
— INTRODUCTION —

GERMANY AFTER THE THIRTY YEARS WAR

SOCIOECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES: COLLAPSE AND DELAYED DEVELOPMENT

“I do not intend to give the reader of this history, as it is often done, a mosaic constructed from an infinite number of individual accounts. [This method] perhaps aims more to arouse terror and compassion than to bring about a creative synthesis and inner understanding,” wrote Bernhard Erdmannsdörffer. He was seeking to reconstruct the “material and cultural conditions” after the Thirty Years War in his still valuable *German History from the Westphalian Peace to the Accession of Friedrich the Great* (1882). He thought that such a synthesis was not yet possible, though “the new research in economic history” might one day make it so. Since then we have learned much more, but we still cannot give a general account of the war’s consequences that is complete in detail and breadth.

The contemporary reports of the devastations of the Thirty Years War, and the accounts in the imaginative literature do not always rest on direct experience. If some of these works do not reveal the extent of the suffering caused by the war, others exaggerate. More importantly, the devastations were not spread equally throughout Germany. The war spared extensive areas largely or completely; in others, it passed through numerous times, bringing with it destruction, plunder, and impoverishment. If simply compiling the terrifying reports would give far too negative an impression, by the same token, statistics for the empire as a whole cannot come close to revealing the actual catastrophic losses that took place in a particular city or region. Trying to arrive at trustworthy, concrete information is still fraught with almost insurmountable difficulties. We cannot conclude that a population was destroyed just because a village was abandoned, since a part or all of its inhabitants might have emigrated elsewhere. Fugitives streamed continuously in and out of the cities, and vagabonds wandered about the countryside in great number. As with the murdered and killed, exact

figures are impossible to come by. Desertion was commonplace: Foreign mercenaries poured into Germany, and many remained, some in extreme conditions. There is no way of knowing about the birthrates in areas affected by the war for years on end. In some places the land remained uncultivated, while in others planting and harvesting was unaffected. Need and waste could exist side by side; many people were impoverished, while others made money. The war did not last for three continuous decades even in the areas hardest hit. There were long periods of apparent peace and even attempts – sometimes fruitless – at reconstruction.

Our efforts to assess the consequences of the war are connected with yet another difficult question that has still not been sufficiently resolved. Had economic decay already begun before the war, in the late sixteenth century, only to be accelerated and intensified by the war itself? If not, what macroeconomic meaning must be given to the earlier changes? We know that since the late fifteenth century individual population groups had been affected differentially by the steady, if uneven, rise in prices and wages known exaggeratedly in the scholarly literature as the “price revolution.” Lords and peasants had both profited from it, the one from the increase in feudal burdens, the other from the higher prices; insofar as they produced for their own consumption, both had remained largely outside the price structure. Artisanal producers, on the other hand, especially craftsmen, suffered a serious decline in real income, because wages rose more slowly than agricultural prices. The aggregate national product continued to climb until about 1620; but agricultural production, confined within the traditional agrarian legal system, could not keep pace with the rapid rise in the population, especially among the poorest orders in the cities, who increasingly were forced into beggary. We cannot reduce crafts and trade on the eve of the war to a uniform pattern. For instance, the great lower German mercantile houses, those representatives of early capitalism, experienced serious losses, while the capital market remained generally solvent, and capital even managed to spread and become more densely interconnected. If stagnation and decline had begun in a few cities, others prospered. Frankfurt blossomed around 1600, as did Leipzig; cities on the Rhine and in Westphalia that exported manufactured goods supplanted older sites; the textile trade in Saxony-Silesia, organized in manufactories, flowered; and the share of German goods in the colonial trade was considerable. But the economy became increasingly distorted, because the growth in productivity could not keep up with the growth in population and the increase in agricultural prices. As the macroeconomic system failed to alter, an active economic policy began to disappear within the territorial states, which became increasingly self-contained and hindered distant trade.

Thus if the economic situation in Germany on the eve of the war reveals a number of crisislike characteristics, there was as yet no general decline. The appearance of crisis resulted from a growing discrepancy among population, the development of prices and wages, the economic system, and

the techniques of production. If Germany was economically backward after the war, then it was basically due to the war itself. The war generated enormous losses and postponed economic growth at the beginning of the seventeenth century for approximately another hundred years.

Just as the demographic catastrophe of the Black Death in the late fourteenth century led to a sharp decline in production and consumption, the loss of life from war in the first half of the seventeenth century also destroyed productive capacity and living space. The regions most severely affected toward the east were Mecklenburg, Pomerania in Brandenburg, the area between Magdeburg and Leipzig, and lower Silesia; toward the southwest, the areas extending from the Palatinate to Augsburg. Less severely affected were Saxony, northern Hesse, parts of Westphalia and the Rhineland, Upper Silesia, Bavaria, and Bohemia. The war largely passed over Schleswig-Holstein, large parts of lower Saxony, though not the edges of the Hartz and the Leine valley, most of Westphalia, the Rhineland, and the Alpine regions. But loss of life did not result simply from battle and material destruction. More devastating was the loss of life through murder and starvation, particularly in the last stages of the war, when unpaid soldiers plundered their way through the land. The armies stripped the land of food and made it impossible for crops to be planted. Epidemics also swept the countryside. From 1636 to 1640 the plague returned, attacking large parts of western and southern Germany. It is assumed that 45-50 percent of the rural population and 25-30 percent of the urban population was lost. In absolute terms the population is thought to have declined from 15-16 million inhabitants in 1620 to 10 million in 1650. For the first time, the population of Germany fell behind that of France. In qualitative terms this decline dramatically altered the age and geographical distribution of the population.

If population remained relatively constant in the areas largely unaffected by the war, it declined in the most severely affected areas by 60-70 percent. Only 50,000 of the 400,000 inhabitants living in the duchy of Württemberg in 1619 survived the war. Only 40 of 6,500 people survived in the Silesian city of Löwenberg. After the cities were besieged, captured, and plundered, the unprotected inhabitants of the countryside were the worst off. The lords could not prevent the survivors from abandoning the land. Many survivors forced their way into the walled cities even though there was no work for them. For those remaining in the countryside, it hardly paid to maintain the soil. The land under cultivation shrank, and villages were deserted. The livestock population rapidly declined, in certain areas by 90 percent. Buildings were destroyed or fell into disrepair. Only children and the elderly survived. Urban and rural trades declined even in almost intact regions because demand plummeted and because of the uncertain conditions of the long-distance trade routes and the unreliable supply of raw materials. Heavy contributions and ransoms demanded by ever-changing conquerors and allies alike plunged certain cities into long-term debt and

forced a restructuring of landownership in the countryside.

This grim portrait needs to be corrected in certain ways. Money and goods expropriated by the military rabble were returned to the local economy. Military requisitioning created business opportunities. Officers in pacified areas bought estates cheaply and began new construction, while those in more fortunate areas profited from food shortages in other regions. Even though the nobility of the Niederlausitz was impoverished, the large peasant proprietors of Schleswig-Holstein prospered. With the disappearance of prewar overpopulation, shortages in the agricultural work force emerged. The price of grain sank significantly as demand declined; similarly, the value of land and estates declined. As agricultural production and, even more so, as industrial production gradually recovered, it became clear that international trade had not simply come to a temporary halt, but that the trade connections themselves were broken. There was too little money in circulation and too little capital for reconstruction. This meant that successful wartime speculators, coinage entrepreneurs, and Jewish court factors – those who had ready cash and could lend it at high interest rates – acquired an unprecedented influence.

Although agriculture was more seriously affected than trade or manufacture, the war intensified the agrarian character of the German economy. The German economy became even more detached from that of western Europe: Witness the relative insignificance of foreign trade, the comparatively modest standard of living maintained by the large majority of the population in the politically peripheral regions, and the lesser competence among artisans who therefore produced less for the wealthier orders. Hence the external impetus and financial means were often lacking for fundamental reconstruction. Furthermore, for a time, individuals and corporations lacked the will to begin. The Treaty of Westphalia did not bring immediate and universal peace. It took years for the old armies to disperse and retreat, even as new wars broke out on German soil in the next decades. For all of these reasons the postwar economic depression was extraordinarily lengthy.

It is in this context, significantly, that the territorial rulers and their governments began actively to intervene in the economy. We witness the beginning of a new phase in the development of political practice, a phase of mercantilism and cameralism that sought to strengthen the power of the state by supporting the economy.

SOCIOCULTURAL CONSEQUENCES:
EXHAUSTION, STAGNATION, PROVINCIALIZATION

Every general statement concerning the social and cultural consequences of the war is crude and inexact. Even if we do not portray life in the villages or

on the estates, each residential or trading city had its own particular standard of living, education, religious life, art, and literature. The surviving written accounts give us only a narrow slice of that reality and are necessarily colored.

Once again we must take a short look backward to conditions on the eve of the war. In general the sixteenth century had brought increased prosperity, especially to the cities. Their wealth and spending for public buildings continued into the first years of the war. In many cases spending may even have increased, though the political clout of the cities within the emerging territorial states had already begun visibly to wane. Rich burgher families and the landed nobility demanded luxury goods and artistically crafted implements of various kinds, thus challenging the artisanate to great achievement. The rural nobility and the territorial princes actively supported new construction. Elias Holl began building the Zeughaus in 1602 and the town hall in Augsburg in 1615; Georg Riedinger started the palace in Aschaffenburg in 1605; construction of the Danzig Zeughaus began in 1600 and the town hall in Bremen in 1609. All of these, including the buildings of the so-called Weser Renaissance, expressed a secular urge to build inspired by the culture of the Italian Renaissance. Catholic and Protestant church construction blossomed at the same time, though Protestant construction began somewhat more haltingly with Paul Franke's building of the Marienkirche in Wolfenbüttel (1607-8). The early baroque Latin drama of the Jesuits reached a high point in the person of Jakob Bidermann, whose *Cenodoxus* was first performed in 1602. Protestant church music also flowered for the first time in the figure of Michael Praetorius, who became active in Wolfenbüttel from 1612 onward. The territorial states continued to found confessional universities into the first years of the war: Giessen (1607) and Paderborn (1614) were followed by Rinteln (1621) and Salzburg (1622). Imperial cities also established new universities: Strasbourg (1611) and Altdorf (1622 within Nuremberg territory). A late humanist Latin style was still cultivated within the universities, but legal-political theory had a contemporary orientation. In opposition to the teachings of Spanish late scholasticism, Althusius argued for the western European Calvinist conception of the political compact, and Arnisaeus elaborated the Lutheran conception of patriarchal godly grace. The oldest surviving newspapers date from 1609 in Strasbourg and Augsburg, attesting to the continued activity of public life in the cities.

The religious fervor and intellectual energy released by the Reformation had largely faded. Theological questions had become routinized, as had the confessional shaping of thought and social life. Lutheran orthodoxy unfolded within the Formula of Concord that had been achieved after lengthy negotiations in 1580. Catholic doctrine of the Counter-Reformation developed within the decisions of the Tridentine Council, though these had been accepted only haltingly within the individual German territories.

Both churches demonstrated a growing rigidification that still revealed the central importance of faith and the institutional church within social and political life. At the same time, the territorial princes and their legally trained councillors began to transform the churches into state churches by placing them under princely authority and integrating them into the institutional life of their territories.

It was the war that destroyed the material basis of a regional cultural life that was no longer as dynamic as it had been in the early sixteenth century but was still viable and prosperous. Construction came to a standstill in large parts of Germany. There was no longer a demand for craftsmanship and artistic creativity. Once construction began again after the war, urban burghers and the now impoverished and indebted landed nobility could no longer function as major patrons. Instead, the ruling nobility and, in Catholic regions, the church dominated reconstruction, and they often looked outside Germany to satisfy their needs. We also cannot overemphasize how low the cultural aspirations of the rural population had sunk in the war zones.

At the beginning of the war the opposing forces had been shaped largely by religious affiliation, and they had seen the war as a struggle over correct belief. But this view of the war was soon carried to absurdity. Although religious conflict did not disappear, it receded in significance in comparison to the property-holding classes' search for security and to the territorial princes' efforts to achieve a stable and expanded authority. Religious affiliation was largely maintained through an agreement in the Westphalian Peace to make 1624 the normal year. From then onward relations between church and state were essentially determined by the individual governments. German Catholicism entered a period of self-satisfaction with the fading of the Counter-Reformation, which also corresponded to a decline in the significance of the papacy. Within German Protestantism, on the other hand, the ruling orthodoxy loosened somewhat later, influenced by a Christian stoicism and pietism that in turn was shaped by English and Dutch sources.

The "great war" prepared the inward turn of religious life afterward. It did not bring with it either a sense of rupture or destruction in either secular or religious literature, but rather it challenged belief and created a turning inward. The war drove men and women to hope and despair. It was an occasion for jubilation and lament. It forced a search for meaning and created profound anxieties about the meaninglessness of existence. It brought forth eschatological hope, a deep feeling of sinfulness, and a search for worldly pleasure. Grimmelshausen's great novel *Simplizissimus* appeared in 1669 as a portrait of events and manners during the war years and as a moral-satirical allegory of human life: The world is inconstant, fortune is fickle, and human behavior is a type of madness from which we are freed only through renunciation and trust in our salvation in the next life.

After the war there was no longer a broad stratum of urban burghers who could create a self-confident, materially potent, and socially dominant literature. Except for the few spared or revitalized trading cities such as Hamburg or Leipzig, only the courts survived. There the poet became courtier and his work courtly verse. The learned character of the literature also intensified itself. It had already been present in Martin Opitz's *Buch von der Deutschen Poeterey* (*Book of German Poetry*) (1624) and in efforts of the Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft (Fruitbearing Society), founded in Weimar in 1617 by Prince Ludwig von Anhalt-Köthen, to support the German language and literature. The officials, clergy, and nobility wrote nothing with a popular appeal, for there was simply no resonance to be found in a self-confident and intellectually dynamic society.

The material decline and reduced sense of self-worth in the second half of the seventeenth century encouraged the increasing dependence on French modes, taste, and language. It became even more difficult with the complete parcelization of the empire into territorial states to construct a central location of political power, wealth, culture, and taste. In the midst of decline, the ruling groups and the educated sought to participate in the most progressive developments in Europe by adapting themselves to the standards of French civilization. For similar reasons they assimilated Italian opera by hiring foreign artists and architects, and they, especially the nobility, began to travel for cultural purposes to western and southern Europe.

Cultural and social life became narrower and more provincial in Germany at the end of the Thirty Years War. Social differences rigidified; the distance increased between the courts – as poverty-stricken as they were in comparison to others in Europe – and the life of the people in city and countryside. A living style developed at the courts that was enormously different from the life experience of the great mass of subjects. Though the pace and degree differed in the individual states, the nobility was either brought or was itself drawn to the courts. In addition, educated burghers increasingly sought positions, income, and prestige in princely service. Such service must also have become attractive because the expanding absolutist system had a growing need for manpower at the courts and within the bureaucracy. At the same time handicrafts, trade, and private service declined.

We noted that Germany in the sixteenth century had been a country with a dynamic and highly developed urban culture, with numerous regional and important supraregional cities. After the middle of the seventeenth century, however, it became a country, like Italy, of innumerable courts, of which few were of European significance. Many cities never regained their prewar population levels or earlier eminence. Life in these cities stagnated; with it the sense of burgher initiative and self-confidence declined; and communal independence was increasingly lost to princely

administration. At the same time older and new princely residential cities grew in significance. The courts also acquired new social functions with their increased striving toward displaying their power and prominence. Similarly, the princely army and administration had a many-sided impact on the society. The social disciplining of the population through the patriarchal regime of the territorial sovereign and the church authorities, which had already begun earlier, now expanded much more fully because there was so much less resistance. This stamped permanently the social and political consciousness of the German people: It engendered those habits of servility, of appeal to authority, and of an absent public spirit that was so apparent to foreign visitors and German critics in the eighteenth century. Such values developed even in those states where princely authority proved unable to overcome the resistance of the estates.

Of course the pattern was similar elsewhere in Europe. Absolute monarchy asserted itself even earlier and more successfully in France; the monarchy degraded the nobility to a court nobility and suppressed the regional opposition of the estates. England was also shaken by civil and religious warfare, destroying the political order, and in Thomas Hobbes's view, bringing society back to the state of nature where each struggled against all. Indeed, crisislike tensions manifested themselves in all countries, so that historians speak of a "general crisis of the seventeenth century." But Germany was the only country to be so exhausted by war, so shaken to its biological and material foundations, so set back in its social and cultural development, and left to such alienation and retreat into narrowness and inwardness. The only comparisons might be to Italy in the sixteenth and to Spain in the eighteenth centuries.

POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES:
THE PARTICULARIZATION OF PUBLIC LIFE,
THE TIME OF GOVERNMENT

Naturally the political development of Germany since the mid-seventeenth century was not simply determined by the Thirty Years War or even by the Peace of Westphalia. The treaty agreements of Osnabrück and Münster did not simply seal the results of the war, but they must also be seen within a wider historical context of confessional pluralism and a shift westward in the political center of gravity within the European states system. This process had begun long before the beginning of the war and was still incomplete at its end.

The signing of the peace treaty brought a legal conclusion, though not yet a practical one, to the open war that had begun as a struggle for Bohemia and had spread to Europe. The original causes played only a subordinate role at the end. Rulers and generals had been exchanged, and

most men living at the beginning either had not survived or could not remember a time of peace. There were so many powers involved, interests at work, and problems to resolve. Delegates from almost all European nations took part in lengthy, wearying negotiations that continually threatened to collapse. In the end they were unable to achieve the perpetual peace they had sought, since they were unable to neutralize the dynamic of the European system of states or satisfy the ambitions of the German dynasties. Even so, the provisions of the peace dealing with the constitution of the empire survived until the empire collapsed in the Napoleonic Wars. The *Instrumenta Pacis Osnabrugense et Monasteriense* was accepted in the *Jüngster Reichsabschied* on 17 May 1654 as “eternal Law and *sanctio pragmatica*, gleich anderen des Heil. Reiches Fundamental-, Satz-, und Ordnungen” and as “perpetual judge and eternal *norma iudicandi*.”

One part of the territorial arrangements in 1648 only confirmed long-existing realities: The Netherlands and Switzerland were excluded from the empire and France annexed the Lorraine bishoprics of Metz, Toul, and Verdun. In the Upper and Lower Alsace, France reached the Rhine for the first time, and she was able in the next decades to derive claims from uncertain agreements that led to further conquest, intervention, and ultimately to permanent losses for the empire. For a time the fate of Lorraine remained undecided. Sweden made the largest territorial gain: Western Pomerania, Rügen, and Wismar expanded her control of the Baltic coastline. Her acquisition of the duchies of Bremen and Verden also made it possible for Sweden to control an area on the North Sea between the mouths of the Weser and the Elbe. Brandenburg's acquisitions also brought Sweden further west: Brandenburg was given the bishoprics of Halberstadt, Minden, Cammin, and a claim to Magdeburg in exchange for abandoning her claims to western Pomerania and Rügen. These gains proved to be decisive for the later course of German history.

The religious settlement also created the basic pattern that, except for some areas later re-Catholicized, has survived unto the present. The Reformed church was recognized alongside the Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession at the imperial level, and the confessions were separated into the fixed division of the confessions on the basis of 1 January 1624. Certain peculiarities survived as long as the empire did, such as in the bishopric of Osnabrück where a Catholic bishop alternated with a Hanoverian Protestant prince, and in imperial cities such as Augsburg, Biberach, and Dinksbühl where confessional parity was maintained among the magistrates. The imperial estates were recognized in their rights and privileges and voted at all consultations concerning the affairs of the empire. Furthermore, they officially acquired the right to conclude treaties among themselves and with foreign powers, insofar as such treaties were not directed against the emperor and the empire.

The year 1648 marked a victory for France in the great conflict with the

house of Habsburg. When the empire, thanks to Wallenstein's successes, appeared to lie at the emperor's feet in 1630, Richelieu had supported Sweden. A few years later, when Gustav Adolf had fallen and peace was concluded between the emperor and Sweden, he entered the war himself and found support among both Catholic and Protestant princes who feared Habsburg hegemony. When the Spanish danger was removed with the Peace of the Pyrenees (1659), France had a point of departure from which she would obtain political primacy in the next decades. Although the Habsburgs retained the imperial crown until the end of the empire, with the exception of the brief period after the death of Charles VI, they were never able to recover the position within the empire that had been held for a short time by Ferdinand II. Their interests thereafter lay largely outside the empire, but the imperial title was a necessary presupposition for the far-flung possessions of the Casa d'Austria. This development was at the cost of the empire, but neither the French nor the Swedes had wanted to bring it to collapse. European diplomats debated whether greater or lesser decentralization of the empire was to the advantage of their individual states, but they knew its complete dissolution would bring the European system of power completely out of joint. Even those Protestant and Catholic princes, who were concerned to protect their own liberties and distrusted Habsburg policies deeply, could not have wanted the empire's demise. As vassals of the emperor they were barely limited in their imperial territories; though they did not possess complete sovereignty, they were functionally autonomous agents in the international order due to their unrestricted right to make treaties. It was important, however, that most princes were too weak to play an independent political role and thus needed the empire for support and protection. Even those who increasingly became less dependent upon the empire – Saxony, Hanover, Brandenburg, and Prussia – never left the imperial legal association. The empire was a political power only in a passive sense after 1648, but it survived exactly in this sense as the framework for the multiplicity of German states and as an essential component in the European system of states. Still, a significant consequence of this passivity was a general stagnation of the imperial constitution until its demise in the years between 1803 and 1806.

The less political energy emanated from the empire, the more it came to reside in the individual states. In the areas of intense fragmentation the smaller imperial estates in particular repeatedly sought their fortune in larger associations, without ever being able to develop ones that were flexible and could evolve politically, however. The larger states, on the other hand, operated with alliances, their own military forces, and administratively mobilized resources within their own boundaries. It is anachronistic and misguided to regret this development from the perspective of the nation state as it first became dominant in the nineteenth century. The account must be drawn on the basis of the concrete facts of German life