

PRUSSIAN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

ITS PRINCIPLES AND IMPLICATIONS

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PREFACE

In addition to the legal obligations which attach to citizenship in any State, whatever its form of government, there are moral obligations which increase in force in proportion to the merits of that government and the beneficence of its rule. But especially great are the moral obligations which rest upon the citizen when, as in the United States, he is given a participating voice in the determination of public policies; for the welfare of the country is thus vested, not in the hands of a few men, but in the people themselves. Upon their intelligent judgment the decision must be founded whether or not the Nation shall be guided by the highest ideals of justice and humanity, and the actions of its government wisely conceived and efficiently executed. Citizenship in a free State thus carries with it greater obligations than are implied in a State autocratically governed—a higher degree of popular education and general intelligence, a keener sense of moral obligation to one's fellow men, and a correspondingly greater willingness to make the personal sacrifices



PREFACE

which are needed if the experiment of republican rule is to be a success.

A person is, however, not qualified to play his part as a citizen of a free State unless he knows and is in agreement with the political ideals of the community of which he is a member. The American people, individually, and as a body politic, are committed to certain ideals of right and justice, not only as regards their dealings with one another and with their own government, but as regards their obligations to the other peoples of the world. At the present time they are waging a war with their entire strength against forces which are antagonistic to these ideals, and which, if not successfully resisted, will render impossible the recognition and free application of these principles of national and international jurisprudence which, they are convinced, must be upheld if the soul of the world is to be saved. If then, this great struggle is to be carried on with wide open eyes, it is essential that Americans should not see through a glass as darkly, but face to face with the true significance of the principles of public conduct against which they are contending.

The nature of the acts which these opposing political principles have been made to justify has been

PREFACE

demonstrated during the last four years by the acts of the Prussian State; indeed it has been revealed throughout the history of that Nation. The principles themselves have found repeated and unqualified statement in the speeches and writings of Prussia's statesmen, publicists, preachers, poets, and university professors. Many of these statements have been made available in English translation to the American people in the volume entitled "Out of Their Own Mouths," and in the brochure "Conquest and Culture," compiled by Wallace Notestein and E. E. Stoll and issued by the Committee on Public Information.

Notwithstanding the candor with which they have been avowed, and the consistency with which they have been applied, so atrocious are they in character, so shocking to the fundamental ideas of justice, truth and humanity, that many of us have found it almost impossible to believe that any intellectually enlightened and christianized people could sincerely hold them. That the Prussian people do accept these doctrines is, however, certain, and the purpose of the present volume is to explain how this has come about. This it will attempt to do by showing how these several principles are related to one another and are logi-

PREFACE

cal deductions from the general political philosophy which has for years been dominant in Prussia. The means whereby it has been possible to indoctrinate the body of the people with the views which those in control of the Prussian Government have, for their own purposes, desired to have accepted, will also be explained.

The philosophy which is dealt with has found acceptance throughout the German States, but is here spoken of as Prussian because it has been peculiarly the product of Prussian thought and practice, its extension being due to the dominating political influence which Prussia has exercised. As Treitschke says in his "Politics," quoting a remark of Emperor William I to Bismarck, "The Empire is nothing but an expanded Prussia."

How far the theories described in this volume may properly be spoken of as characteristic of Austrian-Hungarian thought it is not necessary to consider. The Dual Kingdom has had domestic problems and international operations, which explain her actions independently of a political philosophy such as is needed to give meaning and logical coherence to the actions and utterances of Germany; and it would seem that Germany has utilized the ambitions of her

PREFACE

Ally to obtain her coöperation in the realization of her own *Weltpolitik*. Austria-Hungary is of course predominantly Roman Catholic and, as Rohrbach asserts, there is a natural conflict between Catholicism and the national idea of a State such as Prussia stands for.

In order that a proper application of the Prussian political philosophy, from the American point of view, may be obtained, it has been deemed desirable to open the discussion with a brief statement of the political ideals which Americans consider fundamental.

The chapter entitled "Tendencies Towards Responsible Government in Germany" is by Professor Walter J. Shepard, which, though published several years ago in the *American Political Science Review*, has needed but the addition of a few paragraphs to make it applicable to the present situation. He has kindly given his consent to its use in this volume.

Throughout the volume the author has not hesitated to make liberal use of articles which he has published in the *American Political Science Review* and the *American Journal of International Law*. He has also borrowed from a chapter contributed by him to a volume entitled "Problems of Readjustment After the War," published in 1915.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I AMERICAN POLITICAL IDEALS	1
II THE GERMAN WELTANSCHAUUNG	29
III THE PRUSSIAN THEORY OF THE STATE.	51
IV THE PRUSSIAN THEORY OF MONARCHY	64
V PRUSSIAN CONSTITUTIONAL THEORY	94
VI PRUSSIA'S CONSTITUTIONAL SYSTEM	115
VII TENDENCIES TOWARD MINISTERIAL RE- SPONSIBILITY IN GERMANY	129
VIII PROPAGANDA	157
IX CONCLUSION	186
APPENDIX	201

PRUSSIAN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

CHAPTER I

AMERICAN POLITICAL IDEALS.

The present great struggle now being waged has been justly termed a World War, not simply because nations in the four quarters of the globe are parties to it, but because it is, essentially viewed, a contest between doctrines of political right and political purpose which vitally concerns all the peoples of the world. These opposing systems of political philosophy do not exhibit merely minor differences, but are fundamentally opposed to each other. Furthermore their premises and conclusions do not have merely speculative interest, but lead to widely differing constitutional doctrines and political practices.

It may be assumed that the premises of American political life are known to those who accept and apply

PRUSSIAN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

them. The statement of them in this chapter will therefore be as brief as possible and is made only for the purpose of showing the contrasts to them exhibited by Prussian political theories whose premises and logical implications are not perhaps as well known to us, but whose atrocious practical applications have continued to appear since the outbreak of the war in the summer of 1914.

Not every person can be said to be a philosopher, but every person who gives any thought to the meaning of human existence, necessarily formulates for himself certain standards of conduct and seeks the realization of certain ends which find their source in a philosophy of life even though that philosophy never finds complete and explicit formulation in his own mind.

So it is, also, with Nations. If the search be made, it will be found that their policies are determined by certain ends which they are seeking to realize, and that they justify these ends to themselves, and the means which they employ in attaining them, by fundamental conceptions regarding the nature of political authority, coupled sometimes with a

AMERICAN POLITICAL IDEALS

belief in the possession by themselves of special virtues or qualifications. These fundamental conceptions which together constitute their political philosophy, supply the test or touchstone for determining not simply the expediency but the rightfulness of the acts of their governments.

In this chapter, then, the attempt will be made to state in a succinct manner the political ideals for which the American people stand to the end that, by contrast, the character of the political theories and motives of the Prussian people may be more clearly seen.

The General Welfare of the Governed the Sole End of Government.—American political philosophy finds itself squarely upon the proposition that the sole end for which political rule is established and maintained is the welfare of the governed. The Declaration of Independence declares that all men are endowed by their creator with inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, and that to secure them, governments are instituted among men. The Constitution of the United States in its very forefront declares that the Union is formed "to establish justice, insure domestic tranquillity, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare,

PRUSSIAN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

and secure the blessing of liberty to ourselves and our posterity." And the same purposes support the governments of the individual States of the Union.

It is, then, fundamental to American political thought that there cannot be a welfare of the State, which can be distinguished from the welfare of the governed, collectively or distributively viewed. Upon this point it will be found that the American and Prussian theories stand in essential opposition. The Prussian theory, it will be found, holds that the State is a corporate entity or person, whose well-being or even prestige should be sought for as an end in itself. The American doctrine holds that the individual should render patriotic and self-sacrificing service to his State, but this is because, by so doing, the welfare of the whole body of citizens will be advanced and the true moral self of the individual himself realized. This point is so important that it will be well worth while to dwell a moment upon it.

True Basis of Patriotism.—By all ethical thinkers, including even the most extreme individualists, it is believed that men cannot realize their potentialities as rational and moral beings except in more or less close social relationships with one another. And, except by the out-and-out anarchist, it is believed

AMERICAN POLITICAL IDEALS

that this necessary social life cannot be effectively maintained except as the community or social group gives to itself a political organization; that is, establishes and maintains a government endowed with authority and power to exercise coercion over those persons who refuse to make their acts conform to the established rules or standards of life. The philosophical justification for the existence of coercive political authority need not be here stated, for, as has been already said, it is denied only by a very few extremists, and, at any rate, is not at issue in the war that is now being waged. Americans and their Allies, as strongly as do the Prussians, uphold the ethical right of the State to existence, and the moral as well as the legal obligation of the individual to render service to it. The only difference is as to ends or purposes to be realized, through collective political effort, and, therefore, the demands that may properly be made upon the individual by those in political authority.

It is admitted by all that regard by individuals for the welfare of others furnishes the essential basis of morality. Genetic psychologists are, indeed, inclined to accept the proposition that the very ideas of right and wrong are a social product; that is, that

PRUSSIAN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY.

the individual could not come to conceive of himself as a being with moral rights and obligations if he were not brought into association with others of his kind.

It results, then, if we start from the proposition that it is the duty of every individual to seek to realize those ends which his reason tells him are spiritually desirable, that that best good must be stated in social terms—that in seeking his own ethical self-realization, the individual must strive for the welfare of humanity, regard being had for future as well as present generations. But, though thus necessarily given a social content, it remains true that the individual, as a rational and ethically obligated being, must ever seek what he conceives to be his own best good. He feels compelled to have regard for the interests of others because his reason tells him that only thus can he perform those duties which he owes to himself. And these other than immediately selfish interests have this claim upon him because they relate to persons who, like himself, are rational and moral beings.

This conception, then, of social or political obligation, furnishes no logical ground for a claim of service or self-sacrifice upon the part of the individ-

AMERICAN POLITICAL IDEALS

ual in order to advance the welfare of the social or political community in which he lives except in so far as that welfare is a summation of the interests of its individual members, or an essential element in the welfare of humanity as a whole. Hence it follows that a political philosophy which teaches that the welfare of a particular State is to be sought as an end in itself is necessarily false.

Consent of the Governed.—A second fundamental principle of American political philosophy is contained in the ethical proposition, stated in the Declaration of Independence, that governments owe their existence and derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, and that therefore “whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.”

By implication the doctrine thus declared denies that there can be monarchs or other rulers who have an inherent or divinely given right to exercise political authority. The doctrine also carries with it the proposition that all governments should be so organ-