

Carlsbad 1819

Like another Chouannerie

The transition from Prussian conservatism to German nationalism

December 3, 2017 by Nulle Terre Sans Seigneur

Yesterday's geopolitical exigencies are today's sacred national traditions, and anyone who touches them is committing cultural genocide. So they say.

The Junkers of their day were debating all the hot issues then in vogue. These included such riveting questions as whether their descendants (i.e. you) would be subjects of composite dynastic states that emerged as results of centuries of succession conflicts, appanages, condominiums, purchases, partible inheritances and other obscure devices from a pre-Westphalian era when states were treated like real property (with the occasional revision by such a thing as a Congress of Vienna)... OR, would they be free and independent citizens of sovereign nation-states?

They chose the latter, and today your daughters are being raped by refugees.

Hey, all good things come with trade-offs.

As the Fuehrer said in Mein Kampf (Vol. 2, Chapter 14):

Moreover, the times have changed since the Congress of Vienna: Today it is not princes and princes' mistresses who haggle and bargain over state borders; it is the inexorable Jew who struggles for his domination over the nations. No nation can remove this hand from its throat except by the sword. Only the assembled and concentrated might of a national passion rearing up in its strength can defy the international enslavement of peoples. Such a process is and remains a bloody one.

Damn straight.

Now last time I made a distinction between Hegel and *Preussentum*. Today, I'll give the finest example I know of where *Preussentum* devolves into recognizably modern German nationalism, but even then not the pure Burschenschaft variety of an Ernst Moritz Arndt or a Jakob Friedrich Fries.

Ernst von Bülow-Cummerow, full name Ernst Gottfried Georg von Bülow-Cummerow (1775-1851), more specifically an 1849 pamphlet of his about *Prussia and its political position with Germany and the European states* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=tMkDAAAACAAJ&printsec=frontcover>), is the subject in this post.

I must first preface a disclaimer that there is a tad more to Buelow-Cummerow's thought than his kleindeutsch, anti-dualist geopolitics, and in other respects he was a somewhat reform-minded Junker conservative like Stahl, and whom we will probably be revisiting later. He wasn't quite up to the standards of Friedrich Wilhelm IV's camarilla, but he wasn't too bad. And even then his particular take has some unique aspects. Unlike most of the Burschenschaft and romantic nationalists, he explicitly disclaims himself from basing a Prussian-led unified Germany on a national convention per se. Rather, he insists it must be represented on "Volksschicht[en]," [social strata] like the "earlier French" he says, hence something like estate. To many alt-right writers, this would make him a civic nationalist cuck. Furthermore, he notes by the end of the pamphlet that this government must "abstain from any interference with property," again for more modern readers seemingly a very cucked classical liberal thing to say, but also very normal from Prussian conservatism of the period and its Junker base. The Volksgemeinschaft is cool and all, but not being expropriated by chartist mobs is even cooler. Though he bemoans the influence of so-called "ultramontanes," he has no special ill-will toward Catholics and didn't seem geared for anything resembling a Kulturkampf.

So, even if he erred, it was in a relatively moderate and comprehensible fashion. And it serves as a great case study for a little apophatic exercise.

The core and most interesting aspect of Buelow-Cummerow's argument is his preference for an alliance with France and England alike, as an Atlantic-Western bulwark against what he explicitly dubs the "eastern monarchies," which include Russia and the Habsburg possessions. There is thus a clear identification with the West, and further still, he calls out the alleged "subjection" of the Magyars by the Austrians, revealing a certain concern for self-determination that was in step with the English interests promoted by the post-Castlereagh foreign ministries of Canning, Palmerston, and later Gladstone, etc.

His main bogeymen, however, are Austrian "weakness," its internal dissension, and its reliance on Russian assistance to crush the Hungarian rebellion. His Russophobia is primarily borne of geopolitical interest (perhaps as a potential threat to East Elbian industry on the Baltic frontier?), but it may have a Lutheran dimension to it.

Now when Friedrich Wilhelm IV rejected the crown offered to him by the Frankfurt ~~usurpers~~ Parliament, this little plan would end up bypassed.

Yet it does illustrate the rather accidental nature of that tired cliché about "Prussian militarism." Had Buelow-Cummerow's programme been followed, it would have essentially been the total opposite of what Bismarck and the Kaiserreich ended up doing with the Triple Alliance. Not only that, its explicit pursual of a Franco-German rapprochement would have been a great historical reversal, and moreover have flied in the face of the Burschenschaften nationalists with their pronounced Francophobia. I don't know if WWI would have been avoided, but a swift destruction of the Habsburg lands and a Western commercial pivot on part of Prussia, though not exactly to the taste of a person whose blog is named after the Carlsbad Decrees, would have been an intriguing counterfactual.

He presents his case:

Let us turn from this general view of Prussia's special policy; as this one has become very complicated, and from the proper view of the same question, we obtain not only the answer regarding our own welfare, but also that of the whole of Germany and even of the whole political position of Europe.

If the premise is correct, and who will deny its correctness — that is, that most of the peoples of Central Europe must fight the anarchic, communist propaganda for their preservation — it is in the well-understood interest, especially of France, Austria, and Russia and all states bordering on Germany, that in Germany, in the heart of Europe, there is a power which has the power to maintain law and order in Germany; for if that party [the anarchic, communist propagandists] confiscated Germany, the Red Republic would become the universal ruler of Europe, and this part of the world would be all the more in danger of falling to barbarism. But even supposing that it did not come to that utmost nadir, the lack of a strong power in Germany would at least cause Europe the most violent convulsions.

This view is already quite generally shared, at least everywhere where the eye is somewhat untempered; but in Germany itself the views differ considerably as to who should form that power, whether Prussia alone, whether in common with Austria and other princes, or the other princes between the south and north, under the hegemony of one or the other major power.

In this difference of views, the old hereditary error of the Germans speaks up; Here lies the root of all the evils that Germany has endured so far, and the powerlessness in which it has been for centuries.

The "Red Republic" is his recurring term for the rising tide of revolution. Note one thing in addition to the obvious argument that stalling revolution requires a Prussian hegemon (rather than a concert as per Metternich), is the general acceptance of a "conservative internationalist" outlook. The term and concept of "internationalism" has been greatly defiled over the past 70 or so years, but in that time and under those circumstances it was a basic starting point of various conservative diplomatists — Ficquelmont, Beust, Nesselrode, etc.

This is one more element that makes his a transitioning conservative perspective and not yet a full-fledged nationalistic one.

On Russia:

This state, which by its predominant non-German possessions is already compelled to pursue a policy very different from that required by the German Intellectuals, has at present become an empire dependent upon Russia, which gives discretion to the most powerful emperor and eminent regent; and though we expect the magnanimity of Emperor Nicholas not to use the superiority which he gained thereby in the east of Europe, for new expansions of his empire, there is no doubt that Austria is responsible for the consequence of politics to make her mighty wicked-gods her own.

If, therefore, Austria were to be given a predominant influence over the affairs of Germany, it would actually be transferred to Russia. But can this be in the interest of the German, the Prussian people?

Russian expansion would definitely be on the Prussian radar due to the latter's own eastern possessions, but overall the Russian presence had, for instance in Bessarabia, a generally counterrevolutionary effect. The same for Finland and Lithuania.

Showing his ecumenism, he does not entirely discount the theoretical case of a Bavarian-kickstarted unification effort (IIRC not too dissimilar from what Joseph II tried to do in the 1780s before being thwarted by the Fuerstenbund of Prussia, Hanover and Saxony), but deems it impracticable:

It seems just as questionable to place Bavaria at the head of southern Germany, although this seems desirable from the Prussian point of view and that of Northern Germany, because Northern Germany could more easily consolidate under the leadership of Prussia, and many conflicts would be avoided. It is undoubtedly decided that Bavaria lacks the power to do so, and that over Würtemberg and Baden. Baden would not recognize the hegemony of Bavaria. Without Prussia's intervention, Bavaria would never have been able to curb the uprising in the Palatinate and in Baden. Only the deployment of 60,000 Prussians prevented Würtemberg from being carried away, and where would Bavarians have taken the armies to suppress such a widespread insurrection?

This next excerpt is one of the most significant for its opportunism. Besides accusing the Prussian-skeptical German princes of intrigue and conceitedness, he expresses a very dangerous latitudinarianism in terms of form of government that would probably not have flown in higher circles, except as a deceptive gambit:

Over-estimation of their power and misinterpreted dynastic interests still drive them to intrigue more or less secretly with Austria against an unification of the German people brought about under the wings of the Prussian eagle.

The time when princely politics dominated Europe is irretrievably lost, and only the princes, who know how to promote the properly understood interests of their peoples, will like to maintain their high position.

In the fraternization of the German people's tribes, their welfare and security lie both internally and externally; it will take place because the preservation of the whole is in urgent demand, and because it has become a law of necessity! In what way, whether by the power of the spirit, or by the power of the bayonets? It will depend on who wins in the fight over error and truth.

We believe that, abstractly conceived, man can be well in every form of government, but always only in one which corresponds to his inclinations, his degree of education and his interests.

For a republican form of government inclination and political education are completely absent; hence it is an impossibility for now! The same can be said of the absolute form of government, **so there remains only the monarchical, more or less democratic-constitutional, or refined estates**, and after it the red republic, anarchy, popular despotism and terrorism. For the latter, a not insignificant part of the people is very susceptible; therefore, this party must be opposed by a strong structure, which, as it seems, lacks the material; for there is unity to this, and there is still conflict and error in every corner!

It is an impossibility *for now*. Later, who knows? Well, it did eventually arrive. Not without rivers of blood. He is of course quite right to be concerned with the popular despotism of the Masonic lodges, student confederations and similar expressions of civil society (which we are led to believe by some that it represents the pinnacle achievement of our race — God forbid!)...

Nonetheless, yet another sign we are dealing with a true Junker: he is anti-absolutist. He explicitly prefers the monarchical system of "refined estates," which although he unusually and curiously dubs them as being "democratic-constitutional" (perhaps for a carefully restricted subset of the demos), it

might perhaps be written off to an Anglophilic quirk or to an idiosyncratic expression of his. Yet, the meaning is clear.

The statement that “The time when princely politics dominated Europe is irretrievably lost” is the same as that echoed by Hitler nearly 80 years later as quoted above, but far less true of Buelow-Cummerow’s time than of Hitler’s, and coming from a Junker’s pen it sounds far more disingenuous.

Next, he asserts Austrian goals of Eastern and Central European hegemony to level the Magyars:

Austria knows that Prussia is strong enough to suppress the turmoil in Germany for now, so that there is nothing to fear from this side. She therefore allows her policy to run its course, and seeks to use the jealousy of many German princes against Prussia in order to prevent a closer imperial union and a free constitution of the German people. If this succeeds, she hopes to occupy the Magyars and through the assistance of the Muscovites, to restore the old confederation.

Hungary has hitherto celebrated with its kings an independent empire in the great European group of nations, and without wishing to judge here to what extent Hungary for its part has broken the treaty with his kings, by no means is the emperor of Austria entitled to arbitrarily destroy the constitution summoned by its ancestors, and to turn it into an Austrian province.

Of its fragmentation:

As strong as Austria was kept to the outside, she did not escape the searching glance that she lacked all inner strength. Austria consisted of a conglomerate of individual nations, united with the most varied of nationalities by nothing but by the imperial scepter; and while Hungary had such a free constitution that the government lacked almost any influence, other provinces could only be obeyed by military power. In addition, a proud aristocracy resisted any internal reform, and financial resources were almost exhausted.

Buelow-Cummerow was really playing with fire with these statements, because they are in fact indicative of the same “Red Republic” he claims to be opposing. As if the “imperial scepter” is necessarily deficient, and as if Hungary’s relationship to Austria was anything but a typical personal union of the era, first regulated by the Treaty of Speyer in 1570 between the Holy Roman Emperor and the Prince of Transylvania. If the Austro-Hungarian union was unacceptable, then all dynastic politics in general would have to also be included, including the Hohenzollerns’.

Prussia itself encompassed Pomerania, Posen/Poznan, Silesia, Danzig and other settlements dating to the Northern Crusades, which contained plenty of Polacks and West Slavs. To moan about foreign domination is to shoot yourself in the foot.

Nonetheless, we must note that Buelow-Cummerow’s vision was not especially bellicose. Unlike the National Socialists who would later be labeled as the outcome of a culture of “Prussian militarism,” he wasn’t very expansionist, and had no nostalgia for the Ostsiedlung like the Nazis did, although of course part of this is because Prussia already had a sizable portion of the Ostdeutsch in its boundaries to begin with. His practical policies are simply to intensify the existing Prussian customs union (Zollverein) into a regional economic bloc/free trade zone, and to closely cooperate with willing allies of a Prussian-led German confederation. All in all, not something Frau Merkel would object to.

(He concludes on a rather more ominous yet somewhat frivolous speculation about a war with Russia. Get this: he suggests in such a hypothetical event that the war be financed by auctioning off state property, including forests. I told you he’s a Junker.)

We cannot entirely discount the thesis of internal Austrian ethnic tumult, although it is quite overrated and clichéd as an explanation — but this isn't the place to talk about it. Actually, his emphasis on the “poor downtrodden Magyars” was misplaced, for it was the Hungarians who really won with the Ausgleich of 1867 after the end of Baron von Bach's era of neoabsolutism — which, incidentally, is one of the few historical examples of the Minotaur actually contracting itself voluntarily.

(Certainly, maintaining unitarism in such a case was to be preferred over the option of a more thorough federalization, as the Prussians themselves mostly did — up to resorting to ethnic cleansing, resettlement and “internal recolonization.” Count Karl Sigmund von Hohenwart (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Count_Karl_Sigmund_von_Hohenwart)'s proposals were struck down, mostly for the better, albeit without suitable follow-up.)

National ideas do not surface from some mere byproduct of inclusive fitness maximization, but from the conscious goal-driven machinations of elite strata to usurp authority. Buelow-Cummerow's pamphlet offers a good glimpse to how the German nationalist idea, in diluted form, worked its way up to men with otherwise feudal-aristocratic sensibilities, disdainful of the Turnvereine and other such mass movement nationalist societies. In the end, however, Buelow-Cummerow's particular vision would be quickly swept aside in favor of something much more malignant and awful: Bismarck's blood and iron...

This entry was posted in [Historical insights](#), [Monarchy](#), [Nationalism](#). Bookmark the [permalink](#).

3 thoughts on “The transition from Prussian conservatism to German nationalism”

1. Pingback: [The transition from Prussian conservatism to German nationalism | Reaction Times](#)
2. Pingback: [Kaiser Wilhelm I on the eve of the March Revolution | Carlsbad 1819](#)
3. Pingback: [Old and new conservatism \(1852\) | Carlsbad 1819](#)

[Website Built with WordPress.com.](#)