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978-0-521-08617-2 - Reform and Revolution in Mainz, 1743-1803

T. C. W. Blanning

Excerpt

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Prologue

The 'German Problem' in the Eighteenth Century

I

The contrast between Germany and Western Europe in modern history has long been a subject of historical interpretation and research. The split in Europe, which has existed since the French Revolution and shook the continent to its foundations in the Industrial Revolution, had profound consequences. In two world wars it led not only to the political collapse of Germany as a great power but also to the end of Europe's hegemony in the world. Thus the split between Germany and the West will of necessity always be an important theme for historians. (Hajo Holborn, 'German Idealism in the light of Social History')

Whether a source of pride, concern or neutral interest, the contrast which Holborn identified has never failed to engage the attention of the most powerful of German scholars in this century. Friedrich Meinecke, Ernst Troeltsch and Gerhard Ritter, to name only the most celebrated, all addressed themselves to the problem.² Nor, for obvious reasons, has interest subsided since the last war. Even those controversies which superficially are concerned only with national unification, the origins of the First World War or the rise of National Socialism are essentially concerned with the divergence between German-speaking areas and the West. Yet although the reality and unfading contemporaneity of 'The German Problem' are not in doubt, its location in time is a matter of considerable dispute. Earlier generations of historians concentrated their attention on the early nineteenth century and the development of Idealism; more recently, Ralf Dahrendorf has taken as his starting-point the Empire of 1871, while Leonard Krieger has gone back to the Reformation.³

Although on one level simply a history of the Electorate of Mainz during the last six decades of its existence, this book is intended to be a

¹ Reprinted in *Germany and Europe* (New York, 1971).

² Friedrich Meinecke, *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat; Werke*, ed. Hans Herzfeld, Carl Hinrichs and Walther Hofer, vol. 5 (Munich, 1962). Ernst Troeltsch, 'The Ideas of Natural Law and Humanity in World Politics', *Natural Law and the Theory of Society 1500-1800*, ed. Sir Ernest Barker (Cambridge, 1934). Gerhard Ritter, *Das deutsche Problem: Grundfragen deutschen Staatslebens gestern und heute* (Munich, 1962).

³ Ralf Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany* (London, 1968). Leonard Krieger, *The German Idea of Freedom, History of a Political Tradition* (Boston, 1957).

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contribution to this debate. It seeks to show how, behind the cosmopolitan façade of the eighteenth century, this part of Germany developed in a manner increasingly different from that of Western Europe. This is not an approach which will commend itself to everyone. French historians in particular have stressed the unity of a period which in their eyes was marked throughout Europe by the acceptance of French civilisation. Louis Réau began his book with the exclamation 'L'Europe française!', while part of the table of contents of another distinguished general history reads:

*L'unité de l'Europe : L'Europe française – le français, langue européenne – l'art français, art européen – architecture française – musique française – sculpture française – costume française – cuisine française – L'invasion de l'Europe par la France – Cause de l'expansion française – la puissance française – la Cour de La France – Les salons – L'accueil français – L'émigration française – L'esprit féodal – Le cosmopolitisme – Le despotisme éclairé.*¹

The similarity of the metaphors *lumières*, *Aufklärung*, *Enlightenment* and *Illuminismo* has encouraged an over-emphasis on the characteristics enlightened thinkers held in common. Francocentric historians assume too readily that enlightened ideas current in Berlin or Vienna were but a reflection of those circulating in Paris. It is significant that in the work by Mousnier and Labrousse mentioned above, there are 28 references to Voltaire, 21 to Montesquieu, 14 to Diderot and 12 to D'Alembert, but only 8 to Kant, 6 to Herder, 2 to Wolff and none at all to Thomasius, Sonnenfels, Martini, Justi, Wieland or any other of the prominent figures of the Central European *Aufklärung*.² Even those historians who are aware of the variety of the Enlightenment feel obliged to pay periodic homage to its cosmopolitanism.

Few would disagree with Ernst Cassirer's view that:

the basic idea underlying all the tendencies of enlightenment was the conviction that human understanding is capable, by its own power and without recourse to supernatural assistance, of comprehending the system of the world and that this new way of understanding the world will lead it to a new way of mastering it.³

Yet even if the conceptual and methodological foundations and framework were similar, there was plenty of scope for individuals and groups to build fabrics which reflected regional, personal and chronological variations in style. Grouping Voltaire and Wolff under the enlightened um-

¹ Louis Réau, *L'Europe française au Siècle des lumières* (Paris, 1951), p. 1. Roland Mousnier and Ernest Labrousse, *Le XVIII^e Siècle : L'Époque des 'Lumières' (1715-1815)* (Paris, 1959), p. 569.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 545-59.

³ Quoted by Herbert Dieckmann, 'Themes and Structures of the Enlightenment', *Essays in Comparative Literature* (St Louis, 1961), p. 58.

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rella is equivalent to classifying Borromini and Balthasar Neumann as 'baroque' architects: uncontroversial but unhelpful. In what follows the focus of attention will be the peculiar rather than the universal characteristics of Germany in general and Mainz in particular. Unlike many other investigations of the German Problem it will not be concerned exclusively with the movement of ideas. As Holborn pointed out in his brief but important article, German Idealism was not born in an act of spontaneous intellectual combustion, but was firmly rooted in Germany's social and political development.¹

By contemporary standards, the Electorate of Mainz was only a middling state of the *Reich*, but its history in the eighteenth century illuminates a much wider area. In particular it illustrates what is intended to be the central theme of this book: the astonishing ability of the political and social establishment in Germany to absorb, adapt and even utilise progressive and potentially disruptive forces. If true, this generalisation is a paradox, for to both contemporaries and historians since the most obvious feature of the *Reich* was its decadence. Pufendorf's description – '*irregulare aliquod corpus et monstro simile*' – and Goethe's query – '*Das liebe heil'ge röm'sche Reich, Wie hält's nur noch zusammen?*' – are only two of a host of similar derogatory comments.² The fragility of the imperial institutions and the strength of the centrifugal forces are also too well known to require any detailed examination. The *Reichstag* was described by Sir George Etherege as 'only fit to entertain those insects in politics which crawl under the trees in St. James's Park'; the *Reichskammergericht* and *Reichshofrat*, hampered by lack of funds, accumulated an enormous backlog of untried cases and were accused of Protestant and Catholic bias respectively; the *Reichskreise* organisations were not even instituted in a large part of the *Reich*; the *Reichsarmee*, never more than a fraction of its nominal strength, mobilised late and demobilised early.³

These weaknesses, however obvious, should not lead one to overestimate the *Reich's* senility. Like any other political institution with roots several centuries deep, it possessed surprising reserves of stamina.⁴ As several aspiring tyrants, notably the Dukes of Mecklenburg and Württem-

¹ Holborn, 'German Idealism', p. 3.

² Pufendorf's occurs in *De Statu Imperii Germanici* and Goethe's in *Faust*, Part One.

³ F. L. Carsten, 'The Empire after the Thirty Years War', *The New Cambridge Modern History*, vol. 5, ed. F. L. Carsten (Cambridge, 1961), pp. 446–7. Fritz Hartung, *Deutsche Verfassungsgeschichte vom 15. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*, 8th ed. (Stuttgart, 1964), pp. 147–62. The most recent general summary of constitutional developments in the *Reich* between 1648 and 1806 is in *Handbuch der deutschen Geschichte*, ed. Herbert Grundmann, 9th ed. (Stuttgart, 1970), vol. 2, pp. 376–94.

⁴ Despite periodic predictions of their imminent downfall, the Ottoman, Habsburg and Romanoff empires survived into the twentieth century and, in the last two cases, fell only after a particularly destructive foreign war.

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berg, discovered to their cost, the imperial institutions had not lost all their teeth.¹ Nor should it be forgotten that many subjects of the *Reich* were prepared to speak up loudly in its defence.² Even some of its severest critics found it preferable to the alternatives. Wieland commented that ‘despite its undeniable faults and defects, the present constitution of the German *Reich* is incomparably more conducive to the domestic peace and prosperity of the nation as a whole and better suited to its character and the level of culture it has reached than the French democracy’.³

Until the French revolutionary armies threw every European frontier and institution into the melting pot, it was not at all clear that the *Reich* faced any fundamental changes. After 1648 the threat from outside naturally diminished. Although keen to tidy up his Eastern frontiers, Louis XIV was not likely to overturn a settlement which, in the words of a French diplomat, was ‘one of the finest jewels in the French crown’.⁴ His supine successors were enfeebled by growing financial difficulties and diverted by colonial ambitions. In the East, Poland, Sweden and the Ottoman Empire changed from predators into prey. The growing power of Russia never posed a real threat to the *Reich’s* integrity. Like her French colleagues, Catherine the Great appreciated that its continued existence was the best possible check on undue Habsburg or Hohenzollern expansion. The best illustration of this way of thinking was the Franco-Russian guarantee of the Peace of Teschen in 1779 and with it the German *status quo*.

A much more potent danger to the *Reich* was the spectre of partition from within. Edmund Burke observed in December 1791:

As long as those princes (of Austria and Prussia) are at variance, so long the liberties of Germany are safe. But, if ever they should so far understand one another, as to be persuaded that they have a more direct and more certainly defined interest in a proportional, mutual aggrandisement, than in a reciprocal reduction, that is, if they come to think that they are more likely to be enriched by a division of spoil, than to be rendered secure by keeping to the old policy of preventing others from being spoiled by either of them, from that moment the liberties of Germany are no more.⁵

¹ F. L. Carsten, ‘The German Estates in the Eighteenth Century’, *Recueils de la Société Jean Bodin pour l’Histoire Comparative des Institutions*, volume xxv, pp. 227–38. See also the same author’s *Princes and Parliaments in Germany from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1959). For a discussion of the achievements of the *Reichskreise* in Swabia and Franconia see Karl Otmar Freiherr von Aretin, *Heiliges Römisches Reich*, Vol. 1, *Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte Mainz*, Vol. 38 (Wiesbaden, 1967), pp. 70–6.

² A particularly good example was the speech made by Franz Wilhelm Freiherr von Spiegel, curator of the University of Bonn, shortly after the outbreak of the French Revolution. It is reprinted by Joseph Hansen, *Quellen zur Geschichte des Rheinlandes im Zeitalter der französischen Revolution*, vol. 1 (Bonn, 1931), pp. 478–83.

³ Aretin, *Heiliges Römisches Reich*, I, p. 96.

⁴ Quoted in G. Barraclough, *The Origins of Modern Germany* (Oxford, 1957), p. 385.

⁵ ‘Thoughts on French Affairs etc. etc. Written in December 1791’, in *The Works and Correspondence of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, Vol. IV (London 1852), p. 563.

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Particularly vulnerable were the weaker members of the *Reich*: the smaller princes, Imperial Counts, Imperial Knights and the Prince-Bishops. Plans for the secularisation of the ecclesiastical states were drawn up during the brief reign of the Wittelsbach Emperor Charles VII and again during the Seven Years War.¹ On both occasions they were foiled by the opposition of Austria.

The situation changed radically therefore when the Habsburgs themselves adopted policies hostile to the *Reich*. Joseph II came to the conclusion that the imperial title was a liability not an asset and in particular obstructed his attempt to turn his various dominions into a unitary state. From the late 1770s he was thinking in terms of abdicating as Emperor and severing all Austrian ties with the *Reich*.² Yet this removal of the *Reich*'s main protector did not lead to its slaughter, for when the Austrian shepherd became a wolf, the Prussian wolf became a shepherd. In view of the deep antagonism between the two states, this was inevitable; as Kaunitz observed drily on another occasion, if the Catholics were to become Protestants overnight, the Protestants would equally quickly become Catholics.³ When Joseph abandoned the traditional Habsburg rôle, he both enabled and forced Frederick the Great to become an anti-emperor (*Gegenkaiser*). The two rulers could agree on the partition of Poland, but not on the partition of Germany. Indeed, the last decade of Frederick's life was dominated by his determination to prevent his rival exchanging the Netherlands for Bavaria. The Convention of Reichenbach of 1790 was a desperate attempt by Leopold II to save his inheritance, not a preparation for mutual aggrandisement.⁴ Only a shotgun as menacing as the French Revolution could have forced this ill-matched couple into a *mariage de convenance*. It showed immediate signs of dissolution and ended in acrimonious divorce in 1795.⁵ This is not to deny the existence or even growing strength of centrifugal forces: not only Austria and Prussia but also lesser states such as Saxony and Hanover began to believe that they had more to gain from the *Reich*'s destruction than from its preservation. But only in fortuitous alliance with French victories, French ideology and French designs on the left bank of the Rhine could these forces bring the *Reich* to its knees.

¹ Heribert Raab, *Clemens Wenzeslaus von Sachsen und seine Zeit (1739-1812)*, Vol. 1, *Dynastie, Kirche und Reich im 18. Jahrhundert* (Freiburg, Basle, Vienna, 1962), pp. 121-8.

² Aretin, *Heiliges Römisches Reich*, I, p. 13.

³ Aretin, 'Die Konfessionen als politische Kräfte am Ausgang des alten Reichs', in *Festgabe Joseph Lortz*, ed. E. Iserloh and P. Manns, Vol. 2 (Baden-Baden, 1958), p. 182.

⁴ Adam Wandruszka, *Leopold II*, Vol. II (Vienna, Munich, 1965), pp. 262-72.

⁵ Hansen, *Quellen*, II, p. 880, III, pp. 31-4, 83-4, 491-5.

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II

The third potential threat to the *Reich* – internal subversion – proved to be the weakest of the three. Inevitably more complex than foreign aggression or princely ambition, it requires a more detailed examination. A more leisurely approach can also be justified on the grounds that an explanation of the febleness of the subversive forces does much to illuminate the ‘German Problem’ identified at the beginning of this chapter.

Any explanation must start with Germany’s economic and social development after 1648. In recent years the dispute as to whether the Thirty Years War was a catastrophe or an aggravated phase of a linear development has subsided, as economic historians have denied the existence of a ‘German Economy’ and have emphasised instead regional variations. The weight of evidence still suggests however that the military campaigns by themselves did not produce a sharp break.¹

The war’s most serious effect was on population. Günther Franz’s summary-map shows losses of over 50% in the Palatinate, Württemberg, Thuringia, Pomerania and Mecklenburg, over 40% in Swabia, Franconia, Hessen and Brandenburg and over 30% in Bavaria. Only the Austrian Hereditary Lands, Lower Saxony, Holstein, Friesland and parts of Westphalia escaped lightly or with no losses.² If the *Reich* had also shared in the general European decline in the birth-rate, economic recovery would have been delayed indefinitely. In the event, the area proved to be a demographic exception. Although the losses had been so severe that a complete return to pre-war levels took more than a century, recovery did begin as soon as the war was over. Symbolic of German virility and fecundity was the achievement of Hans Bosshardt, who married his fourth wife at the age of eighty and had three children by her, the youngest being born the same year its 66-year-old stepbrother died.³

Trade and industry could not boast such formidable powers of regeneration. Although it is now accepted that earlier estimates were exaggerated and that something approaching normal activity returned to most areas within a few decades of the end of the war, the halcyon days of the sixteenth century had gone never to return. Trade between North Italy and South Germany, which had made the latter region one of the most prosperous in Europe, declined to a negligible point. Exports of grain and textiles from the Baltic ports never regained previous levels. Rhineland commerce, already decaying in 1618, did not show an upward trend until

¹ For a recent survey of the problem, see Henry Kamen, ‘The Economic and Social Consequences of the Thirty Years War’, *Past and Present*, 39 (1968), p. 61.

² Günther Franz, *Der dreißigjährige Krieg und das deutsche Volk*, Quellen und Forschungen zur Agrargeschichte, Vol. 7, 3rd ed. (1961), p. 8.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 49. After Hans’ death at the age of 100 his widow quickly remarried.

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the second quarter of the eighteenth century.¹ The effect on manufacturing, throughout the *Reich*, was even more serious: reduction of investment capital, disruption of supplies of raw material, destruction of equipment and contraction of markets.² This was not of course due entirely to disruption caused by the war. The long-term shift of the axis of the European economy away from Central Europe to the Atlantic Seaboard, the growing influence of colonial possessions, the decline of the Mediterranean, even the climatic changes which obstructed the Alpine passes, would have made and were making trading conditions progressively less favourable for German merchants and manufacturers, even had there been no war.

However the responsibility is apportioned, one conclusion is inescapable – the *Reich* of 1650 was a great deal poorer than it had been a hundred years earlier. To describe the next 150 years as a period of recovery is misleading, for it implies a return to the conditions which had existed previously. In fact what emerged was very different, the most striking novelty being a decline in the importance of the individual financier, merchant or manufacturer. The great entrepreneurs of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, who had made the *Reichsstädte* the most flourishing cities of Europe, were not reincarnated. The most successful families, like the Fuggers, acquired noble status, bought landed estates and settled down to a *rentier* existence; others went bankrupt, died out or simply disappeared. Their place was taken by the princes, who appreciated that *rétablissement* of the economy was a necessary precondition for the *rétablissement* of revenue.

The attempt to play a more positive rôle in the economy was not only a response to changed circumstances; it also reflected the development of political absolutism. The complexities of that much-debated topic 'mercantilism' are beyond the scope of this study, but it does not seem in dispute that this period saw a significant general increase in state intervention in the economy; although to a lesser extent in England and the United Provinces than in France and to a lesser extent in France than in Germany. This greater degree of control was due partly to the more depressed state of the German economy but mainly to the ubiquity of secular authority. If there had been a sovereign prince in every English, Dutch or French provincial town, their economies would have enjoyed (or suffered) a great deal more interference. Quite apart from the various forms of direct assistance – credits, subsidies, exemptions from taxation or customs dues, cheap or even free raw materials and fuel, and so on – the princes exercised considerable indirect influence on the form of the economic re-

¹ See below, p. 72.

² Friedrich Lütge, *Deutsche Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 2nd ed. (Berlin, Göttingen, Heidelberg, 1960), pp. 289–95.

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vival by their increased expenditure on courts, administrations and armies.¹ Louis XIV's Versailles created a fashion for display which brought many princes to the point of bankruptcy but which also injected large sums into circulation. The most distinctive characteristic of the German economy after 1648 was the growth in importance of the residential city, the prince's *Residenzstadt*. With one or two exceptions, such as Hamburg and Bremen, the Imperial Cities (*Reichsstädte*) never regained their predominant position. Now it was not Nuremberg, Augsburg, Ulm, Aachen, Cologne or Frankfurt am Main that were the centres of growth and vitality, but Munich, Vienna, Mannheim, Stuttgart, Berlin and Hanover.²

The growth of courts and administrations was accompanied by a growth in the number of people directly dependent on the prince for their livelihood. In both Weimar and Munich, for example, they formed more than a third of the city's total population.³ Of the remainder a large number were indirectly dependent, on account of the colossal sums spent by the government and the other privileged orders. There grew up a host of manufacturing and service industries moulded in the image of their paymasters. The princes allowed their subjects no political independence, but they did provide them with employment. In his comparative study of a number of German cities Hans Mauersberg wrote: 'For the residential cities the second half of the eighteenth century was an epoch of not inconsiderable expansion for their industrial sector, an expansion which was increased still further by the directive measures of the eighteenth century absolute state.'⁴

More than at any time in the past, the *Reich's* economy was moulded from above. This has been recognised even by Marxist historians; in the course of his study of industrial development in Bohemia after 1648, Klima observed that

the Austrian absolute monarchy of the eighteenth century played an important rôle in the development of the manufacturing industry and at the same time supported the rise of new industrial relationships within the feudal order. The absolute monarchical state helped to bring about economic advance and the victory of new social relations over old ones.⁵

As a result, there was a wide difference between the independent entrepreneur of the sixteenth (or nineteenth) century and the *Partikulier* of the

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 309.

² Heinrich Bechtel, *Wirtschaftsgeschichte Deutschlands*, Vol. II, *Vom Beginn des 16. bis zum Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1952), p. 80.

³ W. H. Bruford, *Culture and Society in Classical Weimar 1775-1806* (Cambridge, 1962), p. 67; Hans Mauersberg, *Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte zentraleuropäischer Städte in neuerer Zeit* (Göttingen, 1960), p. 207.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

⁵ A. Klima, 'Industrial development in Bohemia 1648-1781', *Past and Present*, II (1957), p. 94.

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eighteenth, heavily dependent on the initiative and continuing support of his ruler.¹ Nor was this new relationship confined to the manufacturing sector; merchants also found that in the bleak conditions prevailing after 1648 only government contracts could keep large-scale trade in motion.² The mining industry, in the past a bastion of private enterprise, was taken over by the state.³ To a large extent the princes were filling a vacuum rather than invading territory already held; referring generally to the period 1648-1800 Wolfgang Zorn wrote: 'Far from being the repression of private initiative, state mercantilism was in reality a substitute for initiative which either was lacking entirely or was too weak.'⁴

To portray this period as one of unrelieved domination by the state would of course be exaggerated. As the economic war-wounds healed, so did private enterprise revive. In the course of the eighteenth century many large units, especially for the production of textiles, were founded and developed. It has been estimated that by the 1790s there were over 1,000 concerns employing 10 or more people, and of these only 60 were run directly by the state.⁵ Entrepreneurs such as Bolongaro, the Frankfurt tobacco merchant, and Schüle, the Augsburg 'Cotton King', amassed very respectable fortunes.⁶ The most celebrated were the von der Leyens of Krefeld, who imported skilled workers from Holland and even introduced machines for mechanical weaving.⁷ In some areas, notably Bohemia, Silesia and the Lower Rhine, significant industrial concentrations evolved. Although most of them were part-time spinners, almost 10% of Bohemia's population were engaged in some form of industrial activity by the middle of the century.⁸

These developments were reflected in structural changes. Although still numerous and powerful, the guilds suffered a relative decline. Increasingly, wealth and technological progress lay with other forms of organisation: putting-out (*Verlag*) and manufacturing (*Manufaktur*).⁹ As the guilds

¹ Bechtel, *Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, pp. 261-2; Lütge, *Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, p. 323.

² For a good example of this new type of entrepreneur, see W. O. Henderson's account of the Berlin firm of Splittberger and Daum. *Studies in the Economic Policy of Frederick the Great* (London, 1963), pp. 1-16.

³ Lütge, *Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, p. 317.

⁴ *Handbuch der deutschen Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte*; Vol. 1, *Von der Frühzeit bis zum Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Hermann Aubin & Wolfgang Zorn (Stuttgart, 1971), p. 573.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 549-50.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Lütge, *Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, p. 266.

⁸ Hermann Freudenberger, 'Industrialisation in Bohemia and Moravia in the Eighteenth Century', *Journal of Central European Affairs*, 19 (1960), p. 350. Between 1775 and 1788 the number of workers employed in weaving in Bohemia and Moravia increased from 39,000 to 66,000. *Ibid.*, p. 354.

⁹ For the distinction between *Handwerk*, *Manufaktur* and *Fabrik*, see J. Kuczynski, *Die Bewegung der deutschen Wirtschaft von 1800 bis 1946*, 2nd ed. (Meisenheim, 1948), p. 22. There is a good deal of unjustified use of the term *Fabrik*, when *Manufaktur* would be more

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became more restrictive, more introverted and more conservative, they attracted the hostile attention of the state. Part symptom and part cause was the *Reich* law relating to guilds of 1731. Although its efficacy depended entirely on the attitude of the individual princes, it doubtless hastened the growth in the number of manufacturing enterprises outside the guild framework.¹

Yet when every qualification has been made and every exemption noted, the fact remains that German entrepreneurs were markedly weaker in numbers, wealth and independence than their counterparts in Western Europe. One interesting indication of this peculiarity was the prominent entrepreneurial rôle played by the nobility. In some areas they established a virtual monopoly. Of the 243 mines in Upper Silesia in 1785, 191 belonged to nobles, 20 to the King of Prussia, 14 to various other princes, and only 2 to private citizens of Breslau.² As Frederick the Great commented, 'the greatest entrepreneur of his age' was the Emperor Francis I, acting as a private individual.³

Accurate or not, that such a comment was possible stresses the peculiar character of German economic development. One hesitates to use the adjective 'backward', for this would imply a teleological and fundamentally unsound notion of economic 'progress'. Heinrich Bechtel has rightly pointed out the inapplicability of the term 'pre-capitalism' to describe this period: to see any period simply as the forerunner of another is analogous to denying a child its individuality by viewing it simply as a 'pre-adult'.⁴ Global, European and German conditions gave the economy of the *Reich* a characteristic form between around the middle of the seventeenth century and around the end of the next. It was a form which helped to produce equally characteristic social, cultural and political results.

III

Although economic conditions and developments after 1648 made for a weak commercial and industrial middle class, they did not leave a total vacuum between privileged orders and lower classes. The gap was filled

accurate. In the opinion of Wolfgang Zorn the first real *Fabrik* was not founded in Germany until 1784. *Handbuch der Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte*, p. 553.

¹ Lütge, *Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, p. 312; Bechtel, *Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, pp. 271–6.

² Lütge, *Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, p. 329. This is not to deny that in other European countries, in particular France, noble entrepreneurs were also common – G. V. Taylor, 'Types of Capitalism in 18th Century France', *English Historical Review*, 79 (1964), pp. 489–90, 495–6. There is insufficient evidence for any precise comparison, but general accounts give a very firm impression that the German nobility's entrepreneurial rôle was relatively more important.

³ Lütge, *Die wirtschaftliche Situation in Deutschland und Oesterreich um die Wende vom 18. zum 19. Jahrhundert*, *Forschungen zur Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (Stuttgart, 1964), Vol. 6.

⁴ Bechtel, *Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, p. 19.