

## The ideas of 1914

Aleksej M. Rutkevič

Published online: 11 June 2014  
© Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2014

**Abstract** Battles of the First World War were accompanied by what was the first full-scale war of words in European history. It was aimed at influencing the public opinion abroad as well as at mobilizing the population at home. Leading intellectuals, including famous scholars, participated in propaganda campaigns waged by the belligerent nations. This text focuses on the discussions between philosophers involved in the international conflict.

**Keywords** First World War · Public opinion · Propaganda · Ideology · Philosophical justification of war

When the war started, it was enthusiastically embraced by the city populace in virtually all participating countries. Rallies, processions, solemn farewell ceremonies for the first trains departing for the front lines—such was the response of the European elites and middle class to the announcement of war. Young men drafted from the peasant and working families went to war obediently, but without any enthusiasm. Leaders of workers' movements and of trade unions in every country supported the “defensive war,” but the young working men in gray overcoats were not ecstatic about it. Yet their peers from noble and bourgeois families (students, grammar schools' graduates) enlisted as volunteers, filling up cadet academies. The romanticism of the pre-war movements such as the German *Wandervogelbewegung*, patriotism of the French Catholic unions or of the royalists from *Camelots du Roi* contributed to drafting the better part of the young generation. About a third of the pre-war Oxford and Cambridge graduates would not come back from the war.

---

A. M. Rutkevič (✉)

Vysšaja škola ekonomiki, National Research University Higher School of Economics, Building 7,  
8/2 Maly Trjokhsvjatitelskij Pereulok, 123022 Moscow, Russia  
e-mail: rutkevitch@yandex.ru

Aristocracy also sacrificed its children; among those who died in war there were German dukes and Russian grand dukes.

Philosophers also went to war. É.-A. Chartier (commonly known as Alain) and E. Jünger fought on the opposite sides, L. Wittgenstein and F. Stepun participated in the battle of Galicia. É. Gilson, a future neo-Thomist, was in the war, too, as was A. Koyré, who joined the French Foreign Legion as a volunteer and subsequently became famous as a historian of science. The thinkers of the older generations sent and lost their sons in war (for instance, E. Husserl and G. Shpet). E. Lask, the most talented of the young generation of neo-Kantians, was killed in 1915; H. Freyer and N. Elias (philosophers who greatly contributed to the development of sociology), took part in the war, as did Leo Strauss, the future teacher of American neoconservatives. M. Heidegger was drafted, but his health prevented him from going to the front lines, while his future student K. Löwith fought and was captured by Italians. These thinkers were to write their principal works following the war; their older colleagues, who by that time had already gained renown and academic “weight,” waged another kind of war: for the first time, history witnessed propaganda efforts of a massive scale, justifying their own actions and denigrating their enemies.

From the very outset of the war, each country had difficulties justifying its involvement. Of course, there were victimized countries (Belgium, Serbia) and treaties which obligated states to declare war against the aggressor who had attacked an ally. But who was the aggressor who had started the war? It was not only to their publics that governments had to justify their actions. An active propaganda campaign was conducted in neutral countries, joined with subversive activities in the enemy’s rear. This practice had already existed (Bismarck’s “reptile press,” American newspaper trusts preparing for the war with Spain in 1898, Japanese money for the Russian revolutionaries, etc.), but for the first time it was conducted on such a massive scale. The countries that had already been at war conducted active propaganda in the newspapers of countries which joined the war in 1915–1917 (Bulgaria, Italy, Romania, the US). Yet with every new month of the prolonged warfare, the task of mobilizing the internal resources, preventing anti-war protests, strikes, and mutinies was becoming ever more pressing.

University professors were involved in those ideological campaigns from the very start. Strictly speaking, the war of words started even before the military actions. The first manifesto signed by British scientists was published on August 1: the scientists called upon the government not to take part in the war that had no direct bearing on British interests. In a few days, another manifesto appeared; it was signed by dozens of leading scientists, scholars, and literary figures; it referred to the invasion of Belgium and contained all of the Entente’s principal propaganda tenets: it is not the war with the Germany of culture and the arts, it is the war with militarism and expansionism of the ruling Junker elite. “Manifesto of the Ninety-Three” (“To the Cultural World,” “*An Die Kulturwelt*”) was the most famous response; this manifesto was signed by the most prominent German scientists, scholars, and artists. In October, another manifesto was published: “An Address of Faculty Members of the Higher Schools of the German Reich,” written by U. von

Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, a famous classical scholar, and signed by 4,000 professors and Privatdozenten. The “Declaration of German Universities” followed.

“*An Die Kulturwelt*” became particularly notorious; it would be quoted by critics of German intellectuals from a wide range of countries. It consisted of antitheses, each starting with the words, “It is not true that...” Some of those statements caused indignation not only in the countries of the Entente. What could be the reaction to the claim that Germany didn’t violate Belgium’s sovereignty? Didn’t the library in Louvain burn down; wasn’t the cathedral in Rheims destroyed by artillery fire? In reply, scholars and scientists of the Entente published proclamations which emphasized again and again that it was not a war against the Germany of Goethe and Schiller, but against the barbarity of the Prussian militarism.

Of course, German professors had grounds to rebuke their opponents for their hypocrisy in writing that the Entente fought the war for the values of civilization, for freedoms, and rights. The population of Germany and Austro-Hungary had as many freedoms and rights as the population of Great Britain (and certainly more than the population of Russia); Central Europe was also undoubtedly part of the “European civilization.” However, German scientists, scholars, and artists made greater claims: they claimed that the German war was “the war of spirit,” Kant and Goethe were aligned with Bismarck and Moltke. Later, German journalists will write time and again about Germany’s “special path” (*Sonderweg*), and their opponents will inevitably make use of it, referring either to Lutheranism’s political culture or to the mindset of the German “mandarins.”<sup>1</sup> However, during the war, the attempts to turn it into a religious war failed to find support both among the Catholics and the Protestants, while liberal and Marxist unmasking of the conservative “mandarins” belongs in a different time and is linked to the left-wing attempts to find the sources of Nazism in Bismarck’s Reich<sup>2</sup> (and even in Germany’s entire history). German historians of the time weren’t so much conservatives as they were national liberals, just like the greater part of the pre-war German urban bourgeoisie.

German journalists used the same opposition between the “spirit” and the political “flesh” in their evaluations of the countries of the Entente. There is the Russia of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, and there is the Russia of the Tsarist monarchy, an oriental tyranny and “prison of the peoples”; the France of Descartes and Pascal is in conflict with the civilization of *rentiers*; the historian H. Delbrück, one of those scholars who became particularly involved in developing German plans for post-war annexations, wrote about “two Englands.” French revanchism is no easier to justify by references to “civilization,” than German imperialism. Should we follow the proclaimed slogans of the peoples’ rights, in that case Alsace is, after all, populated by ethnic Germans. The British desire to retain the colonies and the maritime dominance is hard to justify by referring to Shakespeare’s poetry and Dickens’s prose.

<sup>1</sup> See Ringer (1969). A great number of works was written on the specifics of the German worldview formed by the Reformation and on the influence it had on the political sphere. The trend was started by Plessner (1935).

<sup>2</sup> Particularly famous among historians are H. W. Wehler’s works, especially Wehler (1973).

All polemical wiles of this kind have nothing to do with philosophy. Of course, eminent philosophers signed manifestos: Boutroux and Bergson in France, Wundt and Windelband in Germany, Lopatin and Struve in Russia. But in doing so, all of them acted as patriots of their countries, not as philosophers. Philosophy is born as a disinterested contemplation of the Universum, as the investigation of our cognitive capabilities, as reflection on what is and what must be. Even political philosophy elucidates the issue of the public good and a better political system, not the issue of who is to blame for starting a specific war. Only when history has become the subject of philosophical contemplation and when the philosopher himself has become a kind of a diagnostician of the emerging future, has world war become a philosophical issue. Yet philosophers inclined toward such speculations were an absolute minority.

Justifying a defensive war was the hardest to do in Germany. Not only because Germany declared war, invaded Belgium, and waged war in other countries. Compared to other countries, German churches had harder time declaring the war to be a “godly” cause. A Christian politician is different from a non-Christian politician not so much in his actions, as in their justification: a Christian will not justify his actions with anti-Christian principles. Even given all the flexibility of theologians, they had a hard time explaining to German Catholics, who still had retained the memory of persecutions under Bismarck, that the war with French Catholics was a religious war; and it was equally hard to claim that racial principles, which even then were the inspiration for a significant part of the German elite, stemmed from Christian teaching. Kaiser Wilhelm was no stranger to racism, as he repeated regularly that it was a racial war (*Rassenkrieg*) between Germans and Slavs, without bothering in the least to take into account Czechs, Slovaks, and Croats fighting in his army, and the Poles who formed military units to fight for “an independent Poland.” References to the war against “barbarians” could be excused in order to justify the war against Serbia and Russia, but both France and Britain (and later Italy) could speak about the barbarity of those who kept talking about their victory over Roman legions in the Teutoburg Forest.

Both Britain and France justified their military engagement by defending civilization from barbaric militarism, but Germany wasn't merely interested in conquering new lands. Even those generals who were far removed from philosophizing speculated about the fate of the entire world. Field marshal Moltke wrote that Latin peoples had already passed the peak of their development, Slavs were still too wild and they carried the whip and spiritual barbarity; Britain pursued only material interests. “Only Germany can help humankind develop in the right direction. That is why Germany cannot be crushed in this struggle which will determine human development for several centuries to come.”<sup>3</sup> The German elite viewed the outward expansion as the means to overcome the internal threat, the means to vanquish the mutineer “barbarians” in Germany itself. As Chancellor von Bülow said, “National policy is the true weapon against social democrats.” A large victory of social democrats in the 1912 elections was one of the principal motives behind the start of the war. During the war, the Pan-Germanism of bourgeois

<sup>3</sup> Cited after Utkin (Utkin 2002, p. 165).

political organizations was becoming more and more racist. H. Class, head of the Pan-German League, was even at that time demanding to start a “merciless fight against Jews.”<sup>4</sup> Even the extremely influential myth of the Reds and the Jews stabbing the victorious army in the back was born in these circles back in July 1918. The German bourgeoisie believed army barracks to be the “schools of the nation,” and their own loyalism (*Untertanmentalität*) the example to be imitated by all other nations.

Nipperdey, who wasn't at all inclined toward the exaggerations of left-wing historians wishing to find in the Second Reich all the features of the Third Reich, still noted<sup>5</sup> that along with “official” nationalism (with a strong monarchic component), with the orientation toward preserving the *status quo*, there existed a far more aggressive liberal nationalism which Nipperdey termed “integral.” It was widespread not among the Prussian Junkers, but among the German bourgeoisie.

Later, already after World War II, it would become a sort of a commonplace to believe that in the early twentieth century the German bourgeoisie still delegated the search for the solution to the principal problems to Junkerdom, it still remained apolitical, and obediently accepted Prussian militarism. Indeed, the German burghers' dream of a unified Germany was put into practice with “iron and blood,” the highest offices in the state were held by the nobility. However, the German bourgeoisie had left behind the humanistic dreams of the times of Herder and Schiller. “Never before have such paeans been lavished on the authorities, and on the violent authorities at that.”<sup>6</sup> If in some other countries, such as Russia, Nietzsche was viewed first and foremost as a “rebel” (and consequently, he was read and worshipped by the Left), in Germany, he was German imperialism's philosopher *par excellence*. Field marshal Ludendorff, a coldblooded administrator and technician of war, “was the best representative of the new dominant bourgeois class which had, during the war, pushed aside the former aristocracy; he was an embodiment of the ideas of the Pan-German League, of its brutal will to victory, its obsession with staking everything for the sake of world dominance.”<sup>7</sup>

Considering that part of German journalism of the time that had some claim to philosophical depths, one should take into account that Germany's ruling class constantly debated the aims of the war and the identity of the Reich's principal enemy. The group of politicians and industrialists assembled around Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg considered Russia to be this enemy; “the navy party” led by Admiral von Tirpitz considered their main enemy to be Britain. If an intellectual viewed the war as a struggle against “the global plutocracy” and “capitalism,” he would clearly lean toward the second group of the German elite.

Geopolitics always offers a kind of philosophy of history, be it overt or covert. Germany produced two highly developed philosophical historical models. The first one, represented first and foremost by Fichte and Hegel, posits the necessary movement of humankind as whole which proceeds through a series of steps. Peoples

<sup>4</sup> Cited after Wehler (Op. cit., S. 216).

<sup>5</sup> Nipperdey (1992).

<sup>6</sup> Elias (1992, S. 236).

<sup>7</sup> Haffner (1981, S. 28).

take each other's place as the leader of the movement; by the early nineteenth century this place was taken by Germans. The other model goes back to Herder and the Romantics: there are many peoples with unique cultures, there is no unified mankind nor laws governing its development. These ideas would be developed first by the "historical school of law," then by German economists and sociologists (from von Lizst to Sombart).

During the war, German thinkers either tended to emphasize the specific nature of the German spirit, the "special path" (*Sonderweg*) of Germany and *Mitteleuropa* (Middle, or Central Europe), or else declared that Germany brings a new era to mankind, the era that would cancel the legacy of liberalism and of "the ideas of 1789" opposed to "the ideas of 1914."

In the Germany of the late nineteenth, early twentieth centuries, the opposition between the German *Kultur* and the French and English *civilisation* had already acquired certain anti-Western traits, while during World War I, this opposition became a commonplace not only in philosophical and historical treatises, but also in the official propaganda. Even those thinkers who were not radical nationalists adhered to these views, too. In 1916, E. Troeltsch writes the article "The metaphysical and religious spirit of the German culture"<sup>8</sup> in which German philosophy, art, and political thinking are posited as different from their Western counterparts. The German idea of freedom will always be different, it will be unlike the idea of freedom among western peoples because it is not so much political as spiritual: "It will always retain its connection with the idealist idea of duty and with the Romantic idea of individuality."<sup>9</sup> Germans see the relation between the individual and the state differently, parliamentary democracy is not something that is necessary for a German, but he has the innate "Romantic idea of individuality." Yet even more typical are the war-time and post-war publications of Thomas Mann, who could be considered one of the spiritual fathers of the "conservative revolution." Strictly speaking, he was the first to use this phrase with a reference to Dostoevsky,<sup>10</sup> who in *Dnevnik pisatelya (The Diary of a Writer)* wrote about both this specific revolutionary mood which springs from conservatism ("Moj paradoks" ["My Paradox"]) and about the Germans' uncompleted protest against the West. Mann's several war-time articles and *Reflections of an Unpolitical Man* published soon after the armistice are immediately linked with the "conservative revolution."

Throughout the lengthy tome, Mann keeps quoting Dostoevsky, calling him "a prophet"; although Germany and Russia were at war, Mann calls a union of Germany and Russia "his heart's dream" (contrary to the propaganda of the time where Russia was invariably dubbed "a barbaric country"). According to Mann, this union should be directed against the advancing Anglo-Saxon world with its pragmatism and utilitarianism (in the end of the book, apparently after the armistice had already been signed, Mann writes in English, "The world is rapidly becoming

<sup>8</sup> It was reprinted in 1925 in a collection of Troeltsch's selected articles with the typical title: *The German Spirit and Western Europe* (Troeltsch 1925).

<sup>9</sup> Tryel'ch (2009, p. 234). *Translated from Russian.*

<sup>10</sup> Dostoevsky in general exerted a great influence on the German thinkers of the early twentieth century, in part due to the new translation published under the editorship of Merežkovskij and Moeller van den Bruck. The latter also wrote prefaces to several volumes (the translation was done by his sister-in-law).

English”). Germans and Russians are akin in their understanding of humans and humanity, which is different from the Latin and the Anglo-Saxon ones. Mann poses the question of the two countries’ tradition of similar opposition to the West and asks, “Don’t we have our own Slavophiles and Westernizers?” (*Haben wir nicht auch unsere Slawophilen und unsere Zapadniki?*) Mann lumps those he contemptuously calls “literati” (including his own brother H. Mann with whom all relationship was cut off for a few years) with “Westernizers,” i.e. with those who would want to destroy Germany. In Mann’s opinion, in its negative content, Russian Slavophilism is a reaction to the West, and in its positive content, it is conservatism. His own position is precisely the same, the position of conservative opposition to the West. War-time English and French propaganda abounded with such clichés as “civilization–barbarity” (or “civilization–Prussian militarism” etc.). As early as 1914, in his article “Thoughts in the time of war” (“Gedenken im Kriege”), Mann writes sarcastically that the French had been screaming about a *revanche* for half a century, but when it came to war, they recalled “civilization.” They turned Rheims into a fortress, positioned their cannon next to the cathedral, and when Germans started to return fire from those cannons and destroyed the cathedral, the French started bemoaning “civilization” threatened by “barbarians.” Yet medieval cathedrals had long since stopped being part of their “civilization” which views them as part of the time of “fanaticism and prejudice.”

This “civilization” with its democracy and “human rights” is false and hypocritical through and through. In *Reflections of an Unpolitical Man*, the national theme coincides with the conservative one: “The political spirit of democratic Enlightenment and ‘human civilization’ is not only anti-German in its soul; wherever this spirit dominates it is necessarily hostile to Germany politically. Future historians will demonstrate the role the world’s illuminati, the global masons’ lodge played... in the spiritual preparation and the actual unleashing of this World War, the war of ‘civilization’ against Germany.” Germany’s true spiritual enemy isn’t even France; French revanchism is national and therefore at least somehow justified; Germany’s true enemy is Britain and Britain’s agents, proponents of the “human civilization.” These agents are “German Westernizers” (“*deutsche Zapadniki*”), who strive for a total alteration of the German national character. “The global democracy,” “civilization empire,” “society of mankind” are taken as the example, but their aim is the disappearance of the German spirit. Therefore, Mann defines the war as “conservative resistance to progress” which Mann, in turn, ironically and with a clear reference to Nietzsche, calls “progress from music to democracy.” Mann welcomes the war as an open struggle against this civilization, against the flatly humane, trivially decadent, feminist and elegant Europe which is “as literary as a Parisian cocotte,” which has become “too human”; it’s the war with “the civilization of tango and two-step,” of businesslike pragmatism covered up with highfalutin words about rights and freedoms.<sup>11</sup> This civilization had already started conquering Germany before the war, and the war is “Germany’s rebellion against the Western spirit” which had been driven to nihilism by the Enlightenment and democratic progress. Mann recognizes the world of democracy, party politics,

<sup>11</sup> See Mann (1956, S. 58).

human rights, and similar “ideas of 1789” to be anti-German, since the German spirit is conservative and apolitical.

However, this conservatism was not at all revolutionary. It has become such because the opposing spirit of liberalism and progressivism is winning and gaining strength: “Conservatism needs to gain courage to become more revolutionary than some positivist liberal Enlightenment; Nietzsche himself, starting with *The Untimely Meditations*, was nothing else but a conservative revolution.”<sup>12</sup> Mann compares Gogol to Nietzsche, writes sympathetically about Leskov’s Orthodox conservatism, and of course, about Dostoevsky; these are the ones who had rebelled against the Western civilization.

The opposition of Germany and the West became particularly widespread among many German thinkers during the war. I will touch upon only two, who went on to create philosophical anthropology. Max Scheler and Werner Sombart gained renown before the war; the former as the phenomenologist who combined Husserl and Augustine, and the latter for his works on the history of capitalism. Both participated in the polemics surrounding Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, and their negative attitude toward capitalism as such was no secret. Before the war, Sombart was considered to be a Marxist, and Scheler was a conservative Catholic who wrote *Ressentiment*, a work of tremendous significance for understanding the “conservative revolution” phenomenon; one of the crucial subjects of that work is the critique and criticism of democracy and secular “humanitarianism.”

In early 1915, Scheler published a large book, *The Genius of War and the German War*, which in its political contents is different from the anti-Western orientation of the “conservative revolution,” since Scheler sees Germany’s principal task in the war as victory over Russia, as pushing Russia away from the Baltic and the Black Sea. This is a “holy war” for the “European cause,” and France and particularly Britain are “traitors” to the cause. This war will be followed by several others, and it will be Germany that will lead the united continental Europe into the fight against Russia and, at the same time, it will set up a blockade of Britain. “United continental Europe under Germany’s military leadership,”<sup>13</sup> fighting Russia, its geopolitical enemy—one can say that Scheler had already formulated the principal slogans for the next European war. Germany’s task is to unite Europe “with iron and blood,” to destroy Russia as an independent country, and then to fight the Anglo-Saxons for world dominance.

Scheler buttressed every tenet with references to the “European spirit” which, it should be noted, was on the banners of everyone who proclaimed the destruction of Russia to be a “holy cause.” Curiously, already in Scheler’s next work, *Reasons for Hatred Toward Germans* (1917), his opinions are radically different. He remarks that tsarist Russia exhibits far less hatred toward Germany than the “democratic”

<sup>12</sup> See Mann (2002, S. 37).

<sup>13</sup> The annexation of Belgium, forcible inclusion of Holland into the customs union, the capture of the Baltic region and Ukraine—Scheler, like many other German ideologues, wrote about these things quite openly. It was not yet the time of “political correctness,” that was why the “honest” Germans of the time hated so much the hypocrisy of the Anglo-Saxons who had already learned to disguise their imperial interests with words about democracy, freedoms, and rights.



countries of the Entente. Scheler sees the principal reason of hatred toward Germany in Britain's bourgeois mercantile spirit. He goes even further in his talk "Christian Socialism as Anti-Capitalism," which he delivered right after the treaty of Versailles. At that time, he maintains ties (via H. von Gleichen) with the June Club and formulates ideas which are on the whole in accord with the "conservative revolution." One could even say that Scheler's "Christian socialism" is the direct predecessor of the "German socialism." He rejects both Marxism and Bolshevism, but he puts forward the idea of a "national state socialism." Scheler writes about a possible union with Russia in a struggle against the West. Anti-capitalist politics is proclaimed to be Germany's goal. The war was won by America first and foremost, and for the time being America's victory gives dominance to the "capitalist type of person and economy" while all other nations are turned "more or less into slaves, or even proletarian nations in respect to the Anglo-American capitalism."<sup>14</sup> Yet the time of this capitalism is drawing to an end since "capitalism is but an episode in world history, it has arrived not for too long a time." This is the idol of Mammon, perversion of human nature. The struggle against the Anglo-American "world capitalism" unites the oppressed nations, even including a possible union with Russia which Scheler just a few years earlier viewed as the principal enemy of European culture.

During the war, Werner Sombart published a very stark book titled *Merchants and Heroes* (1915), where the principal opposition is established between Britain and Germany. Germany's enemies speak about "western civilization" fighting "German militarism," but in fact, one should speak about the fight between two human types: the merchant and the hero. They are eternally present in any culture, but in Britain and Germany, they found their clear embodiments as two dominant mindsets. English philosophy from Bacon to Spencer, English political economy, English science from Newton to Darwin—all is linked to mercantilism. Liberal bourgeois ideas are transferred even onto nature, and the teaching about the state depicts a philistine business office. Mercantilism permeates English life through and through, all wars are waged for the sake of profit under the guise of hypocritical words about "rights and freedoms." English socialism is a consequence of this kind of capitalism: plus is replaced with minus, but the human being is still depicted in the same vein, in the spirit of utilitarianism and materialism.

That is why "the war of 1914 is Nietzsche's war": "German thinking and German sentiment manifest themselves first and foremost as a decisive rejection of everything that even remotely resembles some English, or generally western European, thinking and sentiment."<sup>15</sup> The German rejects utilitarianism and eudemonism, the ideas of usefulness and pleasure, for the sake of will and spirit, duty and obedience, self-sacrifice and heroism. The German spirit is imbued with the organic idea of a state as the armor that defends the body of the people. "Militarism" is an expression used by Germany-hating merchants and "democratic" scribblers they bought off. In fact, this is the matter of the primacy of the values of a warrior, a hero. The war allows elucidating these highest human

<sup>14</sup> Scheler (1982, S. 653).

<sup>15</sup> Sombart (1915, S. 55).

qualities. Prior to the war, the mercantile culture and the bourgeois mindset already were on their way to vanquishing the world with their lust for material goods and creature comforts. However, wealth and creature comforts cannot be life's supreme values; where they become such, life is doomed to decline. "The ideas of 1789" are anti-life, that is why a "holy German war" is being waged against them, as it is waged against "internationalism," merchants, against "aping Europe"—there is no "generalized European," just as there is no single language for all the countries as people from different nations haven't yet stooped to speaking some Esperanto.

It should be said that in his book, Sombart holds a negative opinion about conquering territories: nothing should be conquered, no one should be "Germanized"; Germany's historical role is to be the dam blocking the muddy stream of mercantilism which is ready to engulf the world. Of course, German *Realpolitik* of the time was quite different from those proclamations, since even then there was talk about "*Lebensraum*." Sombart's work is important not only as a stage in his own biography (he moved from being a Marxist, albeit a very moderate one, to being a consistent nationalist), but also as preparing the ideology of the "conservative revolution." After the war, the external opposition between Britain and Germany turns into an internal opposition between capitalist liberalism and "German socialism." Sombart's opposition of two human types becomes a commonplace among the ideologues of the "conservative revolution."

Browsing through old books can be useful. Sombart's book was published as part of the *Bücher für die Zeit* series of Duncker Press, and in late 1915 that press alone offered its readers about thirty titles by German professors; summaries tell us that they offer a panoramic view of that time. Some books consider (and condemn) British imperialism, French democracy, and Russian tyranny; others justify Germans' right to conquer various territories; yet others glorify great German generals of the past, etc. Some thus far utterly unknown provincial teachers, like E. Kriek, the future Nazi overseer of German philosophy, gained prominence precisely due to such patriotic series.

## The ideas of 1914

The idea that Prussian militarism is identical with socialism appeared long before World War I. Back in the 1880s, K. Kautsky ridiculed G. Tuch's book where a solution of the social question nearly amounted to transforming Europe into one gigantic army barrack. At that time, social democrats passed resolutions calling for peace, and, in accordance with "The Internationale," they promised to turn the imperialist war into a civil one ("and should these cannibals attempt to turn us into heroes, our guns will be turned against our own generals"). Although Bebel, the party's charismatic leader, said that "if we are talking war with Russia, I will take up a gun myself," until August 1914 socialists considered themselves to be pacifists, and their enemies held them to be such, too, those enemies being the Kaiser's court, the officer corps, and virtually the entire bourgeoisie. Even on the eve of the war, on July 25, 1914, the party leadership passed a resolution condemning the Austro-Hungarian government for "frivolously provoking a war." Yet just a few weeks

later, the overwhelming majority of the social democratic faction in the parliament approved war loans and repeated after the official propaganda that the war was unleashed by Serbia and Russia and that Germany was waging a defensive war for “a just cause.”

Almost all socialists in Europe evolved along similar lines. When the house is on fire, it is not the time to look for the arsonist; the fire should be put out first. It is hardly worth following the communist historiography and to characterize the socialists’ newly awakened patriotism as a “betrayal” of the interests of workers of their respective countries. Yet part of the SDP leadership went far beyond what could be termed patriotism. By 1916, the party leadership had transitioned from their initial stance (“peace without conquest”) to supporting the German government’s annexation plans: taking over various territories might serve economic and social progress,” any means is good for fighting the “blood-thirsty tsarist regime.”

In itself, agreeing with the goals of German imperialism did not set German social democrats apart from other European socialists who supported their respective governments during the war. Ideologically, socialists were partly ready for it: 10 years before the war, the Fabian Society in Britain entertained the ideas of “social imperialism.” What was special about Germany’s right-wing social democrats was the fact that they viewed the total mobilization of all resources during the war as a desired example of a socialist society. Didn’t Engels write in *Anti-Dühring* that the anarchy of capitalist production would be replaced with a more perfect planned economy? It is true that neither Engels nor Marx wrote that this new socialist economy would emerge within the framework of a national state and that socialism was a means of mobilizing labor resources for the sake of a military victory. Yet Lassalle, another founder of the Social Democratic Party of Germany, already had a suitable idea of “state socialism,” and the leaders of the party (Liebknecht and Bebel) liked such words as “organization” and “discipline” no less than Prussian officers did.

Such terms as “*nationale Sozialismus*” and even “*National-Sozialismus*” appear in the works of German social democrats beginning in 1915. August Winnig was the trailblazer with his article published in the periodical of German builders’ union. The article states that a war economy presupposes not only rationing of resources, but also a different organization of the entire society, participating in union management; discipline and organization become the key words in the definition of what Winnig even then termed “Elemente eines neuen Deutschtums.” In the new Reich, class struggle will disappear, the proletariat will become an ally and a collaborator of the state since the destiny of Germany and the destiny of the working class are inextricably linked.

Paul Lensch is a particularly interesting character among those who revisited their former pacifist beliefs; Lensch belonged to the left wing of the SDP; together with R. Luxemburg, he fought the “revisionists.” Still in August 1914, he joined those who opposed war loans, yet since 1915 he belonged to the right-wing group (“Cunow-Haenish-Lensch Group”), which went much farther than others did in re-thinking the program and politics of social democrats in the spirit of “military socialism.” Lensch was well-versed in economics (after the war he left the party and

became an economics professor at Berlin University), and he, therefore, linked the need for revising the socialists' pacifist position with changes in the relation between the state and the economic policies. The emergence of syndicates and cartels led to the monopolistic structuring of the market, to a greater merger of private capital and the state. The role of state planning grew as well, the war merely intensified this trend and made it particularly vivid. For Lensch, the World War is of revolutionary nature since it erases the old differences between classes and estates, it leads to the "organization state" based on planning, with all individuals being cells of a single organism. The society that emerges during the war cancels out the individualistic principles of 1789. Therefore, social democratic party cannot remain the party of the proletariat as it used to be. From an extreme left-wing party it turns into a "center party" in which intellectuals, officials, officers, everybody will play their roles. The socialist ideal can never be identical with the bourgeois ideas of rights and freedoms; at its core, there is the idea of equality in an organized society. Such a society can only emerge within a national state, and for Lensch, therefore, socialism is "the savior of nationalism." Unlike other party leaders, who made various qualifications in the spirit of the old slogans ("peace without annexations," "general disarmament" after the war), Lensch believes that such ideals are abstract and divorced from reality. We live in the world of national states, and a strong economy in a powerful empire is in the interests of German workers. Workers have their fatherland they are ready to die for.

Of these works, Johann Plenge's *1789 and 1914 The Symbolic Years in the History of the Political Mind*<sup>16</sup> is particularly interesting. Plenge wasn't a member of the SDP, although he belonged to those journalists who were close to the right wing of the party. During the war, his articles appeared in *Die Glocke* published by Parvus. Plenge was a right-wing Hegelian, he criticized Marx and his followers in his pre-war works such as *Marx and Hegel* (1911) and *The Future in America* (1912): Marxists don't see that the coming socialism will not be the socialism of "workers' free associations," it will be the socialism of functionaries, "officers and corporals of economics and management."

The book starts with the opposition between the ideas of Kant and Hegel, it is the defining opposition in the German history of ideas. The war brings us back to Fichte's closed commercial state and to Hegel's glorification of Prussia as an exemplary state. The war brings about the end of class conflicts in a national state, it has already led to centralization, to the planning of economic life. "The war produces economy, the economy produces war!" (p. 18). Such is the essence of "the ideas of 1914." Something similar transpired in other countries which are at war, but they lacked a comparable intellectual tradition. "The twentieth century will be ours. Whatever the outcome of the war, we are an exemplary people. Our ideas will define the goals of humanity's life" (20). 1914 is the turning point, since it entails "free inclusion of large economic bodies into the state" which has become "an all-

---

<sup>16</sup> Plenge (1916) makes a reference to the book by Swedish lawyer R. Kjellen where these two dates are already opposed (this opposition made its first appearance in an anonymous editorial in *Frankfurter Zeitung*).

uniting center of all the members of economic life.” “The people’s fellowship of national socialism” emerges (82).

Plenge writes that “the ideas of 1914” are the “golden mean” between state socialism and democracy. They unite such opposites as organization and individualism, officialdom and people’s freedom, the system of obligations and human rights. The movement toward state socialism started before the war. Capitalism has never been peaceful; the capitalist era is the time of colonial conquests, of the world’s repartition in the name of economic purposes. “Capitalism didn’t emerge on some islands of peace in the global history... Capitalism was an instrument of the state, and the state, in turn, was an instrument of capitalism wishing to expand its markets, to suppress its opponents through political means” (74). Capitalism started with liberation, it concludes with organization. It liberated peasants, liberated production from guild-imposed restraints, and proclaimed freedom of trade and freedom of speech. It led to a rapid technical and economic development. Yet this development itself led to the concentration of capital, to gigantic manufacturing works intertwining with state institutions thus cancelling former freedoms. 1789 was the year of victory for the ideas of freedom, 1914 symbolizes the conclusion of this historic process.

Plenge admits that military economy is a temporary phenomenon, that following the war certain traits of former times will return. But the idea of the “German organization,” the planned economy, clear division of labor within a single economic body will remain. This is precisely why for Plenge the ideas of 1914 are the ideas of “national socialism.” Following Hegel, Plenge speaks about the movement of the world spirit through stages embodied in “ideas.” Now it is assuming the shape of a national state with a planned economy which is both national and socialist. For Plenge, the former socialist idea was almost anarchic: social democrats viewed socialization of the means of production as a movement toward “workers’ free associations.” The war showed the true face of the future socialism: planned economy requires a dictator since it needs an organizational center. As early as his 1915 articles, Plenge compared the Kaiser to Napoleon (Hegel’s “world idea on horseback”), and the Kaiser emerged not as a traditional monarch, but as “the leader of the German people,” dictator and organizer of victories.

Leaving aside two large sections on foreign policy and demography, I will pay special attention to Plenge’s principal thought: the coming socialism will not be the utopian “labor kingdom” envisioned by pre-war socialists, it will be national and military socialism. “Philosophically, this can be expressed in the following way: whether we want it or not, we are entering Fichte’s closed commercial state which will be constructed on the basis of Hegelian ideas of the state” (121). It will be closed off from world capital which is only capable of robbing the peoples (Plenge compares it to pirates). It will be a strong national state where the same force permeates all the members and, through a single will directs all members of the organism toward solving the task the nation faces. There is no return to the pre-war society: the war changed both the society and the state. “Through the war we were made into a *socialist society* more than ever before” (123). True, Plenge’s socialism is not usurpation of everything by government, it is not the dissolution of private

property. Both property and a person's basic rights will be preserved, but their environment itself will change, their ideals will be different. Socialism is an organization to which a particular human type corresponds. "The revolution of 1914" begets a new person with a new morality. Plenge provides a sketch which contains the principal features of E. Jünger's *The Worker*. He writes about the new morality of masters (*Herrenmoral*), criticizing Nietzsche since he remained an individualist, and the new morality is national and socialist. The idea of an organization in general is "Apollonian," not "Dionysian"; the supreme type is that of a rational person of an organization, not a Dionysian "Übermensch."

Plenge's and Lensch's ideas exerted a significant influence on the right wing of the SDP (the so-called "neo-Lassalleism"), but it would have been a mistake to turn the entire German social democracy into an immediate predecessor and instigator of national socialism as F. Hayek's believed,<sup>17</sup> viewing any nationally tinged socialism as Nazism. Accusing all social democrats, Hayek took on his own apologetics of Austrian school liberalism. In fact, the SDP, despite its Marxist program, was the main buttress of the Weimar Republic, and its right "militarist" wing was weakened following the reunion of "the majority" and "the independents" in the early 1920s. German trade unions were still to a degree under the influence of this ideology, their leaders found it much easier to find common ground with national socialists. But it was V.I. Lenin who was the true heir of Rathenau and Plenge: in his articles of 1918–1920, he often turned to the experience of military "state socialism." It was these ideas that formed the foundation of the planned economy, and not the peasant "commune" tradition that was alien to the Bolsheviks.

This is how Thomas Mann rendered the essence of "the ideas of 1914": "...that after Spain, France, and England it was now our turn to put our stamp upon the world and lead it, that the twentieth century belonged to us, and now that a bourgeois epoch had run its hundred-and-twenty-year course the world was to be renewed under the emblem of Germany, under the emblem of a militaristic socialism yet to be completely defined"; and he ironically concludes his reminiscences about the ideological quests of the time: "This notion, to avoid calling it an idea, dominated minds in harmonious company with the notion that we had been forced into war, that sacred necessity had called us to arms (well-stockpiled and well-drilled arms, to be sure, whose superiority may have fed the constant, secret temptation to put them to use)."<sup>18</sup>

Apologias of the victorious war of German arms abounded with references to thinkers from times past ("Fichte's war," "Nietzsche's war"), but those journalistic

<sup>17</sup> For many readers, Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* is still, unfortunately, the only source of information about the German social democracy of the early twentieth century. In this book, the ideas of a small faction of dissenters such as Lensch or Winnig, or of an independent philosopher and journalist Plenge, are passed off as the stance of the entire party, and Hayek views the SDP as the force that paved the way for the victory of the National Socialist German Workers' Party in the Weimar Republic. The falsity of these charges is apparent to anyone who has the slightest idea about German history, yet English-speaking liberals most often have no such idea. They didn't have it in 1944, when *The Road to Serfdom* was published, and in particular they don't have it today.

<sup>18</sup> Mann (1999, p. 319).

writings already contained central ideas of the nearest future, and the ideas of the “conservative revolution” first and foremost. A new era came, the era which E. Nolte so aptly called “the era of European civil war.” A concomitant of this era was a particular human type forged in the fires of the World War. That human was ready to kill and sacrifice himself, he saw the world in black and white only, he divided those around him into “friends” and “enemies.” It was the type of a disciplined warrior-laborer, who is utterly rational in using any weapons and machines, but who is not using his reason to select his final goals, but instead relies completely on the leader, the party, and the organization. At the level of philosophical speculations, they spoke about “will,” “intuition,” “decisiveness,” “existential choice,” “the riskiness of existence”; however, for politically involved intellectuals of the time, being ready for decisive action too often meant sacrificing intellect to the idols of primitive ideologies.

## References

- Elias, N. (1992). *Studien über die Deutschen*. F.a.M: Suhrkamp.
- Haffner, S. (1981). *1918/1919. Eine deutsche Revolution*. Hamburg: Rowolt, Reinbeck bei.
- Mann, T. (1956). *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*. F.a.M.: Fischer.
- Mann, T. (1999). *Doctor Faustus* (trans: Woods, J. T.). New York.
- Mann, T. (2002). *Essays. Bd.II*. F.a.M.: Fischer.
- Nipperdey, T. (1992). *Deutsche Geschichte 1866–1918*. Muenchen: Beck, Bd.II.
- Plenge, J. (1916). *1789 und 1914. Die symbolischen Jahre in der Geschichte des politischen Geistes*. Berlin: Julius Springer.
- Plessner, H. (1935). *Die verspätete Nation. Über die Verführbarkeit des bürgerlichen Geistes*.
- Ringer, F. (1969). *The decline of German mandarines. The German academic community 1890–1933*. Cambridge, MA.
- Scheler, M. (1982). *Politisch-pedagogische Schriften*. Bern und Muenchen: Franke.
- Sombart, W. (1915). *Händler und Helden, Patriotische Besinnungen*. Leipzig@Dreseden: Duncker.
- Troeltsch, E. (1925). *Deutscher Geist und Westeuropa: Gesammelte kulturphilosophische Aufsätze und Reden*. Tübingen: Mohr.
- Tryel’č, E. (2009). *Metafizičeskij i religioznoj dukh nemetskoj kul’tury*. Antologija. Logika kul’tury. M.-SPb.: Universitetskaja kniga.
- Utkin, A. I. (2002). *Pervaja mirovaja vojna*. Moscow: Eksmo.
- Wehler, H.-U. (1973). *Das Deutsche Kaiserreich 1871–1918*. Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ryprecht.