

# Political Duties of the German Youth

by Oswald Spengler

Speech given on the 26<sup>th</sup> of February 1924

translated by Monophthalmos

## Preface

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of February 1924, Oswald Spengler held a speech at the university of Würzburg, originally founded in 1402, to a large conference of students. He spoke – as he always did – freely, with just a few bullet points penned down. Accordingly, the following text is not based on a manuscript for the speech, which never existed, but on a transcript that Spengler slightly edited before the publication. Save for maybe a few corrected grammatical errors and slips, this is what Spengler said that day. It must have been quite an experience for the crowd: Spengler, tall by nature, large by nurture, most likely clad in his usual dark suits from heavy cloth, expensive and slightly old fashioned. His voice, a deep bass, was never recorded on any occasion and is lost to the ages. Three pieces of historical context are to be taken into consideration to assess how the speech impacted Spengler's audience.

The multi-faceted crisis of the Weimar Republic reached its preliminary zenith in late 1923. The most obvious facet was of course the hyperinflation. The German *Mark* was replaced with a nationwide emergency currency, the so called *Rentenmark* on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November 1923 and a new regular currency, the *Reichsmark* was established on the 30<sup>th</sup> of August 1924. In any case, the economic situation of the average citizen started to improve from November 1923 onward. Secondly, a number of uprisings and attempted coups happened throughout the final months of 1923, the authority of the German government was put to the test. The most famous of these uprisings was of course an attempted coup headed by Adolf Hitler and Erich Ludendorff on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of November 1923 that started in Munich, where Spengler resided since 1911. Spengler knew Ludendorff personally, being an occasional guest of the former general for tea time. The coup itself, ill-prepared and hasty, presented the various factions of the dissident right in Weimar Germany with a binary choice: to join or not to join? The result was a deep rift and mutual accusations, paralysis and demoralisation. Incidentally, the day of Spengler's speech in Würzburg was also the first day of the trial for high treason against Hitler in Munich. Though neither Hitler nor Ludendorff are mentioned in the speech, Spengler's implicit critique of the two was unmistakable.

Finally, Hans von Seeckt, commander in chief of the German army, the *Reichswehr*, needs to be addressed. While von Seeckt had on one hand been essential in the establishing of the new army and guarantor of what little stability the young Weimar Republic had, he also repeatedly toyed with the idea of assuming power himself and installing a "*Direktorium*" [Directorate]. Spengler met von Seeckt in Berlin on the 20<sup>th</sup> of September 1923 with Spengler being a possible candidate to become minister of education or propaganda in this directorate. The meeting did not go well. As a reaction to the coup attempt in Munich, head of state *Reichspräsident* Friedrich Ebert gave von Seeckt extraordinary emergency powers on the evening of the 8<sup>th</sup> of November. Hans von Seeckt moved quickly and subdued the various uprisings throughout Germany. He also banned the Communist party (KPD, re-established a few weeks later), as well as the NSDAP (re-established in 1925) and a number of smaller groups. He voluntarily gave up his emergency powers on the 13<sup>th</sup> of February 1924 because he feared hostile reactions by Entente powers and was convinced that a civilian government was still needed to make various social and economic reforms. In effect, Hans von Seeckt, a conservative and monarchist general, had been dictator of Germany for about three months and then willingly gave up power.

These events were current affairs for Spengler and his audience. The Weimar Republic had survived and repelled all immediate threats. While many Germans were certainly happy about this turn of events, the enemies of the Weimar Republic – whether they had any sympathies for one of the uprisings of 1923 or not – were disappointed, as the unbeloved system had gained relative stability. Opponents of the Weimar Republic of all colours had to acknowledge that their approaches had failed. They all had to ask themselves: What is to be done? Where do we go from here? Thus, when Spengler took the stage on February 26<sup>th</sup> and indirectly addressed the questions stated above in his speech on the “*Political Duties of the German Youth*”, he was likely speaking on one of the most pressing issues of the day for his audience.

Who was this audience? A conference of the “*Hochschulring Deutscher Art*” [University Association of German Character], a nationalist student union that was founded in 1920. It had strong *völkisch* leanings and voluntarily disbanded itself in July 1933. The “HDA” had considerable influence among students during the 1920’s but started to lose ground to the “*National Socialist German Students’ League*” after 1926. The HDA was fairly radical, for example supporting the coup attempt by Hitler and Ludendorff. One phrase needs to be highlighted: Spengler repeatedly mentions the “*nationale Bewegung*” [national movement]. This does not refer to any specific organisation, it is a broad term that encapsulates all the scattered nationalist movements, parties, clubs, protagonists, politicians and militias and so on that opposed the Weimar Republic and liberal democracy from a rightist point of view. Attempts to unite the “*nationale Bewegung*” were made repeatedly, at times even with Spengler involved, which never came to fruition, although many elements of course were later absorbed by the NSDAP, while others were crushed or marginalized.

After these introductory remarks, a few words regarding the practice of the translation seem prudent. First of all, it is to be noted that this is a layman’s translation, even worse, it is a layman’s first attempt at translating any kind of longer text. To avoid possible pitfalls, I stuck to the source material very faithfully. Due to the text ultimately being a transcript of spoken words, some sentences are a bit long winded and meandering. I resisted the temptation to restructure passages into more concise sentences, even though it would have made the text easier to translate and easier to read, possibly a more pleasant read too. The original text contains four footnotes which all point the reader to passages in “*The Decline of the West*”. Since they are most likely not of any use to anyone that does not have the original revised German edition with which Spengler worked in 1924, I have decided not to include them. The text was later republished in Spengler’s 1932 compilation “*Politische Schriften*” [Political Writings]. More information on that can be found in a short bibliography of Spengler’s writings that, to my knowledge, have not yet been translated into English, which you can find in the appendix to this translation. You can also find an image of the original front cover of the 1924 printed version of this speech. Naturally, some words did pose more of a problem than others, certain peculiarities of Spengler’s style inevitably get lost in translation. As I mentioned above, the syntax was already a bit awkward in the original text and I generally did not try to alleviate this.

Gentlemen!

Germany is currently in a state of delusive calmness. The mercantile proficiency of one individual surprisingly managed to – superficially – stop the abysmal collapse of our economy, insofar as it related to the decay of our currency, but that sufficed to evoke in widest circles the view that the situation of our people had genuinely changed.<sup>1</sup> We are so destitute, have become so impoverished and have lost any scale for greatness and dignity, due to the breakdown of our might and aspirations and what has superseded them in the past five years, that the mere fact of our individual petty business lives having become more tranquil, is more than enough to give millions the impression that everything is back in order now.

On the other hand, we experience a charade that is even more depressing. We have forgotten and unlearned what we as a people used to be amidst the nations of the world. Not only are we destitute, we have also lost our honour. The manly right, which is granted to the smallest of nations, to defend oneself with gun in hand, has been taken from us.<sup>2</sup> We no longer rank among the sovereign nations. We are the mere object of the will, the hatred and the ravenousness of others. While armies and fleets for new decisions are geared up around the world, we pay a French army on German soil with German money – that is our anti-militarism.<sup>3</sup> And how many are there among us, to whom this is a burning shame? To countless it's a state with which one can and must arrange themselves, to build a little piece of private happiness in its shade and it works. Under the system of government, we've had for five years now, you can live superbly despite the misery and shame – if you're part of it. Through the parties and government bodies thousands are nurtured by remunerations and good connections and thousands absolutely do not consider the state of their private dealings to be needing a change.

The German youth does not share these views. It may be the most consolatory of the consoling streaks of our present time, that this acceptance of a shameful fate is more unpopular among the youth of our educated classes than among any other social stratum, despite the nameless misery in which they largely live, and therein lies for me the hope, that the Germans, as the youngest and least spent nation of Europe, will someday, through the emerging generation, play a role that matches their inner strength, their nonetheless unbroken health and their creative character again.

Should this mission, which in my deepest belief is reserved for them, ever be fulfilled, the youth must realize how infinitely tough, long and exhausting this path is, how little they may ease it for themselves, and how much there is to know and master, to find the ascent to a greater future for a poor and disarmed country. It is your sacred duty, Gentlemen, to not just get excited but to educate yourselves for this. The mere resolve leads to nothing. Politics is a difficult and hard to learn art.

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<sup>1</sup> Spengler is probably referring to Hjalmar Schacht, who became president of the German national bank, the "*Reichsbank*", in late December of 1923.

<sup>2</sup> This of course alludes to the restrictions that the Treaty of Versailles had placed on the German army.

<sup>3</sup> After the First World War, several regions of Germany were occupied by Entente troops, the Rhineland from 1919-1930, the Ruhr District from 1923-1925. Germany had to cover the expenses of this occupation. Further anger was caused in Germany by the French also using African colonial troops and the French support for various, unsuccessful separatist movements in the occupied areas.

To discern the means and ends our fatherland calls for, one needs a firm view on this world in its immense tensions. The war has not alleviated the state of the world. The grand questions were deferred, transformed but not resolved. And due to its geographical misfortune, military powerlessness and complete isolation, Germany's fate is dependent on external developments to such a degree, that confining this view to domestic affairs and ideals equates failure.

For the great historical becoming and passing the World War means a cut as deep as the time of Napoleon.<sup>4</sup> It shaped the political and military forms of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, just as the War of the Spanish Succession those of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the World War those of the 20<sup>th</sup>. One needs to know this in order to understand how endlessly much has become impossible that used to be natural before 1914. Try to imagine what the world used to look like in those days, when the Storming of the Bastille happened and then when after the Battle of Waterloo, the Congress of Vienna attempted the reordering of Europe for the coming century. The state system of the 18<sup>th</sup> century fought with very small paid professional armies. 10-20,000 men already constituted a force. Accordingly, the cabinets were quick to deploy such quantities of soldiers. The hostilities were so marginal in terms of space and expenditures, that in the larger countries nobody was concerned with a war that was waged at some border, barring the directly ravaged territories. The political and economic losses were insignificant, even after years and in case of defeat and by the conventions of the times, the peace treaties were even in the worst cases so mild, that any government promptly preferred to resolve even conflicts of minor importance with arms. The mercenary armies<sup>5</sup> had little personal and spiritual connection with the general population, thus the losses had hardly an impact on the mood of these nations. The "people" did not wage the wars of these days at all. Even the Battle of Rossbach, though it inspired German patriotism, was not won by the people.<sup>6</sup>

Then came the time of the revolution and Napoleon: The professional armies became popular armies, that incorporated the entire youth of a people; thousands become hundreds of thousands, and at the end of the Napoleonic era, mass armies stand on European soil, whose numbers would have seemed madness twenty years before. And now since Waterloo something very odd occurs.<sup>7</sup> After old-style diplomacy had redrawn the map of Europe, the mass armies were not sent home; they remained mobilized and it was the concept of the standing army that dominated the political situation and its forms worldwide for a full century. Armies, into which every able-bodied youngling was drafted in rapid succession, armies, connected to the populace through thousandfold kinship, that were their most precious, their pride and their concern, stood from Spain to Russia, numbering hundreds of thousands, eventually millions, ready to march, viewless, a terrible, blind, ever sharpening tool, wielded by governments, so that the choice of responsible diplomacy to move from negotiations to an uncertain

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<sup>4</sup> Spengler was quite fond of Napoleon and had a duplicate of Napoleons death mask hanging above his desk next to one of Frederick the Great.

<sup>5</sup> Mercenary is used as a metaphor and not in the literal sense here.

<sup>6</sup> The Battle of Rossbach (1757) against French and Austrian troops was one of the most brilliant victories of Frederick the Great.

<sup>7</sup> It's noteworthy that Spengler uses the name Waterloo and not the name "Battle of Belle-Alliance", that was frequently used by conservative and nationalist Germans until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Since the winner of a battle has the right to determine its name, calling it the Battle of Belle-Alliance implicitly asserts that it wasn't Wellington that won the battle, but rather that Blücher's contribution was at least of equal importance.

bloody decision became increasingly rare and difficult. And while before 1848 a declaration of war was a resort in some cases, since then the inclination prevailed to seek congresses and visits by monarchs, to evade a conclusion rather than seek them. And since actual solutions can rarely be found that way, least of all in serious cases, since the end of the American Civil War (1865) and the Battle of Sedan<sup>8</sup> we witnessed the spectacle that all great conflicts, that the relentless course of history evoked, were postponed and set aside. Because now technological inventions, the use of trains, of telegraphy, equipment and mobility in vast spaces had changed armies to such a degree that nobody could foresee the nature of the “*war of the future*” with certainty, all calculations had become questionable and the responsibilities became so tremendous, that a diplomatic style emerged that can be described as a style fearful of decisions.

But now that these mass armies have been partially exhausted and challenged to the utmost limits of their capacity, the forms of political action have undergone a fundamental change and we now face the fact, that the conditions of the past decade seem in no way comparable to the future. We have to get used to the idea that the phenomenon of standing armies is irrevocably a thing of the past. It's wholly insignificant if this or that state in Europe, or even all of them have standing armies, if universal conscription is abolished or not. It's a fact that today, under the outer forms of old standing armies, within or outside the existing structures, something new is emerging everywhere. Covenants of men that are willing to risk their lives out of dedication for a cause, fellowships of creed, forged not by conscription but an idea. This was already possible in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and we've seen it 1870 and especially 1914,<sup>9</sup> but it wasn't included in the idea of an army. We're approaching a time where a general mobilization of the fighting-aged men can't be expected anywhere in Europe, not even in France,<sup>10</sup> only an appeal to all who'd stand up for a cause voluntarily. Committees, circles, covenants like the Action française and the Fascists which consider this to be their actual purpose are emerging within and behind the standing troops everywhere and thus small armies will reemerge on European soil, armies for which now one's own conviction or the veneration of a leader is pivotal. By the very nature of standing armies, political convictions did not play a role on duty; by the very nature of these future combat units such convictions go beyond the organization and gain influence over the politics of the country at large. A glance at Italy, France, Russia and other countries proves how far this development has already progressed. But because of this we have to expect an entirely new form of relations between states, one that has a vastly different manner of deciding to take up arms, much more candid and blanking out diplomacy if need be. One needs to know this when pondering Germany's future.

But the changes go further. When the size of standing armies made a decision on European ground itself ever more dangerous and opaquer, a resort was found, that today is still practically concealed under the name colonial policy. The increasingly hasty seizing of vast stretches on foreign continents

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<sup>8</sup> The decisive battle of the Franco-Prussian war. Its anniversary, the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September, was a national holiday in Imperial Germany and many streets were named after the battle.

<sup>9</sup> At the outbreak of the war in 1914 Germany experienced a previously unknown level of patriotism and unity. This was later dubbed the “*Spirit of 1914*” and intellectuals spoke vaguely of “*Ideas of 1914*”, as an antithesis to the “*Ideas of 1789*”, without however agreeing to a trinity like “*Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*”. Spengler addresses this in “*Prussianism and Socialism*”.

<sup>10</sup> Spengler greatly overestimated the French geopolitical power in this period.

occurred seemingly for economic reasons and initially they certainly dominated. Since the mid-century however, the hunger for colonial possessions was no longer caused by a demand for resources and sales outlets alone, but also by the fact that standing fleets emerged alongside standing armies. In the days of Napoleon these armadas were still composed of wooden ships with sails. They were generally tied to coastal waters and depended on wind and weather. But since the American Civil War (1861-65) they were equipped with steam engines, armoured and armed with heavy calibres: a completely new terrifying weapon, not yet tested in large proportions, that created the continuously growing fear in diplomacy, that it might make the fate of a country completely dependent on it. Hence colonial politics became a possibly wholly unintentional device of avoiding or pre-empting a maritime decision. Just as land warfare had been virtually replaced by the speed of army expansions and the inventions of new weaponry, so that an edge in armaments equalled a victory, possibly forcing a diplomatic success, the "*naval war of the future*", outlined in advance a thousand times, was supplanted again and again by the race for theatres and bases for battles never fought. England understood this first. In actuality, the colonial expansion in Africa and Asia has ultimately been aimed at coastlines of strategic importance. When China was partitioned into spheres of influence (since 1894) basically only ports and estuaries, that could serve as bases for modern fleets were concerned. Therein lies the grave importance of Malta, Aden and Singapore. Ultimately the result was that a high seas fleet would already have won a conflict if it firmly controlled all relevant coastal areas, so that the opposing fleet couldn't even be deployed. Remember the problem how the Russian fleet was supposed to even reach Japan in 1905, when the English ports refused to let them replenish their coals. An English prime minister once proclaimed that the borders of England came to an end where the shores of other nations begin. This was absolutely correct for fifty years. But thereby the English fleet had already won all future maritime wars and the World War too. The system of bases triumphed for them. This was an evasion of the decision through mass armies on land. And therein too, a fundamental change has occurred. The immense implications of this have hardly been noticed so far, but it might dominate world politics for decades. The past situation was based on the fact that the mainland of Africa and Asia and actually of South America and Australia too, were politically completely passive: the strategic value of a coast was determined by the sea, not the hinterland.

Currently a transformation is taking place in Africa that would have been deemed impossible until recently. When Napoleon undertook his expedition to Egypt, he had to rely on luck that his fleet would arrive unimpeded and once it got destroyed, he was confined to Egypt. Nowadays, France is methodically pursuing the militarization of the African continent. Via the introduction of compulsory service, hundreds of thousands of negroes are militarily trained from Tunis to the Senegal; a strategic network of railways is nascent between Algiers, the Sudan and Lake Chad, so an overland route exists that already allows for the transportation of armies from Morocco to the Guinea Coast and one day to Egypt or the Congo. Their deployment in the World War has made the negroes conscious of their strength and solidarity. A growing self-esteem pervades them all, from the Senegalese to the Kaffirs and it's constantly fanned with propoganda that originates from the American negroes. Thereby an entire continent is entering the sphere of active politics, even more so because Islam is proselytizing the negroes north of the equator with tremendous success and not just their weltanschauung, they're also

awoken politically and incorporated into a colossal invisible system that spans from Bagdad to China, from Mecca to the Atlantic Ocean. Whether these novel forces will, in a pivotal moment, side with the English, the French or someone else is an opaque question, on which infinitely much depends. It is a fact, however, that to the south of Europe a vast territory has been awoken from its slumber and included in world politics, this could outweigh European quarrels under certain conditions.

Exactly the same applies to Asia. In the East, the 19<sup>th</sup> century was governed by the fact that Russia, from Poland to the Amur, was considered, by itself and others, to be a European state. Today we have the sense that beyond the Vistula enormous masses of people are in a state of spiritual arousal and nobody can predict what effects they might cause. I shall give one example: Around 1920 the Baron von Ungern-Sternberg appeared in Central Asia as a commander of volunteers and before long he managed to assemble an army of supposedly 150,000 men, unconditionally loyal to him, exquisitely armed and trained, that he could have led against any target. Shortly thereafter the man was murdered by the Bolsheviks. Had this not succeeded, it would be imponderable what would be happening in Asia today and which shapes the map of the world would already have taken by now.<sup>11</sup> There can be no doubt, that a, so to speak, an Asian national army of a hundred thousand men, standing in Turkestan, would hold complete sway of the fate of Asia. Whether they'd turn against India, China or Persia, with each step they'd find thousands of supporters and no force on this continent would offer serious resistance against an assault of that kind. But thereby the battleground, that during the World War had been limited to Europe and the Western fringes of Russia, has expanded to the entire landmass of the old world. Within a surprisingly short time, this land mass can be entangled in affairs for which the past century offers no example. This may result in an all-encompassing shift for the security of English world power. While the 19<sup>th</sup> century was despite – or rather because of – standing mass armies the true heyday of states that rule the seas and fleets alone decided over the possession of African and Asian lands, the fact of strategic land routes is nascent today.<sup>12</sup> The English position of power was based on sea routes being the only way from England to its possessions in the Indian Ocean and the South Sea. Now, that the great land mass is waking up from its slumber, there are land routes too. But a fleet that finds the land manned has been rendered ineffective. A maritime power, that can no longer influence the hinterland through coastal bases, has ceased to be a force. It is entirely possible that this could fundamentally change the problem of controlling the seas, that new lines of power across gigantic landmasses allow for a new type of continental blockade. Thus, the political meaning of the geographical position of Germany, that hitherto has been such a plight for our nation, could change completely and the post-Bismarck era manoeuvres of foreign policy could be replaced by completely new and surprising aspects.

This political turning is matched by an economic one of equal proportions, that has changed the economic style of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as the Napoleonic era changed that of the 18<sup>th</sup>. Today it's still widely believed that "Marxism" is the real adversary of the existing social and economic order. Over the past

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<sup>11</sup> As impressive a figure Roman von Ungern-Sternberg, „the Mad Baron“, was, Spengler grossly overestimates the military capacities he had. His troops never came close to 150,000 and they certainly weren't exquisitely armed. Spengler used Ungern-Sternberg as an example on several occasions in this time.

<sup>12</sup> Pipelines and highways have given this idea of Spengler new plausibility.



few years, this view has become outdated. The course of economic development reveals a surprising trait, once you rid yourself of the concepts of the economics of the past century, which have been materialistic through and through and examine the facts of the last two hundred years impartially with regards to their deeper meaning. It is incorrect to consider, as Marx and others asserted, the first half of the past century to be the most important age of the modern economy. The real break lies, as the one in the field of military and politics, in the middle of the Napoleonic era. Let it be supposed that someone flew over any European country with a plane in the time of Frederick the Great: beneath him he'd have seen a bustle of people and a host of economically working things, country estates, factories and commercial facilities. It would have been easy to determine which people belonged to these things as owners.<sup>13</sup> If you flew over the same area today, you wouldn't see a fundamental difference with the naked eye: also people and also economically working things. And yet a revolutionary transformation has happened. Today one might be able to say that the national wealth is the property of the nation; but nobody can see the ownership structure between individual people and individual things anymore. The novelty, reaching far deeper than anything that Marx ever observed, is the spiritual separation of ownership and object. Since the French Revolution, the bond<sup>14</sup> is intruding between man and thing in the shape of stocks, shares, mortgages and banknotes. The link of ownership becomes invisible and in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century something has evolved that hadn't been known at all, mobile wealth, independent of locality and objects, only "invested" in properties, ready to be exchanged at any time, characterized only by its amount and not its nature. Today, as ever, a factory can be situated and working in a country, yet nobody knows to whom it belongs, because the attribute of ownership has morphed into the form of several thousand pieces of paper and sticks to them, as they are passed from one hand to the other, from one country to the other, over the course of a few hours, and the introduction of electronic messaging services even allows for the oral exchange of the trait of ownership within minutes to foreign parts of the world, detached even from a visible certificate, so that it can be transferred across the entire world, invisibly and intangibly, while the factory keeps working independently and unsuspecting. From this a fact has emerged, fully fleshed out, that already completely dominates not only the economic but also the political situation. Today we have in Germany, as is the case in all economically developed countries, already more mobile than immobile wealth. More than half of what remains of our national properties is doubtlessly in the hands of people that don't administer the entities they currently own and aren't familiar with them at all, they just "have" it in the shape of papers and agreements, thus being able to reap benefits through commercial exchanges of this property, wholly independent from the productive work that is tied to this entity. National property, as the things within the borders of a nation and national property as the sum of things that the members of a nation "own", have thus become two vastly different parameters. In England the former is smaller, in Germany larger than the latter. Nobody knows how much Germany owns of the German industry. This changes from one trading day to the other. It's therefore no longer the case, that there is a natural antagonism between

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<sup>13</sup> Here Spengler already sets the tone: The connection used to be so strong, the ownership was almost reversed, as if the objects owned the people, rather than the other way around.

<sup>14</sup> Bond is probably the closest approximation of the German word that Spengler used here and whose literal translation would be "value paper", the two-fold meaning is unfortunate here though, because it implies the opposite of what Spengler was getting at: bonds unravelling bonds.

employers and employees, as Marx claimed, namely because he needed a theoretical basis for class struggle; but today rather between people that carry out a visibly productive work, whether as leaders or being led, as entrepreneurs, technicians or workmen, and the much smaller, fluctuating number of unknowns, that are neither this nor that, but simply own the factory, for whom people therefor are working, even though they know nothing about this work. The detachment of the ownership from the factory undermines and poisons the actually productive work of contemporary nations, that adheres to the soil, to fields, mines, manufacturing sites. As long as every factory is owned by a proprietor that takes care of it, we can talk about national work.<sup>15</sup> But mobile wealth, that can be moved from Berlin to New York with one telegram, is no longer national. It has detached from the soil and floats through the air, it's an incalculable factor. Should this development continue in that direction, so that even the last pieces of national wealth get detached from the objects in the economic area, a state of economy is reached that would quickly consume the marrow of even the strongest nation. The predominant part of the Germans, Englishmen and Americans, from the entrepreneur to the casual worker, is already working for people they don't know and who are interchanging unnoticed. The inventor and entrepreneur is also giving his life's work for strangers and so a small number of people<sup>16</sup> is able to play with the respective national assets and thus the nations itself. The mobile wealth standing behind banks, corporations and individual factories has brought political institutions, parties, governments, the press and public opinion under their influence to an extent the public doesn't grasp. In all countries with a developed industry, plantations or extensive trade, they almost dictate the laws regarding profits and taxation. With the slogan "*burdening the strong shoulders*" they have popularized a taxation policy that, responding to their practices, burdens the immobile, thus visible and tangible wealth, sparing the intangible; they push economic legislation into a direction that further and further detaches the national property from the objects and liquifies them to international wealth, even when it's just in the form of loans, to evade the burdens and duties to the detriment of the work that is still attached to locality. This could one day get to the point, where the entire population works without knowing for whom or for what.

This contrast, between ownership in a civic sense and in the manner of the stock exchange, reaches far deeper than the popular one between capitalist and proletarian, to use the catchwords of the past century. Like other countries, Germany possesses a cultivated<sup>17</sup> social class, that, through generations of education, status, spiritual and living culture, acquired something that can't be translated into material terms: an inner level, a height and refinement of spiritual and practical activity, a tradition of accomplishment, comprehension and will, on which the entire spiritual, moral, social, political and also economical footing or the nation rests. This class only exists under the condition, that enough of the national property and the profits it yields, is in their hands, in order for them to be able to continue this education and tradition and secure it for the future. If the property of this class of old families gets

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<sup>15</sup> Following the success of „*The Decline of the West*“, Spengler became friends with Paul Reusch, an old-fashioned captain of (heavy) industry and came into contact with a number of industrialists. These industrialists frequently had an almost feudal relationship with their workers and accordingly many lived in manors, emulating the nobility.

<sup>16</sup> Spengler is not talking about any particular group of people here.

<sup>17</sup> Cultivated not in the sense of cultured but rather in the sense of having been carefully reared over several generations.

undermined and brought down, then a modern nation has lost its best, something that is utterly irreplaceable, the natural centre of gravity in its course of history, the born leaders of the collective existence and keepers of evolved, unlearnable, slowly developed instincts and qualities. This danger is as big in England as it is in Germany. The tax policy that Lloyd George, at that time a left-wing radical, introduced since 1908, especially the stifling surtax and inheritance tax, directed at the immobile wealth, it already is the case today, that a large part of the old families, for which the pursuit of politics represents a noble tradition, was forced to abandon this tradition due to the collapse of their wealth. But thereby the heartland of an ever-endangered global empire is not, as a Socialist would phrase it, relieved of their exploiters and nobles, but of the class whose inherited abilities guarantee the success in great politics for centuries. If they vanish completely, the golden age of dilettantes and careerists' dawns, though financial wealth can come to a mutual understanding with this kind just fine, they cannot govern a large modern state, let alone guide towards greater ambitions. Not just the impoverishment, the elimination of the historically leading social class is the colossal danger of all old cultured nations, the burning danger to present day Germany as well.

If you want to turn Germany's fate, this is where you have to start, free from utopias and phantasms, with precise, sober knowledge of economic relations and great experience, to save what enabled us to build our wealth since 1870, when we became one of the great nations of the world, the actually fundamental element of our people, who was used to working diligently, frugally, honestly, who provided the preconditions for a government with great demands and ambitions, through their talent for organisation, their ingenuity, their disciplined thought and conduct.

Thirdly and most importantly, I ask you to eventually contemplate soberly at last what should be called the art of governance. The concept has been lost to us and not just us. We're talking about popular rights, representative government, will of the people and among the modern fuss of party-drive we have completely forgotten that we're not talking about claiming benefits, we ought to be talking about the exertion of very hard and rare abilities. These abilities must be on hand, either inborn or acquired through long self-discipline, otherwise rights become a crime. Whether a state is in a good position for the ever-hardening struggle for existence and global renown will decide it's future, not if it has a constitution.<sup>18</sup> The state of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was, actually or seemingly, governed by an absolute sovereign and his entourage, according to unwritten rules that over many decades were honed to a high, ethereal art, from which still everything draws that calls itself diplomacy. The principle "Everything for the people, nothing by the people"<sup>19</sup> is then contrasted by the turning of 1789 and its phrase of popular sovereignty, which immediately, as a tragic and characteristic misunderstanding for the time to come, was distorted by the Girondists to not only mean that leading officials should merely execute the actual or alleged will of the people, but that these officials should be selected from their spokesmen, regardless of whether they know something about political management or not. The state council appointed by the prince, that

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<sup>18</sup> Spengler's wordplay here is lost in translation. In German, the word for constitution, "*Verfassung*", has a twofold meaning. Depending on the context it can also mean something like being in shape, stamina, etc. The original, so to speak, differentiates between having a *Verfassung* and being in a good *Verfassung*.

<sup>19</sup> Motto of Joseph II., emperor of the Holy Roman Empire between 1765 and 1790 and archduke of Austria, one of the leading examples of enlightened absolutism.

maintained high standards in even the worst cases, was substituted with elected bodies; the sovereignty of princes gave way to popular sovereignty – a grand idea that cast its inspiring shade over the entire century to come. That century was destined to implement this ideal and today's parliamentarism lays bare how the idea matched up against reality. Bands of honest enthusiasts in American log cabins, in French salons, at German beer tables, who lived and occasionally died for an ideal, turned into bands of professional politicians and careerists, self-proclaimed leaders of the people, that didn't want to live for it, but off it. Parties initially were enthralled units of thought and will. Today, all around the world, they're unions of a few thousand people with a swarm of paid party officials that don't represent public opinion, but evoke, steer and exploit it in line with their personal interests. Popular sovereignty, for which the fathers had shed their blood, has turned into the depressing subordination to a cabal<sup>20</sup>, in American terms, a caucus. The whims, indulgence and folly of princes, as bad as it may have been at times, has been supplanted by worse, and a new Storming of the Bastille would have broken loose against these fellowships a long time ago, if they hadn't brought all preconditions for the first one, the revising of public opinion, popular slogans, electoral propaganda, under their control in time, to keep the masses in a mood that allows them to continue their lifestyle and to secure their profits, from the castles and bribes of French representatives to cars and share packages of German proletarians and the seats on supervisory boards of German philistines from the bourgeois parties, who always get a heads up first.<sup>21</sup>

All nations of the world have a growing disillusionment and deep yearning to be liberated from this pressure of self-serving and dirty interests, from these cohesive organizations, who lord over the vast majority, despite the jugglery of general elections and a free press – that is silent about whom it actually serves – more ruthlessly than any prince of the age of enlightened despotism ever dared, a yearning to see a personage instead of these unions, who doesn't want to get rich, but to govern, based on a feeling of superior abilities, someone who seeks to, as Frederick the Great put it, become a servant of the state, not its beneficiary and not the general manager of a party.<sup>22</sup> This is the end of democracy, not its overthrow, but its irrevocable inner decay, as the husk becomes more and more meaningless, it can be left standing without worry. This wouldn't have been understood before; today it permeates minds wherever you look, in Europe as in America, where the farmer's movement wants basically the same as Italian fascism. The best Germans and not only the Germans, are waiting to see a man rise into whose hands you may put the fate of the nation, with the mandate to dismiss anyone who seeks to curtail this power in the interest of individual groups. The 18<sup>th</sup> century was the one of the liberty of princes; the 19<sup>th</sup> brought the liberty of the people – first as the dawn of an ideal, then, it ought to be said relentlessly, as a mockery of this ideal. In the stead of what became of this liberty, the 20<sup>th</sup> will place the liberty of the

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<sup>20</sup> The word Spengler used here, "Klüngel", is connotated with the city of Cologne, which like other catholic parts of Germany was a stronghold of the Center Party (Zentrumspartei) that constituted the so called "Weimar Coalition" with the Social Democrats (SPD) and the German Democratic Party (DDP), center-left liberals. So Spengler using the word "Klüngel" here is likely at least partially a jab.

<sup>21</sup> In „*Neubau des Deutschen Reiches*“, published a few months after this speech (see the appendix) Spengler wrote very vividly about the corruption and excesses of the Weimar establishment. This led to a brief spat with the editor of the party newspaper of the Social Democrats, who demanded that Spengler produced evidence for his claims which Spengler refused. He likely draws on anecdotal evidence so he may overstate his case, as the Weimar establishment also had lots of idealistic true believers.

<sup>22</sup> Frederick the Great famously said that a ruler should be the "*first servant of the state*".

great personage, the liberty over which Bismarck haggled in vain with parliament, the liberty that Rhodes only found in South Africa; instead of the parties the retinue of individuals, instead of governance as a right that has sunken into filth and folly, governance as art, as purpose, as mission.

These are the images that the world after the war shows to those who have learned to see the facts. Today they still lie in the mist of outdated systems. Tomorrow they will be confirmed by the anointed bearers of novel world politics, bearers on whose existence or nonexistence the fate of entire continents may depend.<sup>23</sup>

Here we stand at the changing of two epochs, disarmed, dishonoured, on the edge of an abyss, with a shattered tradition, cheated out of everything that the skill and lifework of great statesmen had given us, by a villainous revolution under the laughter of all those that feed on the fruits of this revolution at home and abroad. What 30 years of Bismarckian world politics had built has been destroyed. The high form of governmental life that had developed since Frederick William I. is ruined.<sup>24</sup> The fruits of a hundred years of national diligence are razed. More than any other nation, we need to start anew and only the unbowed will and strength that sleeps within us vouch that this will come to pass. This is the challenge of the adolescent generation: To create a new style of political will and action from the newfound conditions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to bring to light new forms, methods and ideas, that, like the ideas of the French Revolution and the customs of the English House of Commons, will serve as a model and spread from country to country, until history will commence with forms whose origin will one day be found in Germany. Here prodigious outlooks appear and to live up to this calling is the demand I have for the youth, for You, who have been hammered into shape by war and revolution, who hunger to creatively shape the future, to see the future as a challenge, Your field. Will You be up to this situation? Have You understood what it entails? I understand Your longing, but do You know the historical duties, that are imposed on You, for being young in this day and age, for becoming men as the resurgence of Germany is decided?

Certainly, we have learned many a thing, that was unfamiliar to us throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. We have learned an autonomous, almost American kind of acting and deciding, that was alien to us before the war, when everybody was waiting for what someone somewhere might want. We have unlearned a good portion of our sentimentality, the old-hag-idealism of the German Michel, who tried to see the enemies' good qualities and understand their reasons unbiased while under their heel.<sup>25</sup> Every lesson

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<sup>23</sup> The phrase that Spengler used here in the original, "*Sein oder Nichtsein*", warrants a closer look: It is the classic German translation of Hamlet's "*To be or not to be*" by the great August Wilhelm von Schlegel. This is not an accident, Spengler ended a different speech he held two months after "*Political Duties of the German Youth*", one that hasn't yet been translated, (it's included in his *Political Writings*, again, see the appendix) by explicitly quoting Hamlet. He specifically said "*In Bereitschaft sein ist alles.*" ["*The readiness is all.*"]. German nationalists in the 19<sup>th</sup> century frequently portrayed Germany as a sleeping nation, personified by the national allegory, the docile and naïve "*Deutscher Michel*" ["*German Michel*"] for whom then in turn Hamlet was used for comparison, for example by the poet Ferdinand Freiligrath. It's safe to assume that the bulk of Spengler's audience in Würzburg that day understood this reference and its context instantaneously.

<sup>24</sup> Here Spengler returns to a point he made extensively in "*Prussianism and Socialism*". He described Frederick William I., Prussian king from 1713-1740, father of Frederick the Great, as the inventor of German socialism and the true architect of the Prussian governmental tradition.

<sup>25</sup> The German Michel, originally *Deutscher Michel* was a national allegory for Germany, primarily in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, akin to the French Marianne and the English John Bull.

of our German education reminds us to our embarrassment of the state of these unworldly fantasies at the time of the Battle of Jena.<sup>26</sup> Late, hopefully not too late, we discovered a piece of national pride within us. The servile attitude, which Bebel<sup>27</sup> once ascribed to most Germans – towards higher-ups, towards other countries, towards the gutter, as he forgot to mention – has withdrawn to the party-cabal that has pursued a foreign policy for five years now of which a beaten dog would have to be ashamed. And we have finally learned something that I shall state for You frankly: the ability to hate. He who cannot hate is not a man, and history is made by men. Its decisions are harsh and cruel and he who thinks he can evade them with understanding and reconciliation is not fit for politics. He will, even if he has the noblest aims and sentiments, bring ruin upon his fatherland. That we Germans have finally learned to hate is one of the few outcomes of these times that might vouch for our future.

But no country, on the other hand, has ever been saved by even the fieriest sentiment and will, and when I ask myself if the German youth can pair its passion with an equal amount of political prowess, understanding for attainable goals and the means necessary for their attainment and practical instinct, the only answer I can come to, I do not hesitate to state this here, is an unreserved no.

Since the war, national politics has been understood as a kind of frenzy. The youth is en masse amazed by colours and badges, by music and parades, by theatrical vows and dilettantish appeals and theories. This without doubt satisfies their feelings, but politics is something else. Successful politics has never been made with the heart alone. And the success is what counts – otherwise there's no sense in this occupation. All great achievements of statecraft and the astute instincts of the people were the result of cool ponderation, tenacious silence and waiting, rigorous self-restraint and most of all categorically foregoing frenzy and extravaganza. Remember how unspeakably lonesome Bismarck was throughout his life, only because in 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany, he alone pursued far-reaching, factual policies silently and cool. *"I recognized in him a political entrepreneur, far superior to anything you could imagine in this regard. He only seems to take into account what is, focussing only on practical solutions, with no regard for anything that does not further a useful purpose"*, said Jules Favre<sup>28</sup> about him in September 1870. *"There are times where you need to govern liberally and times where you need to govern dictatorially, everything is shifting, there are no constants here"*, he said himself in the Reichstag in 1881. In his old age, when every child could see the fruits of his efforts, he was hailed in a thousand Bismarck-celebrations, but where was our academic youth in all these years where he struggled all alone, to build the Germany that in 1914 could even hope to endure the severest war to which ever a country was

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<sup>26</sup> The Battle of Jena, or rather the Battle of Jena-Auerstedt was a twin battle in 1806 and a crushing defeat of the Prussian army at the hands of Napoleon. It decided the War of the Fourth Coalition and led to the humiliating Treaty of Tilsit. Consequentially a number of significant reforms were undertaken in Prussia that enabled Prussia to resume the fight against Napoleon in 1813. It is frequently underestimated to what an extent the period between the Battle of Jena-Auerstedt and the Battle of Waterloo shaped how many contemporary Germans viewed the Weimar Republic.

<sup>27</sup> August Bebel (1840-1913) was an important leader of the worker's movement and the Social Democrats from the 1860's until his death. With a strong will and a heavy hand, he held the party together during its formative years. When Spengler stayed in Berlin for a semester in 1902/3, he visited the Reichstag (parliament) and was impressed by Bebel's speeches. Spengler also prominently mentioned Bebel in *"Prussianism and Socialism"*.

<sup>28</sup> First foreign minister of the Third French Republic from 1870 onward, signatory of the Treaty of Frankfurt that ended the Franco-Prussian War.

subjected? If his king and Kaiser had not retained him and provided him with the full weight of his influence on government affairs against the overwhelming mass of enemies, he'd have failed right from the start and today would be known as a fool and a criminal, as he was called for years by the parties and all estates. The academic youth, in its patriotic fuss, did not understand him any better than anyone else. And now we also need to take a critical look at the kind of excitement of 1813. We are used to viewing this time of great passion as the foundation of Germany's subsequent greatness. But as harsh as it is, it nevertheless needs to be said: What did the political exhilaration of that year yield? Certainly, the defeat of the French, but that was already ensured by the annihilation of the Grande Armée and the Spanish Uprising.<sup>29</sup> It's not blind enthusiasm that creates or saves nations and states, neither today nor in the Germanic primeval forests. For what did Schill's officers sacrifice themselves?<sup>30</sup> For England! For what did our youth suffer in the Wars of Liberation? For England! And for what is the Völkisch Movement of today, blind as they are, act, think, working? For France.<sup>31</sup> Only Goethe's incorruptible eye recognized how aimless the infatuation with freedom was back then, and I urge You, again and again, to read his staggering conversation with Luden in November 1813.<sup>32</sup> The magnificent and equally foolish youth, that would go on to inebriate themselves with old-German garbs<sup>33</sup>, old-German sayings and pipes, romantic festivals like on the Wartburg<sup>34</sup> and at Hambach<sup>35</sup> (with Polish flags at the helm, because the

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<sup>29</sup> This of course refers to the catastrophic failure of Napoleons campaign in Russia in 1812 and his defeat in the Peninsular War.

<sup>30</sup> Ferdinand von Schill (1776-1809) was a Prussian officer who after the collapse of the Prussian army in 1806 formed a volunteer unit, the "*Freikorps Schill*". He waged a guerrilla war against the French until he died fighting in Stralsund in 1809. Eleven of his officers were captured and executed by the French. One of von Schill's men, Ludwig Adolf Wilhelm von Lützow, then went on to raise the "*Lützow'sches Freikorps*" (Lützow Free Corps), whose black uniforms with red embellishments and yellow buttons are one popular theory as to how black, red and gold became national colours for Germany. The most famous member of the Lützow Free Corps was the patriotic poet Theodor Körner, who later died in battle too. von Schill, von Lützow and Körner were patriotic icons, especially among students, who were, so to speak, the vanguard of the romantic nationalism of the 19th century in Germany. The example of von Schill, von Lützow and others is the main reason why the volunteer formations after the First World War were named Freikorps.

<sup>31</sup> In the aftermath of the First World War, France tacitly supported separatist movements in Bavaria and the Rhineland to weaken the German government or even reverse the German unification. The unruly government of Bavaria let Munich become a safe haven for various kinds of radical political movements. For a while the French at least welcomed the Völkisch Movement as a destabilizing factor for the Weimar Republic

<sup>32</sup> Heinrich Luden (1778-1847), was a highly influential German historian in the first half of the 19th century. He propagated a romantic nationalism, inspired by the French Revolution and Rousseau and became one of the mentors of the "*Urburschenschaft*", the nucleus of the fraternities that became a mass phenomenon among German students in the 19th century and thus a direct precursor of the organisation that organised this speech of Spengler. The appeal to Goethe is no accident either, as and Nietzsche were Spengler's intellectual heroes.

<sup>33</sup> In order to decrease the influence of foreign, especially French trends on German clothing, some patriotic Germans, frequently with an academic background, started to wear garments that actively emulated the clothing of 16th century Germany. This was more prominent in protestant parts of Germany and they leaned towards relatively modest, black clothes.

<sup>34</sup> In 1817, to celebrate both the 4th anniversary of the Battle of Leipzig and the 300th anniversary of the reformation, students from all protestant universities in Germany met at the Wartburg, a castle where Martin Luther sought refuge and where he translated the bible. They protested against reactionary policies and demanded German unification. The aforementioned Heinrich Luden participated. A number of books and artifacts were burned that were considered unpatriotic or reactionary.

<sup>35</sup> In 1832 a similar festival was held at Hambach Castle in southwestern Germany. Once again, students and academics made up a large part of the 25,000 participants. While patriotic slogans were present too, protesting reactionary policies and demanding liberal reforms was more important. That's why it's still celebrated in German mainstream politics as a step towards democratization. The November Uprising in Poland (1830/31)

freedom-loving Poles were killing Germans!) – while England with the destruction of the Maratha Empire finally conquered India and turned its eyes towards South America, that had just seceded from Spain, and the English academic youth started to debate tactical questions regarding the global economy and world politics – this youth was nothing but a pawn in the game of great, primarily English diplomacy. It had been unleashed, when it was needed, and ditched, when it had served its purpose for foreign powers. Will or numbers can't prevent this, only spiritual and tactical supremacy. We didn't have a diplomat, and if we'd had one, the national movement wouldn't have understood but failed him.

If You don't want, that the current day enthusiasm for the national cause becomes a tool in the hands of foreign diplomacy and its domestic entourage too, You will need something else than politics of unrestrained zeal. Not making noise against this or that power counts, but surpassing their political aptitude. When I walk through the streets of German cities nowadays and see what kind of gatherings and demonstrations are happening, what kind of posters are hanging on the walls, what kind of badges are worn, what is sung or yelled, how childish theories are replacing economic facts, how much is said and done publicly, that would be thought through geopolitically in secret and then be concealed in any other country, I'm about to despair. I always wonder which hostile power will one day exploit and then ditch this blind, haphazard enthusiasm, which disregards all facts of the world situation. Regarding everything the youth has willed, thought and done in last five years, I can't shake a saying from dark days of German history: *"Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child!"*<sup>36</sup>

We must, however hard it may seem, choose to conduct politics as politics, as it has always been understood, as a tedious, hard, lonely and not very popular art, not as a frenzy or military spectacle. Most of You have borne arms. I remind You that politics is nothing but an art of fencing with cerebral weapons. You know the importance of exercise, skill and cold-bloodedness. You know that the secret of victory lies in surprising the opponent. If You were to apply Your methods of political action to a duel or on the battlefield, to publicly declare and prepare the assault, waving the weapon through the air, the first strike would already be the last. In any case, passion will not determine success. Passions make dependant. And all too often, our national movement, as it acts in German party politics, gives the impression of a bull in the arena. We must finally learn that great politics ends neither with organization and agitation, with programs and outbursts, nor with solving economic problems. A manager is no politician – even though politics is the management of a state – but drummers and pipers aren't generals either.

Modern politics requires an extraordinary amount of practice and knowledge and among the youth, that today considers politics to be their purpose and vocation, I not only miss the stern will to raise themselves for greater duties, but also to sufficiently acquire knowledge of the facts, forces and directions of modern world politics. Once more: Skill, not will is what counts, and skill requires mastery of the field, in which it is to be utilized. It's a pernicious misconception, caused by reading newspapers daily and even more by the mass of unfailingly shallow and silly party-publications, to believe that everyone understands politics

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won the Poles at lot of sympathies abroad and several Polish delegates were present at Hambach, Polish flags were flown by students for which Bismarck, Spengler and others mocked them later.

<sup>36</sup> Here Spengler quotes the bible (Ecclesiastes 10:16), specifically in the translation of Martin Luther.



and can do it, if only he has the right “creed”. The 19<sup>th</sup> century slogan “*politics for the people*” has raised dreamers and gabblers and eroded the support for statesmen. To maintain a minimum of room for manoeuvre cost most of them more nerves than their actual work.<sup>37</sup>

In addition, there’s another, specifically German danger. Since 1918 we have lost all influence beyond our borders. Not to mention that we aren’t even sovereign within these borders. Not even fifty years ago we stepped into the ranks of world powers and we never grew accustomed to a perspective and mode of thinking reflective of this status, in an instant we Germans have become provincials again and to a degree that would be impossible for other great nation for geographical reasons alone. This firstly impacts the scope of our foreign politics that have been reduced to dealing with mere border issues and frequently not even that. But beyond that our bleak past is reappearing, with her dull particularism<sup>38</sup>, her philistine horizon, her pitiful bickering between one speck of land and the other, which threatens to narrow the national movement’s horizon down to a hopeless level. Not particularism<sup>39</sup> in itself is an expression of inherited provincialism, but rather the renascent tendency to deal with German questions as if Germany was alone on earth. We hear little about what is happening in East Asia, Central America, South Africa and many believe that it doesn’t concern us. Since we’ve lost our colonies – a disaster for the political horizon of our people – our political vision has been constrained to Central Europe and often only a small part of it. A narrow national conceit has arisen, that thinks considering foreign affairs or taking historical and economic global developments seriously when addressing domestic problems is beneath him. Everything that isn’t in line with the own ideology or looks like it isn’t, like the writings of Ford, is derided, ignored or systematically misunderstood.<sup>40</sup> One does not bother to study the facts of the domestic affairs of England, America or the situation in the Pacific. Not a minute is spent studying global economic problems like raw material supply or mastering sales crises, instead some ridiculous theory about a moneyless economy, that someone cooked up at his desk is being lauded.<sup>41</sup> And if this would lead to the situation that friendly powers look down at these goings on with pity or scorn, or that the paramount forces and people of actual politics and economics would have to distance themselves from such movements, one could maybe even see a benefit.

At least fascism managed to come to terms with pivotal economic powers, because it is concerned with success and not an agenda. Otherwise it would have failed in the face of reality.<sup>42</sup> Germany, with her

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<sup>37</sup> This „19<sup>th</sup> century slogan “, that Spenglers speaks of, in the original “*Die Politik dem Volke*”, was never commonly used. In other words, there is not specific historical slogan that Spengler is referring to here, he uses it to sum up popular notions. See Carl Schmitt’s “*The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*” for an overview over these liberal notions in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>38</sup> The word Spengler uses in the original is specifically “*Kleinstaatererei*”, referring to the splintered structure of the Holy Roman Empire.

<sup>39</sup> Here Spengler uses the word „*Partikularismus*”. The discussion how centralised the Weimar Republic should be was very lively throughout its existence. It turned out to be fairly centralised, more so than the post-World War 2 Federal Republic of Germany and much more than the extremely decentralised German Empire until 1918.

<sup>40</sup> The German translation of Henry Ford’s memoirs were published in 1923 and sold very well.

<sup>41</sup> It’s unclear to which theory Spengler refers here.

<sup>42</sup> Spengler spells fascism „*Fascismus* “, which wasn’t that uncommon in his day, but the Germanized spelling “*Faschismus*” has completely taken over and the former is almost unheard of today. This underlines that Spengler specifically meant the *Partido Nazionale Fascista* in Italy and not a fascism as a general term.

sixty million inhabitants, lies in the middle of a world with 1500 million. She has no natural borders. She can do neither without exports nor without importing raw materials and foodstuff. Her fate can't be severed from the big picture. It can be active or passive, but it's no separate issue. Dispensing with global political horizon, dispensing with consideration of global political factors, which would require an equal amount of expertise, thought and tactics, would diminish all prospects of the national movements, You should be under no illusions in this regard. You may keep pulling the cart while You think you're steering it, but You'll seal Germany's fate as a province, a colony of the Western powers. Daily I overhear conversations that scare me, naïve proposals on fundamental economic reforms by young people that have never seen a steel mill and have never read a treatise on modern banking; Ideas on constitutional reform without the slightest imagination how a ministry should be structured nowadays, in order to be functional and what it takes for it to be managed properly. Nobody studies the practices of great statesmen like Bismarck, Gladstone, Chamberlain<sup>43</sup> and for goodness' sake even Poincaré, their way to achieve incremental successes in the petty, tough work of the day, the overall result of which will still make an impact on the fate of their nation. We have fighting objectives that aren't shared a few thousand square kilometers away, and in every corner of Germany we have several competing ones.

But we need enduring contemplation by our youth and not just contemplation, but rather thoroughly working through the current state of global economics and politics in earnest, based on data and facts. We can't solve German questions, whichever it may be, without knowing exactly how they immediately relate to the political constellations in England, in Russia, in America, and this conjunction should extend from knowledge to actual connections, which requires characters of a certain position and experience on our side, whom the national movement has so far refrained from winning over. Our ascendancy depends on matching foreign political methods, as is the case on the issues of technology and economic organization, not on acting as if this was not a factor. And the same is true regarding the international powers within Germany, that are meant by the catchphrases Marxism and stock exchange. One can disprove their views, but that doesn't remove them. Whether someone is right or wrong doesn't matter in history. Whether he is superior to his opponent in practical terms will determine success. And for the last time: the youth movement, as it is today, gives up success for the sake of inebriating themselves. Genuine, but nothing more – that is too little for our future.<sup>44</sup>

And with this I'll conclude: We Germans are slow to get accustomed to the idea that politics is not an expression of sentiments but an art, because our past didn't give us an occasion for experiences. But if we don't learn this now, I fear the future won't give us occasions either. It is the sacred duty of the young generation to rear themselves for politics. Since we're not in the fortunate position of England, of having

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<sup>43</sup> Since Neville Chamberlain wasn't widely known in 1924 it's more likely that Spengler means either his half-brother Austen Chamberlain, British foreign minister from 1924-1929 or their father, the British statesman Joseph Chamberlain.

<sup>44</sup> Here Spengler, for the first time, specifically mentions the "*Jugendbewegung*" [youth movement]. The "*Jugendbewegung*" was a German phenomenon, starting in the 1890's effectively ending in 1933. It was an idealistic movement of adolescents, centred around shared activities in nature. They renounced industrial society and celebrated nature, sometimes through a reactionary, sometimes through a rousseauian lens. The youth organizations of all political parties in the Weimar Republic were influenced by the *Jugendbewegung*. For a popular first-hand account of one of its exponents in the context of First World War, see Walter Flex's "*The Wanderer between the Two Worlds*" one of the best-selling books of the interwar period in Germany.

sent our youth to all parts of the world early and into practical positions, we can only study these things on the basis of historical material, but that ought to be done with twice the sincerity. I urge the youth to put aside all enthusiastic programs and manifestos and to systematically study, alone or together, the diplomatic records of the last decades, for example the publications from German archives or the British Blue Book, to compare the documents, to form an opinion on ends, means and results and thus to comprehend modern statesmanlike practice; to work through the speeches and letters of great politicians, the memoranda of the greatest experts of contemporary global economics like Keynes or Helfferich,<sup>45</sup> to firstly form an opinion on the situation, the methods, the significance of acting personalities, from which everyone can probably assess where their own talents for political endeavours lie. Not the ability to inspire yourself and others makes politics your calling, but having skills equal to your opponent. There's a task to be found even for the least. There are virtues of leaders and virtues of the led. And the latter include understanding the nature and ambitions of genuine politics – otherwise you'll follow fools and born leaders will perish forlorn. To rear oneself to be good material for great leaders, in proud renunciation, ready for selfless sacrifice, this too is a German virtue.<sup>46</sup> And provided that strong men arise in the hard times that Germany is facing, leaders that we can entrust with our fate, they must have something to build upon. They need a generation that Bismarck didn't have, one that understands their way of acting and doesn't reject them due to romantic notions, devoted followers, that understands necessities by virtue of their long, earnest political self-education and that doesn't disregard them as un-German, as it would doubtlessly be the case today. That, this self-education for coming challenges, is what I consider to be the political **duty** of the adolescent youth. This alone will allow You to cerebrally<sup>47</sup> grow beyond the borders with which the Treaty of Versailles cuts us off from the world. Our future does not rest on what new forms emerge within our borders, but on what is reached beyond the borders through these forms.

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<sup>45</sup> John Maynard Keynes came to some prominence in Germany by his 1919 publication "*The Economic Consequences of the Peace*" in which he criticised reparations. Karl Helfferich was a German politician and economist who died in a train accident about two months after Spengler's speech, after holding various government positions throughout the First World War. He became a harsh critic of the Weimar Republic. Proposals of his were an inspiration for the monetary reforms in 1923/24 after the hyperinflation.

<sup>46</sup> German virtues, sometimes Prussian virtues include punctuality, orderliness, diligence and such things. Naturally this notion is not as common in modern day Germany as it used to be. Spengler made some remarks on the matter in "*Prussianism and Socialism*".

<sup>47</sup> Spengler used the word "*geistig*", which can mean mentally, spiritually or intellectually.

## Appendix

The bibliography of Oswald Spengler is long and unwieldy. There is a time and a place for a complete rundown, but it isn't here and now, so a few brief remarks will have to suffice. If we take all writings by Spengler into account that have been published as of September 2022, maybe somewhere between 40-60% have – to my knowledge – been translated in terms of sheer volume. What seems to be available in English? Besides "*The Decline of the West*" we have "*Prussianism and Socialism*" (1919) (Sometimes also called "*Prussian Socialism*", though the former translation is closer to the original title), "*Man and Technics*" (1931), "*The Hour of Decision*" (1933) and an edition of letters, probably an exact translation of the volume that Anton Mirko Koktanek (somewhat of Spengler's literary executor) and Manfred Schröter (personal friend of Spengler) compiled in 1963. In 1941, Spengler's niece, Hildegard Kornhardt, published a collection of aphorisms and quotes from various publications and out of the unpublished estate of her uncle titled "*Gedanken*". The literal translation would have been "*Thoughts*", but the translations was simply published as "*Aphorisms*." Finally, several smaller texts of Spengler have been published in English under the title "*Selected Essays*".

Now there are many texts by Spengler that are neither available in English, nor worthy of being discussed in great detail here. Spengler wrote several newspaper articles, book reviews and prefaces. On several occasions, pieces of longer works of his have been published on their own or as a kind of pre-release. Below I will list all noteworthy works of Spengler that have, to my knowledge, not yet been translated to English. Several of these are compilations based on the vast literary estate of Spengler, which is mostly composed of thousands and thousands of short notes. Many are hard to decipher, especially those written after Spengler suffered a stroke in July 1927. Some of these notes were lost in the Second World War, a significant portion has been typewritten by Spengler's sister and niece after his death. During the last decade of his life Spengler was working on a massive project. Partially inspired by Leo Frobenius he intended to "bridge the gap" between the moment where the human soul starts to significantly differ from its animalic roots and the emergence of high cultures. He described this as a history of mankind "from the beginning". Several late publications of his, for example "*Man and Technics*", were produced in this context, as well as many of the notes in his estate. The list below is chronological, with the original German title and my translation of that title in squared brackets.

- "*Neubau des Deutschen Reiches*" (1924) ["*Rebuilding the German Reich*"]  
This text caps off the period of Spengler's ultimately fruitless political involvement 1919 - 1923. Besides a critique of the state of the Weimar Republic a number of reforms are proposed. It is rightfully considered to be weaker than Spengler's other political texts like "*The Hour of Decision*".
- "*Politische Schriften*" (1932) ["*Political Writings*"]  
This volume includes "*Prussianism and Socialism*", "*Political Duties of the German Youth*", "*Rebuilding the German Reich*" and four more speeches, one of which "*The Two Faces of Russia and Germany's Eastern Problems*" (1922) has been translated and published in the "*Selected Essays*". The remaining three speeches, held 1924-1926, have not yet been

translated. The preface for "*Politische Schriften*" is excellent, the speeches have a certain amount of overlap, but generally the book is a worthwhile read.

- "*Reden und Aufsätze*" (1937) ["*Speeches and Essays*"]

This anthology contains Spengler's doctoral thesis on Heraclitus, several pieces on ancient history and miscellaneous texts. Almost half of this book consists of the first two essays of a planned ten-part series on the history of the second millennium BC. Both were written in 1935, Spengler died before he could continue the series. The second of these essays is included only in the third, extended edition. Four of the miscellaneous texts have been included in the "*Selected Essays*", the other approximately 90% of this anthology have no English translation so far.

- "*Urfragen*" (1965) ["*Primal Questions*"]

This volume (as well as the next on this list) has also been compiled by Kocktanek and Schröter. It is a collection of Spengler's scattered notes, arranged according to planned tables of contents that were found in his estate. This is a part of Spengler's efforts to "bridge the gap", he mostly addresses metaphysical issues. It is fairly abstract and has been described as gloomy by Spengler's standards. With all appendices the book clocks in at 380 pages, is an excellent read and desperately needs a translation. Kocktanek estimates that it was largely written in 1924/25.

- "*Frühzeit der Weltgeschichte*" (1966) ["*Early Stages of World History*"]

Another collection of notes and aphorisms from Spengler's estate. Compared to "*Urfragen*" it is more historical and less philosophical, more tangible in its approach, but a bit dryer in style. It's undiscernible when the notes were written from which this was compiled, but the very rough guess 1931-1936 should not be far off. While – all things considered – it doesn't quite match the "*Urfragen*" in my view, it's still more than 500 additional pages of Spengler and warrants both a read and a translation.

- "*Eis heauton*" (2007)

This short collection of autobiographical notes gives a personal insight into Spengler's soul. While it is an interesting read, it does give you false impressions if you are not already to some degree familiar with the biography of Spengler. A nice edition but not mandatory reading.

- "*Ich bin kein Prophet. Die Aufzeichnungen „Politica“ aus dem Nachlass*" (2021) ["*I am no Prophet. The Notes "Politica" From the Estate*"]

This massive collection contains notes from about 1914-1936. Included are among other things: preparations for two memorandums (one for the German Kaiser, one for the German nobility) which Spengler intended to write while he was working on "*The Decline of the West*", a sizable number of various notes from the 1920's and 30's and notes for a planned second volume of "*The Hour of Decision*". This is a massive book, about 680 pages in total. It is an excellent read and worthy of translation, possibly in tranches.

OSWALD  
SPENGLER

Politische Pflichten  
der deutschen  
Jugend

C·H·BECK·MÜNCHEN

Original cover of „Political Duties of the German Youth”