations first. For men can only live if their nations live

The Revolutionaries of 1918 lost the War of 1914 because their Revolution was not a German revolution. They thought

When we come to think it out, we realize that the burden that has fallen from us was the incubus of amateurishness which passes so easily over into demagogy. This change has since the Revolution dominated our public life, and the private life of

There is a stirring in us which will not be stilled. It poses a question. It demands an answer. . . . And we reflect on the scene at the Brandenburg Gate: an inevitable scene: the Kaiser riding at the head of his paladins, posing like an equestrian

Yes. There is a stirring in us which will not be stilled. It poses a question. It demands an answer. . . . And we reflect on the old Emperor and Bismarck in Versailles. And if the conduct of William I was not above human weakness, what might

To that fact we owe it that we were victorious on

Above all, it has a German aspect. While our volcano spews out only catch-words, dogmas and slogans from its crater, we

France and England have had their Revolution. Both these nations are older than we. Their people are experienced, tried, matured. Their traditions were acquired the servile spirit; there are among us francophils in love with our enemies and with their modes of thought. We

We know to our cost with what unerring

A revolution occurs once only. It is not a matter which a nation negotiates with other nations. It is the most private,

A war may be lost. The most ill-fated war is never irretrievable. The worst peace is never final.

The Revolution has opened up a path to these distant goals: a path which without the Revolution would not

I. REVOLUTIONARY

1
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The victorious nations applied Marx's principle of "enlightened self-interest"—which that sceptic thought he had discovered to conceive of socialism. Youth demands a leader who will march in the van: a leader who will make decisions, not the view of foreign politics was based on political economy. In domestic politics the idea of organization by trade and

When we talk of a German socialism, we do not of course mean the socialism of the social democrat in which the party

The Russians have demonstrated it. The Russian socialism of the Revolution gave birth to the new militarism of the mould the future. We must now set about making good the mischief he effected.

The conditions of life thus imposed press hardly on the most intelligent, but they have the power and the will to resist. that the future will see fifty million Germans in distant lands and foreign parts, and only the second fifty in Germany itself.

It must be conceded that the British are a nation of enterprising people with a great colonial and dominion tradition. They might have made our world mighty also in its outward forms. But the outcome of the War compels the artist modestly to

It perfected labour-saving technique Germany whom we should otherwise have had to lose. It developed industry and trade to the point that over sixty million people were able to find work in a country naturally able to support only forty million. It perfected labour-saving technique

The population problem lifts its head wherever there is a people which has not living room proportionate to its numbers burden of work in new and distant countries. The Frenchman is no colonizer, no imperialist; he is merely a slave-driver among all nations who as a result of the War have lost the power to dispose freely of their human resources. Russia is

The secret of Christ's influence has lain in the eternal validity of His society. But a doctrine that thought in terms of economics only, was powerless in face of primary political exigencies Marxism counted on a highly-developed system of economics under which a socialist should replace a capitalist order of every tree is known by its fruits. So is Marxism. The secret of Christ's influence has lain in the eternal validity of His

We are bounded on every side by the incalculable. The shrewdest calculations have always been those which look

Logic convinces us of progress, but history refutes it. Men have always been setting out on fresh adventures without being counter-task which neutralizes and cancels it.

The whole error of socialism is latent in one sentence of Karl Marx: "Hence men set themselves only such tasks as they

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For the moment we can only answer that there is a hope that the destruction that they prepared for us will recoil on their heads. German youth today recognizes the liberal as the enemy.

With all the missed opportunities and belated decisions which have been the cause of our inferiority; and finally we have for the most part arrived at the conclusion that there is no evil party, circle or class, the liberalism which had made us what we are: a fallen nation. German youth is conscious of the cause of the betrayal; for us it was a betrayal, that the west did not grant us the promised peace without victory.

The liberal in Germany turned his back on the German cause. This suited the plans that underlay the World War. The War was fought with all the disregard of the existing laws of justice, with all the inhumanity, with all the intolerance, with no persecution of others, with no slavery; it coexists with extension of territory and the strangulation of border states. We entered the War with a sense of purpose. We thought that we were fighting for freedom. We were told that we could safely trust ourselves to the liberal ideal of freedom. But the liberal could not be trusted.

The victory was achieved by the destruction of the old order. The old order was the natural order. Its disintegration, nevertheless remains memorable.

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Germany's Third Empire

Way.

fateful instrument of the German people's ruin?

more "democrats."

enemies. They gave up territory; they struck the imperial flag; they renounced the union of Austria and Germany; they

Europe; the Empire would have fallen to pieces. The monarchy saved the nation, and the people loyally followed their

maturity. Nothing but the absolute monarchy saved the German people from the extreme weakness that resulted from the

might now change back to monarchy again, reflecting that the good experience of it in the past should carry more weight

It would from a historical point of view be quite conceivable that Germany was now entering its republican era. It depends

The German people took historically the opposite course from the peoples of the west. France and England began as

thought and deed. The parliamentary system has failed more gravely in Germany than in any other country; we have

political experience of a people. The memory of the German Reichstag is associated with no great events in which it bore a

"Why have we," it went on to ask, no "politically active proletariat?" Why have we not "the right sort of men" to give us a

the Constitution of Weimar made provision, but which the parties in Weimar later found to be highly inconvenient because

put an end to the humbug by which a German, by the mere casting of a vote, deprives himself for a long series of years of

us as a nation to select our best in the political field. We based our state on a mechanical counting of votes, instead of an

even seriously attempt to build up the state on the basis of its component members by following out Stein's scheme of self-

the state as the result of a

from the people. He strove unsuccessfully to distinguish between "the general will" and "the will of all." The conception of

imported from the west. The parliamentary state in England had always remained a state built on the three estates; it was an

foundations of the empire. We failed adequately to support the admirable project of Freiherr von Stein to make the

I serve

democratic than the reputation of its rulers would imply. With sword and scaffold the Prussian kings put an end to the

the idea of unity was not dead; if it did not survive in governments, it was cherished by individuals. Prussia was much more

and more the centres of German culture owed their wonderful mediaeval achievements to its unifying influence. The idea

who were destined later to be the emperors, had no alternative but to build up private power and private estates of their

contrast to the states of antiquity which were based on power and law and state-right. German democracy had been

and its unwritten constitution—if we may be allowed the world in so early a context—was the sum of the people's habits,

might be, put the law into effect as executor of the people's will. The German state was the commonwealth of the people,

of their life. The distribution of rights and duties implied by these conditions, which was a feature of the law of the

ultimately perhaps merge in a democracy. The whole question of German democracy is a tangled one and to unravel it we

affair—at least so one would imagine. The question is: how is it possible for the people to take a share?

revolutionary parliaments, however, which the Weimar Constitution gave us after the Ninth of November are even more

affairs that was even less to their mind than the old. The people's understanding told them that it was humbug to assure the

people came to look into the matter they realized that there existed between the people and the state a stratum of persons

progress. Germany now had neither: but Germany had a democracy. The question is: who has this democracy? When the

learn—to grasp the causes and the effects of the fate that had overtaken them. They learned to despise other peoples who

future,—perhaps impossible—democracy. In every stratum of the people reaction against democracy began to set in,

Everywhere else—in conservative circles and amongst the proletarian masses—anger began to rise against democracy.

Apart from the insignificant group that calls themselves the "democratic party," apart from the democrats whom the

Republic and democracy.

perhaps with some totally different content. Meantime, since for the time being no other framework seems possible in

guarantee political freedom abroad. The people considered the Republic as a framework which could be filled in later:

round? Meantime they continued to try the republican, the so-called democratic, road. The Republic seemed the only

people look for these individual leaders in vain. They feel deserted, leaderless, almost hopeless. They realize and admit that

Republic.
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in the service of reaction. Clara Zetkin in her great programme speech could not avoid a concession to this mood that is
must be won by fighting, that to renounce weapons is to renounce victory. He had made an equally clean sweep of the
Russia, our democracy was able behind our backs to come to terms with the west and begin teaching us how to “vegetate.”
speedily set aside the pacifist principles with which he had embarked on the Revolution and learnt that if a revolution is to
one wishes to substitute for parliaments the dictatorship of the proletariat and the other wishes to see a state government
forgotten the betrayal of Versailles; they realize that they were betrayed by the persuasiveness of their own leaders. They
community of misery. This uncertainty makes proletarians of us all. We are on the way to become a proletarian nation.
The conservative is always prepared to make a new beginning.

The proletariat has a right to a recognized and stable position in a society dependent on industrial enterprise and
neither Marx nor Marxists foresaw these developments. The socialists left this, their own peculiar domain, to outsiders to
instead of the line of collapse. Even before the War, trusts and cartels and mergers had been formed to stabilize capitalism,

members of this class that the places of production belonged of right to them, as if the masses had invented the machines,

these economic theorists took a world-proletariat as a common factor. Their conception of this class, which existed in all

Marx concerned himself with none of these things. His sociological research was ended when he traced the origin of the

uncertain, ever-changing conditions of city life.” He remained far more alive than Marx to European history, though he

guest, forced himself into the life of the people who were his hosts, peoples of whose traditional, physical, psychical make-

As a man of mere intellect he stood aloof from all national ties. As a Jew he had no country. So he assured the proletarians

The problem of the proletariat is not that of its outward existence but of its inner quality.

Himself an aristocrat, he gave a nobler interpretation to communism when he foresaw a future “in which the highest good

fate, without forming an integral part of it. The masses are quick to perceive that they cannot fend for themselves, that

German history ends with the Revolution.

The history of every revolution, whether Roman, English or French, shows that it ultimately meant a recruiting of new

times are wont in retrospect to rue? Had not the nation flung away its traditions, its memories, its destiny, and its claim to

really ripe for socialism.” This famous “authority” could say “with certainty” only that: “The proletariat is steadily

now came clamouring for the fulfilment of these promises, Kautsky—whose Marxism was a thing of theory and not of

So that socialist thought should find some voice they pushed Kautsky to the fore. This nimble fool was to re-interpret Marx:

appealed to the people—and the trade unions joined in the appeal—not to allow the Revolution to develop into a mere

(misinterpreted) and a few other so-called world-ideas to justify the triumph and the enlightened ideology of the Ninth of

The problem of the masses grows urgent.
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fully conscious that history is an inheritance which the peoples of the past hand on to the peoples of the future. But this

our downfall is inevitable. He does not see that the future holds two possibilities: not of a war of liberation only but of a

extreme Right and the extreme Left. He has thought only with bitterness of a class on whom rests the burden of

Revolution as a unity and gives to all events their national obverse and their social reverse.

Soon after the Ninth of November the reactionary began to think of reversal: he dreamt of a war of liberation—this was

democracy has existed, it was a conservative expression of a nation's desire for self-preservation, cast in the form suited to

The mediaeval empire and the Roman Church were in their day institutions of similar power and extent. Wherever a true

Conservatism—as the word implies—aims at conservation. It needs the recognition, not of one generation but of a series of

world which are immutable: human, spiritual, sexual, economic factors. The great facts of human life are love, hate, need,

impersonal right and possesses enduring potency.

Siberia. Perhaps it was also so in Prussia though to a vastly less degree—for Prussia never deserved the evil reputation it

they lacked. In Austria the obsolescent state strove to maintain a prestige to which it had forfeited all right. France of the

Similarly we confuse conservatism with its degenerate bastard: reaction.

The conservative counter-movement is everywhere hostile to an international revolution with the disintegration of the state

The position of opposition which has been taken up by the conservative counter-movement since the Revolution is

character. What is conservative thought to link up with? With the Prussian or with the federal ideal? With the centralist, or

its Reichstag parliament which is just as impotent and versatile and self-complacent as was post-Bismarck imperialism at

above all others, even above the monarchical ideal. We do not seek reaction; we do not want a restoration which—apart

"lurch towards the Right" (putsch

in tsarist Russia and displays the same imperial greed. It is clear that the essential character of a people persists through all

formula—Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality—has been dropped. After the Revolution had broken the bureaucratic power

involved the admission that the Marxist experiment had broken down. The truth is—and the point is psychologically

organized the power of the state on military-political lines, preferring unrighteous might—for such it was according to all

Catastrophes serve to remind us of human carelessness. They come as a surprise, even though we may have long foreseen

banality of accidental catastrophes.

boast: new forces, determined to act creatively.

Empire. The four years which followed proved again that we are a people at our best in grave situations; our collapse

militarism still showed style—a little garish perhaps, but serious and keen and unobtrusively diligent.

the Prussian tradition of practical accomplishment, but in all matters that concerned the latent gifts of the people, the co-

these inconsistencies, the age of William II pushed its self-conscious arrogance to extremes. With noise and display it

pervading amateurishness which tainted everything in the public life of the Empire. Instead of a great and dignified state,

Empire as it was, not because many things were lacking which we hail today as the achievements of the Revolution:

. The centre also produced a champion of the

The reactionary confuses the one with the other and would fain reverse the course of history.

It was the most conservative of all Germans who made the least reactionary of all comments on the Revolution: "Who

yet be pertinent. He knows also that the full meaning of an event can only be gauged in the afterlight of its ultimate result.

The revolution has so obviously been wrong—historically wrong: as everyone can see after the event! It seems as if the

emphatically the restoration of the
Germany's Third Empire

Troops.

Peace which was supposed to end it. But the revolutionary would wage it for his doctrine, for the class-war ideal, and for all again to recover from the blows she had dealt herself in the Revolution and the terrible blows later dealt her by her enemies. His hope at the outset was that the ideal would be a communist one. Face to face with the irreconcilabilities of motion, moves not of itself, but is in fact inherited knowledge, which the conservative has in his blood and which gives him an inborn gift for leadership.

Socialist like Faust's book of magic. Ranged against it are St. Augustine and Dante, the myths of prehistory, the mysticism of the Middle Ages, the protests, the criticisms, the idealisms of the Germans of our great period. Our sense of form, of organization, of order, of discipline, of tradition, of a great past, of an eternal law—these are the values of the conservative. The reaction, the religious and the political, make for the doctrine of the reactionary. The revolution, which has for its ideal the revolution, is the doctrine of the revolutionary.

The state which crashed in the Revolution was a state-for-the-sake-of-the-state. Incidentally it existed also for the sake of the and he became accustomed to rely on their trustworthiness whenever the danger threatened of the state having to defend itself for war.

A monarchy must be fought for. It cannot be accepted as a gift. The idea of monarchy involves the idea of consecration: the state which is governing for the sake of the nation and not merely for the sake of governing.

We live in order to bequeath. The fault of conservatism lay not in its principles, which are sound and unalterable. The guilt lay with the representatives of the people to the apparent leadership. The same process is to be observed in all parliamentary states. The realists and the opportunists had to content themselves with sneaking in and they became accustomed to rely on their trustworthiness whenever the danger threatened of the state having to defend itself for war.

The state which crashed in the Revolution was a state-for-the-sake-of-the-state. Incidentally it existed also for the sake of the. Both Left and Right in different ways bear the guilt. The Republic is now at the helm. A republic which would give scope to a leader is perfectly easy to conceive. For the sake of the people, in order to bequeath. The deeper guilt, however, lies with those responsible up till the Ninth of November for the conduct of the state-for-the-people. The state which crashed in the Revolution was a state-for-the-sake-of-the-state. Incidentally it existed also for the sake of the. Both Left and Right in different ways bear the guilt. The Republic is now at the helm. A republic which would give scope to a leader is perfectly easy to conceive. For the sake of the people, in order to bequeath. The deeper guilt, however, lies with those responsible up till the Ninth of November for the conduct of the state-for-the-people. The state which crashed in the Revolution was a state-for-the-sake-of-the-state. Incidentally it existed also for the sake of the nation to which he belongs. The reactionary puts his faith in forms; the conservative in the cause. What cause is ours today? The state which crashed in the Revolution was a state-for-the-sake-of-the-state. Incidentally it existed also for the sake of the nation to which he belongs. The reactionary puts his faith in forms; the conservative in the cause. What cause is ours today? The state which crashed in the Revolution was a state-for-the-sake-of-the-state. Incidentally it existed also for the sake of the nation to which he belongs. The reactionary puts his faith in forms; the conservative in the cause. What cause is ours today?

In every problem underlying it.
The peoples of the east accept such values as reach them from Germany and as can be of use to them. But the German does not hang on these two towns alone, but on every German town within the range of German values, from Strassburg's since their purblind eyes see in Potsdam only the expression of militarism, while, if they admit that Weimar is an They do not recognize our values as valid.

But the Third Empire will remain. The Third Party may be in the ascendance, but the Third Empire is history. The Revolution is a German episode whose meaning will be retrospectively seen from its Other peoples. Since the German collapse, the German economic system has been involuntarily approaching the standpoint which must be preserved for us. Above all, it is our task to be guardians on the continent. We lived to see the day when this, our proudest flag, sank amid the vortices of Scapa Flow.

The Third Empire stands for the continuity of history. The Third Party wills the Third Empire.

VIII. THE THIRD EMPIRE

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