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THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF GENERAL HANS VON SEECKT

by

Henry William Herx

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

February

1964

## LIFE

Henry William Herx was born in Chicago, Illinois, June 29, 1933.

He was graduated from Quigley Preparatory Seminary, June, 1952, attended St. Mary of the Lake Seminary, Mundelein, Illinois 1952-1953, and was graduated from Loyola University, February 1955 with a degree of Bachelor of Arts.

Since 1958 the author has taught Modern World History at Tuley High School. He began his graduate studies at Loyola University, February 1955.

The writer has published an article, on the lack of critical content found in the Chicago newspapers, in New City magazine (April 1, 1962) and is presently working on a Film Education Handbook in connection with the Catholic Film Center.

## PREFACE

This thesis on General Hans von Seeckt's political idea has three aims. The first is a presentation of the content of his published works. Because there is little available in English concerned with these specific books, they have been given in as objective and detailed a manner as possible. This is also the reason for the biographical section which has tried to present facts not usually found in accounts of his life.

Secondly, though much has been written about Seeckt's actions, their interpretation remains to be clarified. This thesis does not pretend to do so, but rather it should provide the perspective for such clarification. It should also be mentioned that Gordon's excellent study of the Reichswerh's relations to the Republic, partly based on Seechkt's private papers, reveals nothing contradictory to what is contained in his published works.

Thirdly, Seeckt and his ideas have some meaning for the contemporary world situation. To draw parallels between his time and our own would not be difficult. It is hoped that this presentation may help to focus more sharply on the relationship of military and political forces in our age of nuclear weapons.

## CHAPTER I

### BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

Ironically the Seeckt coat of arms featured a dove bearing an olive branch in its beak. This dove of peace was the symbol of an aristocratic family which had left Eastern Europe for Sweden sometime prior to 1700.<sup>1</sup> In 1816 Rudolf von Seeckt, the grandfather of Hans and the family's first military member, left the Swedish army to join the Prussian army in hopes of rapid promotion in its reorganization following the Napoleonic Wars.<sup>2</sup> In this he was disappointed but he stayed on and married Emma Israels,<sup>3</sup> whose Italian ancestors had settled in Pomerania about 1600. Their son, Richard August, also entered the army and rose rapidly to the rank of general during the three wars that created Bismarck's Reich. Richard married his first cousin, Auguste von Seeckt, whose

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<sup>1</sup>The family's origin was probably Hungarian or perhaps Polish although Seeckt himself felt his ancestors must have been Nordic and their origin exclusively Swedish. Friedrich von Rabenau, Hans von Seeckt. Aus meinem Leben 1866-1917 (Leipzig, 1938), p. 14. Also consult Edgar von Schmidt-Pauli, General von Seeckt: Lebensbild Eines Deutschen Soldaten (Berlin, 1937).

<sup>2</sup>Rabenau prefers not to call the Seeckt family "Junkers" unless that "catchword" is taken to mean nobility and strength of character. He emphasizes especially that only the last two generations before Hans represented any military tradition. Rabenau, Hans von Seeckt, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup>Rabenau carefully points out that Israels "is an old Nordic name" and this is a reminder of the date of publication and the consequent problem of possible suppression in the use of Seeckt's papers. Ibid., p. 15.

first and last boys died in infancy. The second child, Marie, later became the Grafिन von Rothkirch und Trach. On April 22, 1866 was born Hans<sup>4</sup> Friedrich Leopold, their third child and destined to be the last to bear the name of Seeckt.

Schleswig in Schleswig-Holstein was Hans' birthplace, but in 1874 his father was stationed in Berlin.<sup>5</sup> Here the young Hans began his life-long attachment to that city which seemed, he wrote his mother as a young man, to be more his real home than with his relatives.<sup>6</sup> In 1881 the family moved to Strasbourg where he completed his secondary education in 1885 at the Protestant Gymnasium. His final examinations there revealed his scholastic capabilities and he would have been able to matriculate.<sup>7</sup> Instead, he decided upon a career in the military.

After graduation in 1885, at the age of nineteen, Seeckt entered the elite Kaiser Alexander Grenadier-Guards Regiment stationed in Berlin. The following year he was sent to study at the Hanover War College, where he was not entirely happy because he felt the discipline was overly strict.<sup>8</sup> In 1893 he was appointed to the War Academy, from which in 1897 he entered the mobilization

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<sup>4</sup>His actual name was not Johannes but its diminutive Hans, and this he used throughout his life. Friedrich von Rabenau, Seeckt. Aus Seinem Leben 1918-1936 (Leipzig, 1940), p. 320.

<sup>5</sup>Rabenau, Hans von Seeckt, p. 21.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

section of the Great General Staff.<sup>9</sup> Two years later he was the staff officer of the XVIII Army Corps in Danzig. His first direct command of troops came at the age of thirty-six as a Company Commander in Dusseldorf in 1902. Two years later he was staff officer to the Fourth Division at Bromberg, from which he was posted in 1906 to the General Staff in Berlin. He became staff officer to the Second Army Corps at Stettin in the year 1909. Promoted to major in 1912 Seeckt became Battalion Commander of the First Baden Elite Grenadiers. The next year he was back in Berlin, this time as Chief of Staff of the Third Brandenburg Army Corps, the post he held on the eve of the First World War. His early career had been that of the typical staff officer, alternating between schools, staff duties, and actual command of troops.

It was during this long period of routine military training that Seeckt began his extensive foreign travels. Immediately following his graduation from the War College in 1893, he married Dorothea Fabian, and after a brief honeymoon in Switzerland, he began his studies at the War Academy. Seeckt and his wife made almost yearly excursions that were to take them, before the World War, to all parts of Western Europe, North Africa, and India. Seeckt had a professional motive for these frequent journeys besides the natural indulgence of sight-seeing. In his biography of Bismarck's chief of staff, Seeckt mentioned that Moltke had advised every staff officer to be well-travelled in order to broaden his character by observing unfamiliar ways of life, and also

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<sup>9</sup>Craig puts his entry in the General Staff in 1899. Gordon Craig, The Politics of the Prussian Army 1640-1945 (New York, 1956), p. 383.

as a means of developing his military tactical sense. This latter was done by first mastering every topographical feature of one's own country and how it had played its part in previous battles, and then by observing, as would a military attache, how a foreign country's geography and resources could be used militarily.<sup>10</sup> It is clear that Seeckt did this on his own travels. For example, in

a letter he stated that he has seen everything in India that was of interest militarily and that he had even been fortunate enough to have had two long talks with General Kitchener.<sup>11</sup>

These travels ended with Sarajevo. Seeckt's Third Corps belonged to the First Army which had as its task the strike through Belgium towards Paris. After the initial success of the drive (during which Seeckt received the Iron Cross, First Class<sup>12</sup>) the First Army was forced by the outcome of the Battle of the Marne (September 5-12) to withdraw behind the Aisne River. The war of position in the West was gradually coming into being. But on October 31, the Third Corps won a victory at Vailly which it quickly followed up two days later by a similar gain at Soupir. This created the conditions for the minor breakthrough by the First Army at Soissons in the first days of November. Whether it was Seeckt's own plan or his application of a higher order that provided this opportunity is immaterial, for in any event, he correctly interpreted the weakness in the enemy's deployment and exploited it

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<sup>10</sup>Hans von Seeckt, Moltke, ein Vorbild (Berlin, 1931), p. 39.

<sup>11</sup>Rabenau, Hans von Seeckt, pp. 46-52.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 74.



successfully.<sup>13</sup>

As the man credited with the plans that were successful at Soissons, Seeckt was promoted to Colonel and attracted the attention of Falkenhayn. He decided to use Seeckt as Chief of Staff in the Eleventh Army which was being formed for the purpose of achieving the final breakthrough in the West. However, before it could be brought together, the German High Command decided on victory in the East prior to a decision in France, and the embryo Eleventh Army was sent to Galicia where the Austrians were hard-pressed. A joint Austro-Hungarian and German operation under the leadership of Mackensen with Seeckt as his chief of staff was begun with the capture of Gorlice on May 2, 1915. The battle ended in a Russian rout and the subsequent loss of Poland but the one great battle or annihilation, which was its object never materialized.<sup>14</sup> Although Seeckt had planned the campaign with the object of completely destroying all Russian forces in southeastern Europe, Falkenhayn, harried in the West, could not send sufficient troops and supplies to achieve this goal. Thus the brilliant tactical victory of Gorlice was never brought to its contemplated strategic conclusion. By the end of the summer Mackensen was sent elsewhere, winter quarters were taken up, and another opportunity lost for a final end to the war against Russia. For his part in the campaign Seeckt received Germany's highest military honor, the Pour le Merite, and a promotion to Brigadier

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<sup>13</sup>Schmidt-Pauli, Seeckt, p. 32.

<sup>14</sup>Rabenau, Hans von Seeckt, p. 150.

General (General-major).<sup>15</sup>

The High Command now turned its attention in the East to the problems of linking up with its Turkish ally which had become imperative since the British landings in Gallipoli. Bulgaria in July of 1915 secretly agreed to enter the war on the side of the Central Powers. This meant that a combined operation against Serbia would bring contact with Turkey. Mackensen, newly released from Poland, was put in charge of this operation and his request for Seeckt as his Chief of Staff was soon granted. The team of Mackensen and Seeckt began their drive with the capture of Belgrade on October 16. By November 6, the enemy was in full retreat and the way lay open to Sophia. The landing of Allied troops in neutral Salonika came too late to stabilize the Balkan front, and in December the evacuation of Gallipoli began.

As a result the German line of attack was shifted to Montenegro and Albania in a drive on Salonika. However, a new offensive by Italy caused the Austrian forces to be withdrawn from the Balkans and the Germans were left with the indifferent Bulgarians to carry out the plan. The drive was being prepared to commence in April but Falkenhayn weakened Mackensen's forces for the all-out offensive at Verdun in February and at that time urged an immediate attack on Salonika so as to coincide with the Western offensive. Seeckt advised Mackensen against it on the grounds that he could only plan his operations on the basis of what was militarily feasible and not what was politically expedient.<sup>16</sup> As a result the campaign against Salonika never began.

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>16</sup>Schmidt-Pauli, Seeckt, p. 60.

In June, 1916 Seeckt was transferred from the Balkans to the Seventh Army as Chief of Staff to the Austrian Archduke Charles (soon to be the last emperor of Austria) who was commanding the southeastern front. In effect his task was to coordinate the operations by the Central Powers in the entire sector.<sup>17</sup> Two days after taking his post the Austrian line collapsed and a general retreat began. Ten days later they were back on the offensive and the lost ground recovered. By July fourth the front in East Galicia was broken and the way to Bokovina was opened. The following month a strong Russian counter-attack sent the Austrians reeling back again. Seeckt requested five divisions to stabilize the front but could be spared only two. The situation now became what Seeckt always hated: a war of position. Mobility was lost because of the lack of men, ammunition, and supplies. All that could be done under such circumstances was to hold the line in the dreary winter months that followed. The Russian revolution and the protracted truce that terminated in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk eventually freed the troops on the Eastern front for other duties.

In December of 1917 Seeckt was sent to Turkey as Chief of the General Staff of the Turkish Army. There existed a great deal of antagonism between the two allies stemming on the one hand from their mutually divergent and unrealistic plans of expansion and on the other from the Young Turk leaders who wished to take their country out of the war. Seeckt, in the midst of these political intrigues, was barely able to re-establish the Palestinian front. A

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<sup>17</sup>Craig, Prussian Politics, p. 383.

palace revolution wasted this effort and the new government surrendered to the Allies on October 30. Seeckt, who was on exceptionally good terms with all the leading figures in Turkish political life, was allowed by the new regime to lead all of his troops with their weapons back to Germany.

On January 10, 1919 Seeckt was appointed Chief of Staff to the Border Defense North. The Allies had permitted German military forces to remain under arms on their eastern frontier to guard against Bolshevik infiltration. The situation was chaotic: straggling German units fought their way back home and the Lithuanians and Poles were attempting to organize their own governments in the face of the German occupying forces. His official duties required him to work with such insubordinate officers as Graf von dem Goltz, the commander of the Sixth Reserve Corps, which after the official liquidation of the Border Defense group, became his own Freikorps unit. Seeckt's difficulties with Goltz and other such commanders made him realize the hopelessness of their independent action. Although he felt that Germany needed eastern buffer territories for protection against antagonistic Eastern neighbors, he knew that the first priority of defense must be the creation of a strongly disciplined and united military force.<sup>18</sup>

In April he was transferred to Versailles as chief military advisor to the German peace delegation. After the presentation of the Allied demands, Seeckt drafted a negative report on the military conditions. He put forth his views in a memorandum sent to the German government on May 26 in which he castigated

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<sup>18</sup>Schmidt-Pauli, Seeckt, p. 76.

the military conditions laid down by the Allies as impossible of fulfillment, but he added that resistance to the Allies was militarily out of the question.<sup>19</sup> Under these circumstances Germany signed the Peace Treaty on June 28, 1919.

The last position he held in the imperial army was that of Chief of the Great General Staff and so he was formally the last of Moltke's successors.<sup>20</sup> On November 24, 1919 Seeckt received his appointment as Chief of the Troop Office (Truppenamt) which served the newly created Reichswehr as a substitute for the Great General Staff outlawed by the Treaty. His immediate superior was General Hans Reinhardt, Chief of the Army High Command (Heeresleitung) who was subordinate to Gustav Noske, the Reichswehr Minister in the government's cabinet.

A few months after assuming his duties in the Truppenamt, Seeckt and the Reichswehr faced a crisis of conscience in the form of the Kapp Putsch, March 13-17, 1920. Dr. Wolfgang Kapp, a minor official in the government, backed by the guns of General Walther von Luttwitz's Reichswehr troops and various Freikorps, declared an end to the Republic. Noske called together his military leaders to determine their attitude in the present situation. Reinhardt alone spoke for immediate action by the Reichswehr to save the government. Seeckt, in contrast to the position he was to take in the Munich Putsch three years later, spoke for the other generals and stated the impossibility of using the Reichswehr to fight other units of the Reichswehr. The government, unable to employ

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>20</sup>Rabenau, Hans von Seeckt, p. 203.

its military forces, fled Berlin and the abortive coup was ended a few days later by a general strike. When it returned, Noske was replaced by Otto Gessler and Seeckt now became Chief of the Army Command. Noske had failed to control the armed forces and Reinhardt did not have his subordinates' confidence.

Seeckt at fifty-four was now the Republic's leading military figure. Since his return from Turkey he had gradually emerged from the overabundant supply of general staff officers whose future was uncertain to the position of creator of the new and severely handicapped army. His background was identical with that of most officers in the Prussian army who had come from the impoverished, uprooted, landless families of the nobility."<sup>21</sup> His prewar staff training and duties were certainly not out of the ordinary. His war record demonstrated some tactical ability, but hardly superior to that of many fellow officers. The last years of the war had been spent almost in exile, out of touch with the shifting developments of the home situation. He had cultivated no powerful friends in the political sphere which he heartily disliked. Even his admiring biographer admitted that he had too much humanity to be an "historical figure."<sup>22</sup>

Apparently his reports from the vital area of the Eastern Border Command, where he had been routinely posted because of his experience there, was the

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<sup>21</sup>Walter Goerlitz, History of the German General Staff 1657-1945 (New York, 1953), p. 56.

<sup>22</sup>Rabenau, Hans von Seeckt, p. 206.

reason for his selection for his advisory role at the Peace Conference. His work here led to his selection as Chief of the Truppenamt. He was in a position of authority in which to take a stand on the question of the relation of the new Army to the new state, which was dividing the officer corps. The Kapp Putsch resolved the entire problem. The positions of Luttwitz that the army become revolutionary and of Reinhardt that it become republican were officially denied by Seeckt's appointment.<sup>23</sup>

Seeckt opposed both because he believed the army had to remain isolated from politics. Simply stated his position was that the Reichswehr was not to be used as a police power to combat a particular regime's political opponents. It was to be taken out of the realm of political intrigues. In demonstration of this viewpoint Seeckt set up the "Commission for the Accomplishment of the Investigation of Those Concerned in the Kapp-Luttwitz Putsch." Its outcome was the dismissal of sixty officers and the shelving of 112 others.<sup>24</sup> The final result of the affair was Paragraph Thirty-six of the Defense Law promulgated on March 23, 1921:

Soldiers may not engage in political activity. While on duty such activity is also forbidden to military officials. Soldiers are forbidden to belong to political clubs or to participate in political meetings.<sup>25</sup>

Seeckt as head of the Reichswehr was present at the Conference of July

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<sup>23</sup>Walter Gorlitz, Der Deutsche Generalsstab. Geschichte und Gestalt 1657-1945 (Frankfurt/am Main, 1950), pp. 321-22.

<sup>24</sup>Schmidt-Pauli, Seeckt, p. 98.

<sup>25</sup>Curt Riess, The Self Betrayed: Glory and Doom of the German Generals (New York, 1942), p. 71.

1920, where the allied demands for the final composition and structure of the German Army were imposed. Seeckt's arguments for various changes were not accepted and the hundred thousand man Reichswehr was required to comply with the Conference's provisions no later than January 1, 1921. The Allies assigned a military commission headed by General Nollet to ensure that all the conditions were carried out to their satisfaction. Seeckt maintained that trying to negotiate successfully with this commission was one of his chief duties in the Army Command.<sup>26</sup>

Seeckt's energies were completely concentrated on the gigantic task of reorganizing, within the treaty limitations, the broken Germany army so that it would be a military force capable of providing some guarantee of Germany's sovereignty and at the same time providing the nucleus for expansion in the future. Germany's political leaders paid little attention to the manner of this reorganization. The withdrawal of the Reichswehr from an active role in political affairs was the reason for the government's apathy to what its military leaders were doing in their own work. The Reichswehr Minister, Gessler, felt that his duty was to represent the interests of the Army in the Reichstag rather than the opposite. This meant that under the protection of Gessler's ministerial office, Seeckt was in the position of having almost complete freedom in military matters.<sup>27</sup>

The year 1923 was the highpoint of Seeckt's career. At the beginning of

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<sup>26</sup>Rabenau, Seeckt, p. 445.

<sup>27</sup>Harold J. Gordon, Jr., The Reichswehr and the German Republic 1919-1926 (Princeton, New Jersey, 1957), pp. 314-335.



January the French moved into the Ruhr under the terms of the Treaty which gave them the right of occupation if the reparations were in default. The German government was advised by its military that the Reichswehr did not possess the capability of stopping the French should they decide upon a further penetration of Germany. The German leaders were also deeply disturbed by the separatist sentiments along the Rhine and in the south which were being supported by the French. In this crisis the government decided upon a policy of "passive resistance" on January 12, 1923, to render the Ruhr unprofitable for the French. Instead of achieving this, a precipitous inflation engulfed all Germany.

The Ruhr crisis decided the Republic's leaders upon the necessity of improving their military security. To this end, Seeckt met with Severing, the Prussian Minister of the Interior, and they agreed upon the creation of an unofficial formation of men called Worker Troops (Arbeitertruppe) which would be trained and supplied with weapons by the Reichswehr.<sup>28</sup> This was the beginning of the so-called "Black Reichswehr" which proved to be more dangerous than useful because of their ill discipline and they were disbanded after the Kustrin Revolt (October 1-3, 1923).

On September 26, 1923 Dr. Gustav Stresemann declared that the policy of passive resistance had failed and he accepted the government's obligation to meet all Allied demands. In response to this defeat, the separatist elements throughout Germany rapidly gained adherents and the Reich appeared near

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<sup>28</sup>Rabenau, Seeckt, p. 362.

dissolution. In Bavaria, Gustav von Kahr was appointed Commissioner of a Republic. That night, September 27, 1923 Gessler was given executive powers under Article 48 of the Constitution and the military became virtual dictator. A few days later Hitler's Volkerischen Beobachter published a scurrilous attack against Seeckt and he promptly ordered it to cease publication.<sup>29</sup> Kahr refused to execute the order and Seeckt ordered General Otto von Lossow, the Bavarian Reichswehr commander, to use the military to carry out the decree. Lossow refused and Kahr rewarded him with the appointment to head the Bavarian Republic's Army. At this point Seeckt decided on action but was overruled by the government. On November 8, just as the situation seemed to be nearing its end, Hitler attempted his Beer Hall Putsch. The Berlin government responded to this by turning over Gessler's powers directly to Seeckt. The next morning, however, the Putsch was easily stopped by the Munich police.

During the four months that Seeckt exercised executive powers a remarkable stabilization was achieved. The Weimar Republic was given another opportunity to succeed as a democratic government, even though this was achieved by extraordinary measures. The various separatist movements had been crushed, internal bickering among the parties was temporarily abandoned, and the ruinous inflation was checked. During January 1924 some National Socialists were involved in an assassination attempt on Seeckt because, as they said at their trial, he was "as much of a national menace as the Jews."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Gordon, Reichswehr, p. 236 has a translation of this verbal attack by the National Socialist newspaper.

<sup>30</sup>The National Socialists later tried to suppress this fact. Robert G. L. Waite, Vanguard of Nazism (Cambridge, Mass., 1952), p. 185.

On February 13, 1924 Seeckt relinquished the powers he held and the ordinary constitutional process was declared operative again. Seeckt refused the suggestion of some of his subordinates and friends that he remain as dictator.<sup>31</sup> The zeal and decisiveness he brought to the tasks facing him in 1923, the self-restraint employed, and the success obtained, mark this as the zenith of Seeckt's career.

The death of Ebert in February 1925 was followed by Hindenburg's election to the presidency in May. A new era seemed to be beginning for Germany, one in which she was again taking her place among the nations of Europe. The Locarno Pact was signed and relations with the West were much improved. The misunderstanding between Germany and Russia caused by the pact was resolved with the Berlin Treaty (April 24, 1926) which remained the basis of Russo-German relations until 1935. In September 1926 Germany formally took her place in the League of Nations. This year of progress began happily for Seeckt with his promotion to Colonel-General (highest rank in the Reichswehr), but ten months later he was no longer on active service. He resigned as Chief of the Army Command October 8, 1926. Nor was he in Germany when, three months later, the Allied Control Commission disbanded. He had devoted so much energy to this purpose, now that it was accomplished, it no longer had any personal meaning for him.

The public motivation for his resignation was the furor raised by the press over the affair of the Prussian Prince. The facts are that Prince William of Prussia, eldest son of the former Crown Prince, was seen by a correspondent

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<sup>31</sup>Rabenau, Seeckt, p. 397.

taking part in the Reichswehr summer manoeuvres. Seeckt maintained that he was there only as an observer and that he was permitted to take part in some of the staff exercises only on the understanding that he be discreet in showing himself. However, he was seen by a reporter in uniform giving an order to some soldiers. Seeckt accepted the responsibility for the incident. Press reaction to the fact that royalty was taking a role in the military was outspokenly hostile. Gessler made no attempt to help him over the demands for his dismissal. With no sign of support from those in power there was nothing to be done but comply.

The deeper motivations behind the dismissal have not been thoroughly examined. It is inconceivable that Germany's leading military figure should have been cashiered for what was, after all, a minor indiscretion and one that had happened previously. It is understandable that political enemies would utilize an opportune moment to rid themselves of an unwanted figure. But the question remains as to why those in power decided at this particular moment to jettison Seeckt. Gordon presents a picture of gradually deteriorating relations between Gessler and Seeckt resulting in Gessler's determination to replace him.<sup>32</sup> But the decision to dismiss Seeckt was certainly wider than this. Gatzke asserts that Stresemann had no part in the matter but that he did not object.<sup>33</sup> It would be illuminating in the study of the Weimar

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<sup>32</sup>Gordon, Reichswehr, pp. 333-335.

<sup>33</sup>Hans W. Gatzke, Stresemann and the Rearmament of Germany (Baltimore, 1954), pp. 60-61.

Republic to know exactly the forces that combined to bring about Seeckt's replacement.

Seeckt himself knew no more than that the parties of the Left were against him.<sup>34</sup> He surmised that Hindenburg was behind the move but he felt that he had more political friends than enemies and that he would be able to play a further role in Germany in some government capacity.<sup>35</sup> Immediately after his resignation he left the country for a vacation. It was his hope that upon his return he would be invited to some responsible post for which his knowledge and experience would qualify him. Specifically he felt himself suited best for diplomatic service.<sup>36</sup> In spite of the fact that he let it be known that he desired such a position, the government made no move to disturb his retirement. He did, however, obtain a minor advisory post in the Reichswehr Ministry which was probably meant to supplement his pension rather than give him an opportunity to help shape policy although his opinion was sought from time to time.<sup>37</sup>

Seeckt's short career as a parliamentarian also remains to be investigated. Immediately after his resignation, Joseph Wirth tried to get him to join the Center Party but he refused saying he wanted no party label.<sup>38</sup> In the

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<sup>34</sup>Rabenau, Seeckt, p. 558.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 547-548.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 626.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., pp. 627-628. This gave rise to rumors of his conversion to Catholicism.

election of 1930 he decided to stand for the Reichstag as a member of the German People's Party.<sup>39</sup> It was in the midst of a reorganization after Stresemann's death and to Seeckt may have appeared to have a future. He worked very hard for election and toured the country often making two or more speeches in one day.<sup>40</sup> Seeckt took his seat as one of his party's representatives for the next two years.<sup>41</sup> His record as a politician does not appear outstanding.<sup>42</sup>

Seeckt, instead of becoming a state official, became at the end of his life a prolific writer.<sup>43</sup> He took up residence in his beloved Berlin and embarked upon a literary career writing at first on military topics. In 1927 an article, "Modern Cavalry," appeared in the Militar-Wochenblatt. Most of his other military articles were published by the same journal. In 1929 he entered the esthetic and philosophical sphere by writing a piece called "Remembrances of Salzburg" for the Frankfurter Zeitung. In this same year also appeared his first three books.

Antikes Feldherrntum (1929), a small work of thirty-five pages, dealt

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 652.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 653.

<sup>41</sup>John W. Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power; The German Army in Politics 1918-1945 (London, 1954), p. 223. There does not appear to be any evidence for the statement made here that he was re-elected in 1932.

<sup>42</sup>W. M. Knight-Patterson, Germany; From Defeat to Conquest 1913-1933 (London, 1945), pp. 474 and 484. This contains some of his Reichstag speeches on military questions.

<sup>43</sup>Rabenau, Seeckt, pp. 578-622. This contains a summary of twenty-six articles and books which represent only a part of Seeckt's total work.

with military leadership. Alexander, Caesar, Hannibal, and Napoleon were presented as the prototypes of supreme commanders of grand strategy. In Gedanken eines Soldaten (179 pages), Seeckt presented the views of a military man on such topics as slogans, modern military problems, pacifism, imperialism and the need for leadership in the post-war period. The book was divided into a series of disjointed sections but it served as an excellent index to his most prominent ideas. The largest section of the work was clearly intended for the popular reader. The last work in 1929, Das Zukunft des Deutschen Reiches (192 pages), examined the present needs for the German State in accordance with certain historical precedents and theoretical limitations. The whole sphere of the state was analysed and certain general and specific recommendations were set forth.

Landesverteidigung (94 pages), published in the following year, examined the whole problem of German defense in the modern context of mass warfare. The lessons of the World War were presented in order to determine the way future wars might be fought. Here Seeckt also suggested the way in which a future German army should be constituted when the Treaty restrictions were abolished.

In 1931 Seeckt published his historical study, Moltke ein Vorbild (187 pages), the result of his lifelong admiration of Bismarck's Prussian Chief of Staff. It was his best literary effort, well-constructed and well-written. The work served him as a vehicle for the presentation of his own military ideas. It was an apologia for his own work, thinly veiled as intellectual history, emphasizing the parallels between Moltke's time and his own.

During the first year of the Nazi era Seeckt published two last books.

Die Reichswehr (140 pages), retold the history of the reconstruction of the German Army after its defeat under the restrictions of the Treaty. Seeckt related the events in the third person, never imitating that he played any role in what he is describing. Deutschland zwischen West und Ost examined the orientation of Germany's foreign policy. Each neighboring country was subjected to an examination for its possible role in relation to the Reich in the coming power struggle between East and West.

In 1932 the Chinese nationalist government requested a military advisor from Germany. Seeckt agreed to serve as an advisor to the mission and left for China in April 1933. However because of heart trouble he returned to Germany in August of the same year. He left again for China in January 1934 and remained there until March 1935. His work in China was officially denied by the German government, but Seeckt "is regarded by some as having really laid the foundation for the organization of the modern Chinese Army."<sup>44</sup>

In October 1935 Germany unilaterally declared the military prohibitions of Versailles at an end. The following year, on his birthday Seeckt received a congratulatory telegram from Hitler granting him the unusual honor of becoming the commander of his original regiment, the Alexander Grenadiers. Seeckt's life had come full circle. His career ended in the regiment where it had begun. On December 27, 1936, about four o'clock in the morning Seeckt was found dead of a heart attack holding an English novel in his hands.

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<sup>44</sup>Kurt Bloch, German Interests and Policies in the Far East, Institute of Pacific Relations Inquiry Series (New York, 1940), p. 15.



Hitler's perfunctory telegram of condolence to his widow read in part, "The Generaloberst will be remembered by posterity as a great soldier."<sup>45</sup> Three days later a State funeral was held. Hitler, Göring, and Blomberg accompanied the coffin to the Military Cemetery and as the coffin was lowered into the ground, the band played the traditional Ich Hat ein Kamerad.

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<sup>45</sup>Schmidt-Pauli, Seeckt, p. 197.

## CHAPTER II

### THE REICH

Seeckt's The Future of the German Empire (Die Zukunft des Reiches), published three years after his retirement, contains his major ideas on the state. Its subtitle, Postulates and Criticisms (Urteile und Forderungen), made clear that he was less concerned with organizing a political system of his own than with the presentation and application of principles he considered relevant for the Reich's problems in this critical period of its development. He believed strongly that Germany needed practical policies of action for the immediate future rather than more political theories.<sup>1</sup> Any utopian or doctrinaire approach to political questions he rejected totally by his insistence that the political process was one of organic development.<sup>2</sup>

For Seeckt, concepts such as the Reich, nationalism, historicism, and individualism were the central realities of political life. Within this

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<sup>1</sup>Hans von Seeckt, The Future of the German Empire; Postulates and Criticisms, trans. Oakley Williams (London, 1930), p. 26.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 53: "It is not difficult to conjure up a vision of an ideal State, the functions of which are determined on what appear to be logical principles, but the State in which we are living is not a guinea-pig for vivisection by theorists and we cannot afford the luxury, less than ever nowadays, of reducing wrong tenets to absurdity for the instruction of their disciples." Ibid., p. 103: "The fulfilment of the needs of the day in the course of national evolution, that is politics."

framework he was able to take up what he thought to be the necessary reforms of the state institutions, the parliamentary and executive powers, the relationship between the individual and the community, police powers, economics, and cultural forces.

At the heart of Seeckt's political thought was his idea of the Reich. English synonyms for this word are "realm," "state," or "empire" and as a proper noun it has been commonly used to designate various former German states. Usually, however, Seeckt employed the word in a more abstract and broad sense than this and it had for him a deeply emotional, almost mystical, significance. At the outset of The Future of the German Empire, Seeckt established his intention to give to the term "Reich" a wider connotation than merely that of a state, and in no way was it to be taken to represent the existing state institutions.<sup>3</sup> There is, he wrote, "something supersensuous" about this word, stemming as it does from the distant Roman past and continuing to exist even when it has been forbidden a political form, since even then "its being (Wesen) remains."<sup>4</sup> The Reich, he continued, existed in the material world as a political form of government, but it was essentially "an organic living entity (Lebewesen), subject to the laws of evolution" which in his day was "almost the sole uncontested bond of unity" among the German people.<sup>5</sup> This word, then, was meant by him to signify the continuous

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

national spirit or soul of Germany in a very living and vital sense.

Seeckt's Hegelian-like concept of Reich expressed primarily the national, and not political, character of the German people. His nationalism was rooted in a belief in Deutschum, the national genius, and he was confident it would accommodate itself successfully to the modern age of the nation-state. In viewing the thousand years of the Reich's existence, Seeckt saw that the unity of the nation had been spiritual and cultural rather than political, so that the nation was still trying in his own day to adapt a state to fit its particular needs.<sup>7</sup> He emphasized, in the forward for the English translation of Die Zukunft des Reiches, that non-Germans should not mistake this political inexperience for weakness, but understand that the national solidarity of the German people had always been much greater than their political unity.<sup>8</sup> He was certain that two traits in the German character, their willingness to undertake difficult tasks and their "sound political instinct," would result in a successful conclusion to the domestic dangers of his own time.<sup>9</sup> In particular, he characterized Prussia as the model for the construction of a German state because its sense of discipline and of individual service to the community had made it the most successful politically of the many German groups.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>It is difficult to understand the reasons which caused the translator of Die Zukunft des Reiches to use invariably the Bismarckian "Empire" as the proper synonym for "Reich."

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

Seeckt rejected an internationalism which in trying to eradicate the natural national spirit of modern states would actually result in powerful states dominating the weak by using internationalism as a mask for their own aggressive nationalism.<sup>11</sup> He admitted the existence of a common European culture and thought that just as it was possible for states to co-operate in this sphere, a true international feeling based on a strong nationalism might emerge so that nations might share the best in their individual characters.<sup>12</sup> He welcomed the "wholesome" reaction that was growing in many countries besides Germany against the type of internationalism that meant to erase national characteristics.<sup>13</sup> He cautioned, however, that unless the government tried to guide this growing nationalism into constructive channels, radical movements might seize power.<sup>14</sup> Any such dictatorship, he felt, whether of the right or of the left, could never be truly national because they would look to politically-similar foreign allies in subjugating their fellow citizens.<sup>15</sup>

Seeckt identified the nation with a community of interests and never with a racial group. He realized that in the present phase of history nationality was important.<sup>16</sup> However, his nationalism showed no trace of racism, or in

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 13-14.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 177.

particular anti-Semitism.<sup>17</sup> Nor did he hold Pan-German views. He believed in the Bismarckian Reich which had excluded the Austrian Germans whose interests were not consistent with the new federation.<sup>18</sup> He praised Bismarck's foreign policy as having taught "a healthy sense of nationality" by forcing Germans to unite in a common cause of defense.<sup>19</sup> He explicitly castigated those who dreamed of incorporating all Germans into one state as being unrealistic and deluded by the perennial chimera of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation.<sup>20</sup> He believed, however, in a special "German mission" which was to export its culture to the world and to those who were in need of it.<sup>21</sup> Expansion of territorial Germany was not at this time a practical possibility although he certainly was not against exploiting any opportunities that might develop.<sup>22</sup> In particular, he wished the return of the colonies.<sup>23</sup> But he felt that these were not the most important matters confronting Germany. What was of particular urgency was the conservation of the Reich through the achievement of a national unity of purpose in a truly German state.<sup>24</sup>

In speaking of preserving the Reich and not the Republic Seeckt was in no

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<sup>17</sup>In his many writings he attacked no groups on racial grounds and Gordon quotes Hitler's attack on him as a Jewish partisan; Harold J. Gordon, Jr., cf. The Reichswehr and the German Republic, 1919-1926 (Princeton, New Jersey, 1957), p. 236.

<sup>18</sup>Seeckt, Future of the Empire, p. 99.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>20</sup>Hans von Seeckt, Deutschland zwischen West und Ost (Hamburg, 1933), p. 6.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Seeckt, Future of Reich, p. 97.

way implying an anti-republican outlook. Instead he was following the usage established by the authors of the Weimar Constitution. As they stated in its preamble and first article, the official name for Germany was the German Reich and not the German Republic.<sup>25</sup> In justifying the preservation in the Constitution of this ambiguous word "Reich" because of its intimate association with the historical German desire for national unity, Hugo Preuss, its principal drafter, observed, "The word, the thought, the principle of the Reich has for us Germans such deeply rooted emotional values that I believe we cannot assume the responsibility of giving up this name."<sup>26</sup> Such an expression of feeling coincided with Seeckt's own affection for the use of the word "Reich" as a concept prior in value to the form of its state.

Nor did Seeckt's use of the word imply former imperial allusions. As a realist, Seeckt understood that the monarchy was irrevocably gone. He was, in fact, rather bitter that the Kaiser had abdicated in such an ignominious fashion.<sup>27</sup> He recognized the advantages that the military had enjoyed under the former regime and he regretted their loss. But he was fully prepared to accept the Republic as long as it responded to what he considered to be the needs of the Reich.<sup>28</sup> Whatever his suspicions or dislikes of the Republic

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<sup>25</sup>Arnold Brecht, Federalism and Regionalism in Germany: The Division of Prussia (New York, 1945), p. 6: "The German Reich is a republic."

<sup>26</sup>Koppel S. Pinson, Modern Germany (New York, 1954), p. 402.

<sup>27</sup>Hans von Seeckt, Die Reichswehr (Leipzig, 1933), p. 16.

<sup>28</sup>Seeckt, Future of Empire, p. 103.

may have been, he was not a conscious monarchist and he had no tolerance for those within the Reichswehr who wished to work for its return.<sup>29</sup>

Seeckt was not overly concerned with any particular form assumed by the state, that is, the Reich in its political sense. He felt that in accordance with past developments and present needs there were a variety of structural alternatives which the state might employ to fulfill its goal of promoting individual and community welfare.<sup>30</sup> The form of the state was simply an amoral means to an end and the manner in which results were achieved was a question of style.<sup>31</sup> He equated good government with successful government regardless of how it was organized.<sup>32</sup> The fact that he called his chapter on the structure of the state "The Machinery" indicated his feeling that the type of government was of secondary importance.

He acknowledged that there were general principles of successful government, but he felt that their doctrinaire application without regard for the individual circumstance was certain to harm the vitality of the state.<sup>33</sup> For Seeckt, the only absolute principle was the "organic law of evolution" which

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<sup>29</sup>Gordon, Reichswehr, pp. 307-308.

<sup>30</sup>Seeckt, Future of Empire, p. 25 and 175.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 175: "These forms are subject to historical evolution and of themselves are neither good nor bad; you might call them...mutable forms of style, of which nothing more is asked than that they do not mar the main plan."

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 97.



operated through a "struggle for life."<sup>34</sup> This idea of systematic development of organisms was his basic philosophical position and certainly not an uncommon one for a man of his generation. Such a doctrine of "the incessant flux of things" resulted in a thorough-going political relativism.<sup>35</sup>

Political forms are of no more supernatural, than of supertemporal, value. To realize this insures us against a mistaken conservatism looking for eternal verities in mutable forms. State institutions, organizations, legal codes have in themselves, no everlasting worth. They have grown up, are in being today, and are subject to change in the future.<sup>36</sup>

He reasoned that, even though it was an unpopular idea, the "historically logical consequences of past happenings" limited man's freedom of meaningful action.<sup>37</sup> He believed, however, that this evolutionary process could be directed by "the man of action" who had a true understanding of "the continuity of the past to which the future is fatefully linked."<sup>38</sup> The leader who had "served the term of his apprenticeship and pupillage in History" could co-operate with the movements and forces of the past and so guide the course of the present.<sup>39</sup> It was through the study of history that man achieved some measure of freedom by teaching him where "the laws of being and

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 20 and 25.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

growth" were leading.<sup>40</sup> Man could do as he wished but his actions, however understandable or even praiseworthy, were fruitless if done "in opposition to the organic law of evolution."<sup>41</sup> He demanded that the leader be a realist who did what was possible within the historical situation and he dismissed the idealist as a positive danger.<sup>42</sup>

To Seeckt, history was not a speculative study but a practical method for determining a course of action. His historicism, however, did not concern itself with guessing the future, a pursuit he called "labour lost."<sup>43</sup> Just as he did not believe in political theory producing successful government policy, so he did not have any hope in actions based on prophecies.<sup>44</sup> He added, however, that since present affairs would affect future generations, action had to be responsibly undertaken with an understanding of their background and consequences.<sup>45</sup> Thus, he concluded, the conservative and liberal were natural and complementary partners in maintaining and fostering the vitality of the Reich.<sup>46</sup>

Although he made no forecasts of the political future, the quality of

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 22-3.

his historical sense can be judged from what he considered to be the significant factors in Germany's political past and his assessment of the problems and historical forces present in 1929. The basic fact he wrote, in Germany's political development was the unbalanced growth of its nation and state.<sup>47</sup> By this he meant that the long, continuous history of factional strife among the German people caused the Reich to evolve into a state more slowly than other European countries.<sup>48</sup> The final success of this growth was dependent upon the development of a common political unity within the German nation. Seeckt saw this beginning in Napoleon's dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire in 1803 and the consequent regrouping of the German states culminating in Bismarck's Reich of 1871, an imperfect dynastic federation but another large advance towards a truly German state.<sup>49</sup> The Weimar Republic, in his opinion, had not made any significant further progress in the evolution of political unity.<sup>50</sup>

He characterized his period in history as "a turning-point of Time."<sup>51</sup> The First World War and the Revolution had thoroughly disrupted the maturation of German unity but he did not consider this to be the beginning of "an entirely new epoch."<sup>52</sup> Even so great a debacle as the war did not destroy

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 15-16 and 98.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 98-99.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 99-100.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

the basic laws of evolution although it did redistribute the balance of historical forces, most notably the heightening of nationalism in all countries.<sup>53</sup> The problem for Germany was to make this a cohesive movement instead of a divisive one. Seeckt identified the present with a struggle for national unity in the face of ten years of internal unrest. Although the "German nation has yet to live itself into its new State and conciliate domestic antagonisms" he was confident that at some future time "the common factor will become a matter of course and Germany will resume the course of quite evolution."<sup>54</sup> He conceived the "urgent" task before the contemporary politician to be the conservation of Germany as a political unity.<sup>55</sup>

Seeckt designated some of the general principles necessary to the evolution of the Reich's political unity as the gradual reduction of the number of German states, the strengthening both of the executive and of local government, the constant reduction of bureaucracy, the reform of the parliamentary system, and the priority of the common good.

He envisioned the ultimate goal of political unity as a federal union of unit states (Einheitsstaat) to be achieved by the gradual reduction of the total number of German states (Lander). He divided these various states into three groups: the large, vital states capable of growth (only Prussia was so

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 17-18.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

designated); intermediate states which justify their continuing separate existence, and the "historical keepsakes" that serve no purpose at all and are ultimately destined to be absorbed within the first group.<sup>56</sup> Reforms based on this evolutionary principle of "State simplification," Seeckt cautioned, had to await the needs of actual future conditions before they could be carried out.<sup>57</sup> Although it would be a long time before this was accomplished, the politicians had "to quicken and to facilitate it."<sup>58</sup> Seeckt believed that such an integration would eventually and inevitably develop but to attempt to compel a new grouping of states "by way of Parliamentary force majeure" would hinder true German unity.<sup>59</sup>

Prussia embodied in a special way for Seeckt all that he honored about the Reich. To show that Prussia had the right "to enlargement and hegemony within the Empire" he described the special qualities of this "model of the State in itself."<sup>60</sup>

Not constructed on alien models, never having shed a closely knit tribal community, but created by, and developed from the State idea itself, Prussia attaches organically all particles within the range of its magic power of attraction to itself without destroying their characteristics, but by making them subserve the weal of the realm, that stiffened the rich, but soft and versatile German Kultur life by the strictness of its sense of duty; the

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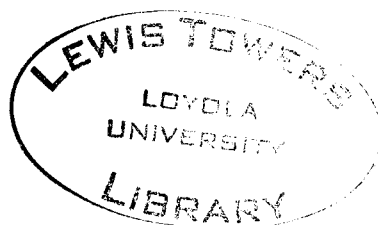
<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 102-103.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 101.



only German State that knew how to acquire new territory for the German genius (Deutschtum), the social state in its truest sense, because, if it inexorably demanded the devotion of the individual to the State, it was at all times prepared to place the might of the State at the service of the people.<sup>61</sup>

He left no doubt that Prussia would "gradually absorb and incorporate the small States that come within its geographical and political orbit" and believed that German unity would be served by the eventual absorption of all the three types of states "into the firm Prussian State union."<sup>62</sup> Such was his solution to a perplexing problem which he blamed the Weimar government for not solving.<sup>63</sup> He believed in a political centralization of power within the proven and viable Prussian state.

Seeckt meant this centralization to be federal in character because the Prussian experience had proved the beneficial effects of sharing authority between the central and local governments.<sup>64</sup> Centralizing tendencies were, he thought, inherent in the modern state's need "of rationalizing administrative work and of facilitating routine control" in its promotion of the common good.<sup>65</sup> The areas in which only the central government operated were foreign affairs and the armed forces.<sup>66</sup> In all other areas, he maintained, the central

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Seeckt, *Future*, 105.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 105.

government must be confined "to laying down general lines, to supervising, to conciliating and to lending a helping hand."<sup>67</sup> His view of sound centralization was based on the self-administration by local units of general state policies. Seeckt believed that the cause of unity was served by giving as much local authority as possible to the various states but he did not offer any concrete program of reform to implement such a general principle.

Overcentralization, in his view, was a dominant characteristic of the Weimar Republic which had "imposed ever-increasing duties on itself in the mistaken view that it ought itself to work for the welfare of its citizens, whereas its function is to take steps to enable them to reach this standard of welfare by their own exertions, and then to watch over and protect them in this state of prosperity."<sup>68</sup> By assuming the burden of what ought to be left to the several states, the Weimar Republic had created an "atrophied, lymphatic bureaucracy" whose members were actually "only governing and directing one another."<sup>69</sup> He criticized the civil service for having become impersonal, unrealistic in its remoteness from actual needs, restricted by the "curse of red tape," bound to mediocrity, and most particularly, politically appointed.<sup>70</sup> In contrast to the present civil servants he praised those who remained on their jobs during the November revolution of 1918 because they proved themselves servants of the state and not of a political party.<sup>71</sup> He

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 113-114.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 115.

felt that the parliamentary system primarily was responsible for the growth of the Weimar bureaucracy since party politics have need of patronage.<sup>72</sup> His solution to the problem of excessive bureaucracy was again the principle of self-administration on the part of local units of government who would best know how to deal with their own affairs.<sup>73</sup>

That parliamentary government had fostered bureaucracy was only one of the reasons he was against it. Fundamentally he felt that a parliament was incapable of governing properly because it would represent party strength and not national interest.<sup>74</sup> The democratic notion that parliament expressed the wishes of the people was illusory because, he believed, people were unconcerned with specific political issues.<sup>75</sup> He admitted that there was such a thing as the peoples' will on grave, general issues so that elections usually were based on the simplification of such issues through the use of slogans.<sup>76</sup> But the Weimar parliament did not even reflect this, he thought, because the proportional system of election, intended to give a voice to minority interests, only severed the contact between the electorate and the candidates.<sup>77</sup> His conclusion was that the party leader in parliament might

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 116-117.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 118-119.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 120.



just as well cast a vote representing the number of members of his party and to thus acknowledge the "unqualified triumph of numbers."<sup>78</sup>

Seeckt did not mean by this that parliament did not have useful work to do or that individual deputies did not represent at times the interests of the nation. He acknowledged that the party system in a parliament was "the natural sequel to the people's participation in political life."<sup>79</sup> But he repudiated the idea of majority rule as "the absolute domination of numbers" and contrary to true democracy which insured the rights of minorities.<sup>80</sup> Government by a parliament of party influences could never serve the interest of the whole nation.

The proper function of a parliament was not to legislate but to advise and guide the leader of the state by helping him with their special knowledge of the national needs. He thought that parliament's task was not to make laws but to be a center for public opinion and as the people became more politically experienced, the more would the government have to accept the advice of the parliament which represented them.<sup>81</sup> Seeckt was vague on the matter of testing parliament's representation of the people but he did suggest that a means other than "the arithmetical" be found.<sup>82</sup> Parliament was, he

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<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 122 and 171.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 122.

said, "conscious of its own incapacity to rule and to govern" since in times of crisis it invariably tended to look for a strong man or allowed the mob to seize power.<sup>83</sup> He summed up the functions of a parliament as "supporting, counselling and keeping a watch on a State direction that has the people's confidence behind it."<sup>84</sup>

Parliamentary government was the chief cause for the ten years of post-war political instability and the main remedy was to free the executive from parliamentary majorities. The need for executive leadership was founded on the basic principle "underlying all forms at all times" which is that of "the worth and value attached to personality."<sup>85</sup> He cited "the triumph of democratic and pseudo-democratic" forms of government as the cause for unrest and revolution in the modern world which both illustrated "the incapacity of mob rule" and demonstrated the need for personal leadership in those very states which had repudiated it.<sup>86</sup> The necessity of personal rule may exist only in the abstract and not be committed to any particular individual, but he insisted, "The sense of incapacity to rule, for the most part unconscious and rarely admitted, is inherent in the mob, and in the hour of danger this sense rises to terror; mass terror leads to panic, to chaos--or to leadership."<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup>Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 177.

The concluding chapter of The Future of the German Empire amplified his views on the nature of political leadership and made clear that every properly functioning state conformed to the principle of a strong and independent executive.<sup>88</sup> Seeckt was purposefully vague in defining the limitations on the powers of the head of the state because theory could not dictate the needs of the historical moment. However, he did concede that there should be some unspecified constitutional safeguards on the personality of the leader exceeding his office.<sup>90</sup> But he gives no indication that he could even conceive of the possibility of a willful and perverse individual gaining power. Whatever the limitations, a wide latitude must obtain so that the executive was free to take the necessary action in emergencies and to oversee the nation as a whole.<sup>91</sup>

This ability to represent the entire people and their interests was a special attribute of the head of state and one that no parliamentary system could emulate. To personify his nation was the primary responsibility of the leader.<sup>92</sup> In previous times this had not always been the case, so that he wrote, "It is only the historical development of the sense of nationality that

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<sup>88</sup>Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 180.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., p. 180: "Trust on the one side and a sense of responsibility on the other furnish more trustworthy limitations than legal documents."

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid.

has made this postulate a matter of course. . . ." <sup>93</sup> Such a representation, in the person of the executive, of "the State as a nation" was a very important check to an unsound internationalism, and which a victorious politician bound to represent his own particular party might not be able to carry out. <sup>94</sup> The head of state could not be expected to break his own convictions or ties of association but he must be prepared to foster and integrate a wide variety of differing interests within the nation excepting only those that would do violence to the very existence of the state. <sup>95</sup> He must be above but equidistant from all. <sup>96</sup>

He professed no interest in whether this leadership would take the form of dictator, king, or president, as this was a question solved by the Reich's evolution. <sup>97</sup> Whatever the form, he argued, the head of state must not be responsible to majorities, as in the case of a parliamentary leader, but must be "responsible to himself and, what is the same thing, to his people alone." <sup>98</sup> Because of the very fact of the leader's burdensome responsibility, "the man of destiny" was often driven to assume this office. <sup>99</sup> He believed that such a man, even though he made mistakes, cannot be discharged because he had made

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<sup>93</sup>Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid.

them for the common welfare.<sup>100</sup> He stated that it was the truly democratic state with its shared responsibility that had the greatest need for the single, centralizing personality in whom its unity was crystallized.<sup>101</sup> The people must trust their leader and in return he must subordinate his own feelings to his assumption of responsibility for the common good.<sup>102</sup>

Seeckt's conception of the head of the state being often an exceptional individual with wide latitude of powers to accomplish his tasks found the limitation of his freedom in the demands of the nation. The issue of individual freedom and the power of the state is likewise resolved by an appeal to the common good. The source and goal of the state, according to Seeckt, is the individual, and the individual's freedom, was a right which must be guaranteed as far as possible since the individual is the basic unit of society without which there would be no state.<sup>103</sup>

But since the state had a wider responsibility than to the single individual, it must interfere with his rights in the interests of the whole community.<sup>104</sup> Restraints on personal freedom should be as few as possible in normal circumstances, but dictatorial powers might be justified by a time of crisis.<sup>105</sup> Such exceptional laws must be done away with as soon as the immediate danger is past since their existence is an indication of basic

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<sup>100</sup>Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., p. 108 and 163.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., p. 164 and 165.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., p. 165.

governmental unsoundness.<sup>106</sup> Seeckt examines property, security, and free speech as fundamental rights of the citizen, and yet in each case what is discussed is the necessity of state interference in these rights.

In every case Seeckt resolved the perennial "struggle between freedom and the State" by emphasizing the priority of the common good.<sup>107</sup> In theory Seeckt saw the importance of personal freedom but when it came to a practical assessment of how that freedom worked, the result, except in the case of economics, was the integration of the individual into the common good. He solved the problem of freedom and power in the voluntary acquiescence by a "free" community of individuals in all that was needed for the domestic and foreign strength of the Reich.<sup>108</sup> It would appear that Seeckt regarded the individual as being meaningful only as a part of society and not in his own right. The Reich, and not theoretical individual rights, are emphasized in Seeckt's thought. Questions of personal freedom are invariably approached from the point of view of social obligation. He did not believe that there were any rights or laws of justice which were absolute.<sup>109</sup> He based his theory of law on the strength of the state to carry out what were the particular needs of the nation.<sup>110</sup> He characterized as weak, codes of law that were adhered to slavishly while the national good suffered and praised

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<sup>106</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., p. 92.

the English example of unwritten law.<sup>111</sup>

Seeckt, in speaking of the security of the individual, underlined that this is not primarily a question of right or law but of the police power of the state.<sup>112</sup> He excused questions of excesses by the police as the unfortunate results of enforcement.<sup>113</sup> He repeated here that if the state did not interfere in this area of public order that the law of competition would result in harmful anarchy.<sup>114</sup> In return for domestic peace, the citizen must voluntarily submit his freedom to the strength of the state.

The right of free speech must be maintained by the state because, Seeckt believed, conflict was a law of nature and hence "the suppression of its expression leads to the danger either of stagnation or of explosion."<sup>115</sup> Restraints, in his opinion, were to be imposed not from fear of differences of opinion, which he regarded as a healthy sign of civic participation in the work of the state, but because it created a dangerous impression of weakness which foreign powers might misinterpret.<sup>116</sup> He cautioned the reader that since it was action and not debate which caused responsibility, that once a course

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<sup>111</sup>Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., p. 170-171.

of action had been decided upon by the government, debate on the matter ceased to have any meaning.<sup>117</sup> In this area he was not concerned with the private expression of opinion but only with its public utterances, especially by parliament.

It was in the realm of property rights that Seeckt was most reluctant to push his conception of state interposition for the common good. He believed that it was here that the state had to be most cautious in maintaining the public interest because the "whole property-owning stratum of the nation" was the foundation of the state's very existence.<sup>118</sup> The virtue of this class was its "diligence, thrift, enterprise, initiative, and sense of responsibility" to which the state must give free scope and whose success enabled the financially unproductive state through taxation to obtain the funds necessary for its operation.<sup>119</sup> The danger that Seeckt saw was that the period of inflation and deflation caused by post-war conditions, the demands of reparations, the over-expansion of state services, and the crushing tax structure had alienated the very class that the state must depend upon to function.<sup>120</sup> The resulting resentment and resistance on the part of the people who showed such a high spirit of sacrifice during the war made Seeckt warn of grave future consequences.<sup>121</sup> High taxes throttle the industrious and only

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<sup>117</sup>Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid., p. 167.



aggravate the condition of a weakening economy. Private enterprise for profit which utilized the valuable principle of the worth of the personality must be fostered by the government.<sup>122</sup>

The right of property, as all other rights, must yield to the prior right of the community. The principle involved in this area, and Seeckt called its understanding of highest importance, is this:

Competition, the struggle for life, which Nature has laid down as a law, cannot and must not be eliminated from economic life, we need it to encourage efficiency; but it is the function of the State to confine this struggle within the bounds set by the weal of the community and to prevent the uneconomic oppression of the weak by the abuse of the superior strength of the stronger.<sup>123</sup>

In interfering in economic matters the state must be careful not to restrict private enterprise and limit itself to a constructive and protective approach.<sup>124</sup>

For this reason Seeckt rejected a state planned economy which would only result in stagnation and lack of individual initiative, and favored instead a temporary state assistance to the producer with the view to eventual independence.<sup>125</sup> He recalled that Germany had been forced by adverse conditions during the war to set up extreme state controls but some "fanatics of organization" regarded this temporary but necessary evil as a model state

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<sup>122</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

economy.<sup>126</sup> Even more did he repudiate socialism which he dismissed as intellectually nothing more than a slogan.<sup>127</sup> Socialism, in his definition, was "the endeavour to place all economic resources, including capital and property, entirely under the custody of the State."<sup>128</sup> This idea he found economically wrong because the state was unable to create but only use values, and false politically in that the state was not meant to be omnipotent but could only multiply a useless bureaucracy.<sup>129</sup> The ultimate danger to the state of such ideas were that they could not, as their proponents believed, be stopped short of their logical end which he saw as Bolshevism.<sup>130</sup> Such movements as Russian Communism were pernicious because they were religious dogmas which appeal to the masses who "do not think, but believe."<sup>131</sup> At the other extreme there existed the peril of private monopolies which can never be tolerated because of their control of the necessities of life.<sup>132</sup>

The economic problem of his day was not what changes should be made in the German economy but how the state could restore her sound pre-war economy.<sup>133</sup> Protective tariffs were necessary to revive many home industries

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<sup>126</sup>Ibid., p. 46, an obvious reference to General Erich von Ludendorff and his ideas of the total state.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>128</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>131</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>132</sup>Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>133</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

but the fundamental difficulty was Germany's reliance on foreign capital which was making her increasingly "a Colonial territory of international capital."<sup>134</sup> German industry could never be sound until it was wholly controlled by Germans. He did not question the continuance of reparation payments, as much as this made recovery impossible, because this was a political and not economic question and one which had nothing to do with justice, but with power of which Germany was bereft.<sup>135</sup>

Although Germany had been industrially autonomous before the war she had been dependent upon the importation of foreign foodstuffs.<sup>136</sup> Her acceptance of the "monstrous conditions of peace" forced by the blockade which was to serve as the chief sanction employed in future international disputes meant to Seeckt that Germany would be defenseless unless it had a self-sufficient food supply.<sup>137</sup> This was a political consideration he maintained that was above all party bickering.<sup>138</sup> In formulating a state agricultural policy, he wrote, "Everything must be subordinated to the one objective; to the restoration of liberty to the Empire by enabling it to live on its own resources..."<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>134</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>135</sup>Ibid.

<sup>136</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>137</sup>Ibid., p. 32-33.

<sup>138</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>139</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

He believed that to achieve this end the state must employ protective tariffs, loans, and credits but once the point of an adequate supply unsupported by imports was reached then this assistance must be withdrawn.<sup>140</sup> When this condition had been attained, he saw the normal task of the state as being the elimination of surpluses and the maintenance of prices and profits adequate for both producer and consumer.<sup>141</sup> He realized that in practice this would be difficult and that the state was powerless to legislate prosperity, but he was hopeful that by concentrating on the individual farmer's initiative it would be successful.<sup>142</sup> He cited approvingly the experience of the United States as an example of how the state was able to direct with remarkable success the development of their farm economy along the lines of cooperatives.<sup>143</sup>

An example of what Seeckt meant by state interference for the national welfare was his solution to the problem of the larger Junker estates in northern Germany.<sup>144</sup> The People's Party, of which Seeckt became an elected representative, was inexorably opposed to any suggestion that they be split up. Yet Seeckt's position in this matter was that large landholdings should be broken up if they were not productive and placed in the hands of those who would make them useful for the nation, alluding to the example of Prussia in

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<sup>140</sup>Ibid., p. 34-37.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid., p. 34-5.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid., p. 38-39.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>144</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

colonizing unused land.<sup>145</sup> His application of the principles of national need and historical development provides a fair example of his method of approaching problems.

Seeckt understood that the problem of economic freedom was coupled with that of social justice. In this area, the state must achieve "the highest possible well-being of the sum total of its citizens."<sup>146</sup> He pointed out that this had nothing to do with the utopian idea of equal prosperity for all since the natural human condition presupposed inequality.<sup>147</sup> He affirmed that the duty of the state was not to limit the competitive struggle which produces wealth but to provide the means of "self-help" by which the "general level of well-being" might be raised by the weaker citizens themselves.<sup>148</sup>

He realized, however, that modern developments in industrialization had made it necessary for the state to undertake social services that formerly were done by the economically stronger in the community. In his opinion it was "undesirable but unavoidable" that the state care for the sick, the aged, and those unable to work, as well as to supervise the conditions of employment, such as hours of work and child labor.<sup>149</sup> Seeckt limited the state's intervention in the social sphere with two principles. The first was that direct aid such as a dole to those in need was to be avoided so that the individual did

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<sup>145</sup>Ibid.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>147</sup>Ibid.

<sup>148</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>149</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

not lose his incentive and become a permanent burden to society but that he be cared for by his family, his neighbors, the local community, and, in particular, worker's organizations.<sup>150</sup> The second principle was that social services should never exceed the ability of the taxpayer to maintain them or the source of aid, along with the state, would be irreparably harmed.<sup>151</sup> He recognized the difficulty in obtaining social justice without unbalancing economic freedom but his principles for achieving this are open to various interpretations.

The state had a reluctant role to play in the social welfare of the nation but it had a positive obligation to be a promoter of its cultural forces. The first of these was the ethical one of public morality in which both the state and churches co-operated for their mutual benefit. Seeckt distinguished between religion, the individual's response to the "supersensuous," and the church, an historical institution which "held out the saving hand of dogma . . . to uncharted religious individualism."<sup>152</sup> He saw no conflict between religion and the state since both were concerned with a strong ethical spirit in society.<sup>153</sup> As far as the churches were concerned, the rise of the national states had occasioned the growth of state churches, a situation he deplored

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<sup>150</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>151</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>153</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

because the state had no concern with doctrines and the church's interest was beyond politics.<sup>154</sup> In the promotion of religion the state must regard the various churches with tolerance which, even if it was not one of the principles of modern times, it would still have to be affirmed.<sup>155</sup>

The state had the duty of promoting the work of religion and this meant of the creeds in which it was embodied.<sup>156</sup> The only reservation he attached to this material assistance was the same that all citizens must observe, and that was to foster the stability of the state.<sup>157</sup> By calling Germany a Christian state Seeckt meant that the state reflected the morality of its citizens and not that the state was in any way Christian.<sup>158</sup> He recognized that churches were "political associations" because they existed for the protection of their coreligionists, and he saw the Roman Catholic Church in particular as having international political significance.<sup>160</sup> The state, he believed, could accommodate to this but the state must never forget that it alone was the "embodiment, representative and controller" of the spiritual interests of its

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<sup>154</sup>Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>155</sup>Ibid.

<sup>156</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>157</sup>Ibid.

<sup>158</sup>Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>159</sup>Ibid.

<sup>160</sup>Ibid.

people.<sup>161</sup> He concluded that conflict in this area would be avoided if both realized that they were fulfilling the same duty but on different planes.<sup>162</sup> He makes no comment on other ethical groups, such as the Teutonic Christians or the Masons, omitting them from any official place in the state.

Religion was a part of the citizen's formation but another equally important area of that cultivation was education. In education, as religion, the state was able to promote the material aspects but the non-material were beyond its scope.<sup>163</sup> He believed that the state could ensure the development of students with average mentality but that it was incapable of instilling genius into men of talent.<sup>164</sup> The most it could do was to provide opportunities for such individuals to reach their maximum limits.<sup>165</sup> He believed that education was not primarily meant for practical purposes but for the cultural broadening of the entire person.<sup>166</sup> However, for the state, the most important result of the classroom, was to stamp its students with the national character.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>161</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>162</sup>Ibid.

<sup>163</sup>Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>164</sup>Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>165</sup>Ibid.

<sup>166</sup>Ibid.

<sup>167</sup>Ibid., p. 74.



He stated that the sole responsibility for education must lie with the state since it is as much an asset as its material resources.<sup>168</sup> Seeckt realized that from this claim there arose three dangers: party politics being introduced into the schools, governmental bureaucracy destroying the spirit of education by its insistence on a deadening uniformity, and the temptation to make education a state monopoly closing off equally valid education from other sources.<sup>169</sup> The higher the educational level, the more the state should withdraw its direct control leaving the initiative to the discretion of the school officials themselves.<sup>170</sup> He saw this as being especially true in respect to allowing universities complete freedom to do as they saw fit, because they played such a distinctive role in molding society.<sup>171</sup> It should be noted that nowhere does he give any state institution so much freedom.

Science likewise he placed beyond the control of the state since its results are for the benefit of all mankind.<sup>172</sup> Although the state would ultimately derive some practical benefit from it, science existed for its own sake.<sup>173</sup> It was international but it could only develop in a national setting

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<sup>168</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>169</sup>Ibid., p. 74-76.

<sup>170</sup>Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>171</sup>Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>172</sup>Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>173</sup>Ibid., p. 79.

and the state had the duty to foster this part of its spiritual strength.<sup>174</sup>  
 Art was more "earthbound" than science since it was a reflection of the time in  
 which it existed and, hence, political life strongly influenced and sometimes  
 used it.<sup>175</sup> Writing especially reflected political conditions, and the state  
 must not make the mistake of trying to interfere or set up an official  
 literature.<sup>176</sup> Nor should it attempt to censor literature directly since  
 enough laws existed for the protection of "public order and security."<sup>177</sup>  
 He characterized censorship boards as absurdities because their members could  
 not help but be prejudiced and they should in any case be rendered superfluous  
 by the existing legal code and the magistrates.<sup>178</sup> The strong state, he  
 believed, did not have to be afraid of criticism or laughter and those who  
 "pander to the sensation of the moment will quickly disappear."<sup>179</sup> In particu-  
 lar, political interference, with its party politics and bureaucratic  
 favorites, was to be avoided although the state within limitations (to support  
 "circenses" the state had to have enough "panis") should endeavour to help  
 the artist.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>174</sup>Ibid.

<sup>175</sup>Ibid., p. 80-81.

<sup>176</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>177</sup>Ibid.

<sup>178</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>179</sup>Ibid.

<sup>180</sup>Ibid., p. 85-86.

In his discussion of the spiritual and creative forces of German culture he included what he called the state's "humanitarian duties."<sup>181</sup> In this section he spoke of the charitable institutions of private individuals and of the churches, because of modern economic developments, passing into the impersonal hands of the state social services.<sup>182</sup> However, he was proud of the fact that the state had incorporated within itself the "historic mission of the Church" in the preservation of public health.<sup>183</sup> His consideration of this topic omitted its negative side such as hospitals and old people's homes and instead concentrated on the single positive aspect of physical exercise. He felt that the contemporary enthusiasm for sports was a healthy substitute for forbidden military physical training and should be supported by the state for that reason.<sup>184</sup> He regretted that so much emphasis was placed upon individual honors and less on team competition which he believed was better training in the duties of the citizen.<sup>185</sup>

Seeckt's political philosophy was not composed of anything original or startling. The evolutionary and historicist ideas were common to many writers of his time. So too was the nationalism and the heavy emphasis on social discipline. His adaptation of laissez faire economics to the twentieth century

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<sup>181</sup>Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>182</sup>Ibid.

<sup>183</sup>Ibid.

<sup>184</sup>Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>185</sup>Ibid., p. 90.

situation is almost sentimental in its fervor. The distinctive facet of his thought lies not in its content but in the manner in which it is expressed. He was an epigrammatic writer, expressive in his allusions, and giving the impression of a great breadth of knowledge. He had a sense of humor and of satire coupled with a sincerity that engendered interest on the part of the reader. His thought was authoritarian but he was no fanatic. In the mind of a crude or shallow person, these were not harmless ideas. As expressed by Seeckt, they had style and point. A reader might imagine them in the mind of a De Gaulle, but never of a Hitler.

## CHAPTER III

### THE PHILOSOPHY OF FORCE

Seeckt's belief in a universal law of the ascendancy of the strongest in a competitive world made him, in his political writings, concerned above all with matters of force. In the post-war context of German disunity and isolation, it was not strange that a soldier writing of contemporary political problems should focus his attention primarily upon the state's ability to preserve itself through its police and military powers. His practical approach to such questions resulted in the point of view that in reality the state was not constituted in some abstract legality, but that its legitimacy derived from the maintenance of its existence against internal and external enemies. For these reasons, power relationships within and without the state were of particular importance in his thought. And the logical conclusion of these ideas was his conception that the well-ordered state was a power state whose sovereignty and well-being existed only through the presence and exercise of force. In setting forth his ideas on these matters, the present chapter will summarize his justification of force as law, the use of the state's enforcement powers, the primacy of foreign policy, the necessity of war, the universal obligation of military service, and finally, his concrete appraisal of the Versailles Peace Treaty and analysis of the European situation of his day.

Seeckt's philosophy of force rested upon his belief that actual power and not theoretical right bestows authority. Fundamental in this regard and

consistent with his historicism was his denial of the existence of any absolute or transcendent justice "raised above might, time, and the State."<sup>1</sup> Laws did not depend upon such metaphysical ideas but instead found their origin and interpretation in the needs of time and place.<sup>2</sup> His belief that the only universal law was that of conflict and change led naturally to the conclusion that there existed no absolute standard of public morality or legality to which the state must conform. For him laws and rights were simply the creation of the state's power and he stated quite plainly that "Code, law, and justice are derived from Might and are created by it."<sup>3</sup>

In the last chapter it was stated that he believed there were individual rights other than those granted by the state. However, these rights were contingent upon the approval of the state, because, he said, if the state did not order society there would exist only "the naked struggle of individual entities and the eventual "domination of the stronger."<sup>4</sup> His idea was that there existed no such thing as law or justice unless there was the power to enforce them.<sup>5</sup> He cited Niccolo Macchiavelli's The Prince, which he called

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<sup>1</sup>Hans von Seeckt, The Future of the German Empire (London, 1930) p. 90.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 91: "What has become of the supersensuousness of Justice when law in this country is administered on the principles of the Emperor Justinian, and a few hundred miles farther East the law of a Communist State obtains?"

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 90: "Within the country there is only State justice; outside of it only Might."

"entertaining and instructive even today," to the effect that good laws were made possible by good soldiers.<sup>6</sup> Seeckt outlined a consistent theory of power based on the thesis that power not only precedes law but that "right and law emanate from Might."<sup>7</sup>

He did not mean by this that power necessarily effected good laws nor that the State was free to make any kind of law it desired. Since the state represented the nation, that is, the common interests of the people, he realized that there was an implicit restriction on the state to legislate only in the interest of the nation. "Law," he said, "only has this force [legality], as long as it is in being, that is to say, is in accord with the thought and life of the people. . . ."<sup>8</sup> However, the important factor here was not the will of the people, which in any case was disunited, ill-informed, and inarticulate, but the power of the state leadership to initiate measures believed to be in the common interest. The very existence of the state depended upon such authority and its enforcement. He considered it natural for the citizen to resist the state's authority and that civic compulsion was necessary.<sup>9</sup> To put his thought more directly, the state theoretically derived

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 92.

its authority from its people but practically this authority was directed upon the people for their common welfare.

His nationalism identified the state with the people to the extent that in his mind the state came to stand for the people. In this connection he quoted the Latin proverb that the common good is the highest law and that it would be "a sham regard" for a legal principle to enforce a law that jeopardized the good of the State (ideally the community).<sup>10</sup> Apparently he did not conceive the national good and the security of the state as ever being in conflict. The right of revolution was not one that he acknowledged. He believed in evolution and was extremely fearful of what abrupt changes might bring. The highest principle was the security of the state and obedience to whatever measures were found necessary to maintain it.

A sense of balance in the relationship between state power and individual freedom was lacking in Seeckt's thought. The authority of the state was absolute precisely in order to ensure the freedom of the citizen. Some limitations, most notably economic, were laid down by Seeckt, but there is certainly little preciseness about them and in general all conflicts between freedom and authority are resolved in the state's favor. Although he said that emergency regulations caused by a state of crisis should be removed as soon as possible, the reason for this was that such laws were the symptom of governmental weakness and only disguised more fundamental weaknesses.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 94.



It was precisely for this reason that Seeckt found the Weimar Republic lacking in its representation of the Reich. The parliamentary system obscured the full power of the state in relying too heavily on temporary expedients. Under the Weimar system laws were the result of compromise on the part of the various political parties and this was in no way a substitute for a "clear-cut State will, embodied in a personality."<sup>12</sup> The state in its goal of embodying the common welfare had to be above party intrigues or else it would encourage endless resistance to its decrees.

The State, enacting its laws and enforcing obedience to them by the instruments of its Might, is in the true sense of the words, social and democratic--for which reason neither the State nor the police are social-democrats. . . . The possibility of a party political attitude and the justifiable or unjustifiable fear of it, accounts in part for the dislike and resentment shown towards the State and its officers of public order, an indication how necessary in a well-ordered State is the effort to put the State above party.<sup>13</sup>

This was the ideal, because he believed the government leaders naturally came from the most powerful element in the nation, but the more they transcended their own interests, the more power they would have, and consequently, the more they would be able to represent all interests, powerful or not. Implicitly, then, Seeckt believed in the necessity of popular acceptance of the regime. And he was so sure of the lack of public confidence in the Weimar regime that he counselled a moratorium on legislation so as not to further weaken the state idea in the minds of the people.<sup>14</sup> For Seeckt, the chief crime of the Republic

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 93.

was that it did not use its power as a state, either for good or bad, and hence had no right to existence.

Seeckt questioned whether a parliamentary system was able to govern Germany. His philosophy of government made clear that nothing short of constitutional changes were necessary if a complete breakdown in the Weimar Republic were to be avoided. To him the basic flaw in the Weimar system was the necessity of basing government on a cooperation of rival parties, exactly the point that most theorists see as the fundamental strength of democracy. In his view however, such a system could not work in Germany even from the standpoint of legislation since the full power of the state was not behind its laws. He acknowledged that the parliamentary system worked in England and in other countries but he maintained that it was wrong to attempt to institute it in Germany since its development was entirely different.

No matter what the government, the question of the implementation of policy by the police was vital. He was concerned about the numerous criticisms of the police because this struck at the very foundation of the state's authority.<sup>15</sup> He believed one of the reasons for the general unpopularity of the police was that the Weimar government, in its weaknesses, was promulgating too many laws although he does not specify which laws he found objectionable.<sup>16</sup> A second reason was that of federal control of the ordinary police which he

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

felt should rather originate and be controlled by the local authorities since they should be as close to the people as possible.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, certain departments, and he named only those dealing with major criminal investigations, should be as far as possible centralized, even "to a certain extent internationalized; not for any political object, only for its own ends."<sup>18</sup> Last of all, he felt it was a great mistake that every "verboten" sign in Germany should carry the imprint of the Reich's emblem.<sup>19</sup>

In connection with police affairs, Seeckt devotes some space to the relationship of the military and internal order. The armed forces are trained for the purpose of waging war against the external enemies of the state and their use as police would seriously compromise their standing with the people and undermine for a long time the authority of the police.<sup>20</sup> In the extraordinary situation in which the police are helpless in maintaining the existence of the state, then the army must wage civil war which is "the most unhappy, and to a soldier, most distasteful" using full military means to obtain their object.<sup>21</sup> However, he asserted unequivocally that even with full knowledge of the many serious objections, " . . . the army must, if the necessities of the State demand it, be prepared to take this ungrateful task upon its shoulders

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 132-33.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 134-135.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 135.

and stand the consequences."<sup>22</sup> However, he insisted that the state leadership be under no illusions that the army could ever allow itself "to be employed as party troops."<sup>23</sup>

This is the theoretical justification for the use of the Reichswehr in the 1923 separatist uprisings in Saxony and Bavaria. Seeckt's stricture against the government's use of the military to maintain the position of a particular party is also the partial explanation for Seeckt's attitude in the Kapp Putsch of 1920. His adamant attitude about party politics also throws light on the meaning of his reply to Ebert's question about whom the Reichswehr supported.<sup>24</sup> The Reichswehr was a military organization which obeyed the orders of its Commanding General who was subordinate to the President of the Reich through the Reichswehr Minister. The military chain of command was inflexible even for presidents. But as his action in 1920 showed the military commander was responsible for his interpretation of the direction he received from his civilian superiors and if he found them objectionable his recourse was resignation and not insubordination.

The armed forces existed however for a much broader purpose than internal security. They were an integral part of Seeckt's philosophy of force in the realm of foreign relations. He regarded foreign policy as operating from a position of power completely divorced from any notion of morality or legality.

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>See Chapter Five for fuller treatment of this topic.

He defined the conduct of foreign affairs as being a combination of diplomacy and the military.<sup>25</sup> Because foreign relations were based upon power, the goal of Germany's foreign policy must be "the restoration of Germany as a Might State."<sup>26</sup> He believed that treaties and alliances, just as laws within the state, were meaningless without the power to implement them. "Alliances between States should be regarded entirely from the point of view of Might policy: and whatever else the treaties contain, their chief value, often their only value, lies in their military clauses."<sup>27</sup> Seeckt's position was that a state relied not on the good will that was expressed in a pact but on its worth which could only be translated into military terms relative to political ends.

These political aims naturally determine the state's foreign policy. Seeckt denied the proposition that domestic policy was more important than foreign relations since to him they were two different aspects of the state. Neither had primacy over the other because both dealt with the political goal of fostering state strength.<sup>28</sup> However, he maintained this to be true only in the case of a strong national state whose people and leaders were unaffected by outside interests and influences.<sup>29</sup> He believed that a strong nationalism

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<sup>25</sup>Seeckt, Future of Empire, p. 107.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., pp. 145-46.

inevitably resulted in strengthening the state's relations with foreign countries and was actually a factor in maintaining peace.<sup>30</sup>

The worst enemy of a strong foreign policy was mistaken internationalism. The idea of an economic union was repugnant to Seeckt's nationalism because the internal economic foundation of the state's independence would be influenced by the consideration of foreign economic needs.<sup>31</sup> State sovereignty demanded that each country serve their own economic interests and that this was the goal of foreign policy. International economic ties destroyed the freedom of the militarily weak state since there would be "the oppression of the economically strong by the politically stronger, for in this adventure, as in every other, Might rules."<sup>32</sup> Seeckt believed that Germany would suffer in such a situation because this type of association would have "the purpose and the object of conserving the status quo in Europe, and is therefore to the interests of those who believe this Europe and the world of today to be politically the best available."<sup>33</sup> Seeckt found the thought repugnant.

There was a further danger to national strength in international finance which was more interested in profits than in national well-being. He commented

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 149.

on this that. "It is impossible to shut one's eyes to the fact that the intertwined, international monetary powers and monetary interests are beginning to acquire a super-State influence."<sup>34</sup> The belief that such investments would lead to the avoidance of war was mistaken in Seeckt's view because he realized that such economic arrangements could also very well be the cause of war.<sup>35</sup> Seeckt was not a mere xenophobe but he had no faith in any other safeguard to the security of a state but its power. He was not an isolationist but he appreciated that Germany's only chance of regaining her position as a great power was to avoid good wishes and concentrate steadfastly on the goal of force.

In attaining this goal, Germany must be aware that in its weakened, post-war condition any alliance it might make with a stronger country would be ultimately disadvantageous, because weak states in doing so place themselves in the position of being "the stronger's vassal who can be dropped when convenient."<sup>36</sup> He did not believe that isolation or neutrality was a practical solution to the international problems of a small state since such policies are only intelligible when founded on force and the will to use it. Germany's course had to be different because she was in reality a strong power who temporarily had been deprived of her power by the peace treaty.<sup>37</sup> To regain

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

her position as a world leader, Germany would have to use diplomacy to get rid of the military and economic restrictions by which the Allies had hoped to destroy her after the war.

He did not describe the course German foreign policy was to take in the restoration to the status of a great power. The fact that he was one of the originators and strongest advocate of the military and economic alliance with Russia, demonstrates how he translated his theories into action.<sup>38</sup> The key to such an alliance is to be found not simply in the fact that both Germany and Russia were outcasts and weak states in comparison to the Western Powers, but in his understanding of the nature of diplomacy. It was not based on legal permanence but on fluctuating basis of national needs. A state must not feel bound to observe the provisions of a treaty which was no longer to its advantage and in moral justification of this position he wrote that "Treaties, alliances, pacts, associations, are, of course, not made for all eternity, and the reservation 'rebus sic stantibus' in all of them is an understood secret clause. . . ." <sup>39</sup>

Seeckt was not being cynical in this statement. It was a natural outgrowth of his world view and his extreme nationalism in which laws and treaties were no more than a "scrap of paper" in relation to the far greater importance of national security. For Seeckt, there were no higher values than those of the

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<sup>38</sup>Hans W. Gatzke, Stresemann and the Rearmament of Germany (Baltimore, 1954), pp. 87-88.

<sup>39</sup>Seeckt, Future of Empire, p. 149.



Reich. It would have been hypocritical of him to have disguised in flowery language his belief in the primacy of national self-interest. He understood the importance of world opinion but the first duty of each state was its own security and interests.

Seeckt was a believer in Machtpolitik from conviction and he found no possible alternative to it. In his most thoughtful work, Moltke, he considered at length the philosophical implications of his policy of force which he derived from Emmanuel Kant's discussion of the possibility of eternal peace. Seeckt's reading of Kant was that although eternal peace was an extremely remote possibility for mankind it should not be dismissed on that account because "if all human acts are subjected to the categorical imperative based on freedom, then this one cannot be subordinated in an individual instance to the principle of opportunism and cleverness."<sup>40</sup> Even though Kant lauded peace as one of the ideals of mankind, he realized, Seeckt thought, that struggle and conflict was the natural condition of man.<sup>41</sup> It was Seeckt's understanding of the human condition that served as his chief justification of following a course of power politics.

According to Seeckt, Kant saw war as one of the competitive elements in the development of the natural world. Even more, Seeckt saw war as being something noble and dignified because Kant showed it was founded in human

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<sup>40</sup>Hans von Seeckt, Moltke, ein Vorbild (Berlin, 1931), p. 104.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

nature.<sup>42</sup> Seeckt was committed to the belief that war was both profoundly human and a good which effected the best in man. Hence, he saw pacifism as being an unnatural sentiment and unrealistically abstracted from the actual circumstances of life. Beyond the philosophical there is a religious justification for war as a positive good. Moltke's life showed, Seeckt wrote, that a military career and piety go together and that the soldier takes his vocation "not as a blind fighter for God, but in the full freedom of the Christian man."<sup>43</sup> Seeckt believed strongly that war was part of the moral order.

Seeckt ended his discussion with Kant's view of the possibility of man renouncing war by quoting him as saying that the whole question of eternal peace is about an ideal which probably has no foundation in fact.<sup>44</sup> He agreed with Kant that as a dream it was certainly a very appealing one. But it was for this very reason that Seeckt was unalterably opposed to this ideal which he considered potentially capable of destroying the state. The vision of peace, he believed, sapped the strength necessary to meet actual conditions confronting the state.<sup>45</sup>

In his Gedanken eines Soldaten, Seeckt again dismissed the theoretical

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 109.

position of pacifism. He reduced all pacifist arguments to the question of the perfectability of man. Since this was something which could not be demonstrated one way or the other, he was not interested in the argument. He believed men had to operate not on the possibility of some future development but in the light of present reality in which war was prominently in the nature of things.<sup>46</sup> As in his discussion of political theory, Seeckt, the student of Machiavelli, here presented himself as the thoroughgoing realist operating within the limits of actual present possibilities.

Although Seeckt regarded pacifism as Germany's most insidious enemy, he was not unaware of the terrifying prospects of modern warfare. He knew well what the four years of fighting had cost Germany and in particular that all future wars would be total. It is understandable then, that Seeckt called the soldier, the man whose profession was war, the only true pacifist.<sup>47</sup> He at no time gave any indication that he conceived of the military in romantic or adventurous terms. His attitude reflected a belief in his vocation as a career of service and self-sacrifice with few compensations. The reason for the armed forces was their employment in war, but to decide upon this course was of the gravest consequence.

Pacifism, he believed, did not arise from the terror of modern weapons

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<sup>46</sup>Hans von Seeckt, Gedanken eines Soldaten (Berlin, 1929), p. 73.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 75.

because every past war had been horrible "even to the civilian."<sup>48</sup> However, the state in its mission of promoting the well-being of the Reich, cannot allow itself to be moved by such considerations of modern weaponry and their disastrous effects upon civilization. As much as Seeckt understood the consequences of modern war, he demanded that war, as a fact of life, must always be reckoned with in state councils. He lamented the unrealistic atmosphere created by pacifism in his own time which branded as "war-mongers" people who stated the simple fact, as Moltke had done, that war was an unavoidable evil out of which some good would always come.<sup>49</sup>

Since war was a natural part of existence and played such a large part in the history of the great powers, Seeckt had no doubt that Germany must be prepared to fight another war at some future date or cease to exist. However, he did not believe in war for war's sake. Instead, as a soldier and a "true pacifist," he realized how often politicians resorted to war as a substitute for realistic aims. Seeckt corrected Clausewitz's statement which called war the continuation of a political policy to read the "bankruptcy of that policy."<sup>50</sup> He declared it was the positive moral obligation of statesmen to strive for the reduction of the danger of war in the settling of disputes. At the least this should achieve, he hoped, limiting war to "the great antitheses

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>49</sup>Seeckt, Moltke, p. 107.

<sup>50</sup>Seeckt, Gedanken, p. 74.

of life."<sup>51</sup> The attainable goal that he saw within the reach of mankind was to rid the world of wars over purely political affairs.<sup>52</sup> Here as perhaps nowhere else in his writings does Seeckt more strongly put the onus on the state's leaders for the use of the philosophy of force. He believed the responsibility for waging war did not rest upon the conscience of the military but upon their political superiors.

The limitation of war was possible but not its complete elimination. In his eyes if the politicians of the world really desired to mitigate the evils of war, one practical possibility existed in the reduction of armaments.<sup>53</sup> There were two types of wars and both could be sharply reduced in number and magnitude. The first were those between political governments and these could be avoided at the conference table.<sup>54</sup> The second were those between peoples caused by some spiritual conflict into which, for example, the First World War had degenerated, could be avoided by reducing armaments which would lessen the likelihood of their occurrence.<sup>55</sup> His fundamental objection to such plans was the necessary disproportion of military strength between countries. This could be overcome by the creation of a balance of armaments so that no one state had superior forces in relation to a combination of other states.<sup>56</sup> Another practical advantage of such a system, he believed, was the fact that it

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., pp. 75-76.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

would produce a feeling of security, a prerequisite for times of peace and one which did not exist in the Europe of his time.

Armament reduction did not mean to Seeckt the end of universal military conscription. He held that the ultimate basis for the defense of one's country in modern times was the principle of such military training. The apparent contradiction in the reduction of armaments while retaining universal military training is explainable because Seeckt conceived of small, professional standing armies in all countries, with the population of the country and all of its material resources available and ready for use in the event that a war developed which could not be ended in a short time. However, he doubted the possibility of limited warfare in the post-Napoleonic world.<sup>57</sup>

Seeckt believed that the Treaty of Versailles only made another war more likely. "Peace treaties have replaced a Europe in which there were a few big differences which statecraft has for decades contrived to bridge, by a new Europe, in which there is a succession of unsolved problems, which it will be difficult, if not impossible, to solve by pacific means."<sup>58</sup> Even though he regretted this, Seeckt believed that there was little alternative other than war in a world of unbalanced forces. In any event, he realized that Germany would have to work for changes in the European power relationships. Such a stabilization had to be accomplished before there could be any hope for better

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<sup>57</sup> Seeckt, Landesverteidigung, p. 30.

<sup>58</sup> Seeckt, Future of the Empire, p. 157.

times.<sup>59</sup>

In the Europe created at Versailles, Germany was faced with two alternatives. Seeckt saw that a decision had to be made between becoming either a satellite of France or of Russia. Either choice meant the destruction of Germany because it would become the battleground in the future war between East and West which he felt must eventually come.<sup>60</sup> He dismissed England as having only a small role to play in the impending conflict because the innovations of the submarine and the airplane ended her as a great power.<sup>61</sup> He saw France as Germany's natural enemy and any rapprochement with her would in effect mean the end of German sovereignty.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, he concluded, Germany's only way out of its dilemma was close economic and military cooperation with Russia based upon a realistic foreign policy.<sup>63</sup> If as a result Germany became a strong national power again, Seeckt believed there would be nothing to fear from Russian Communism.<sup>64</sup>

Seeckt insisted that the German people be aware that they would in all probability have to fight another war to solve their problems. He thought that the "war guilt" clause of the treaty had morally confused many Germans. He

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., pp. 158-159.

<sup>60</sup>Hans von Seeckt, Deutschland zwischen West und Ost (Hamburg, 1933), p. 8.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., pp. 16-18.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., pp. 40-43.

castigated the hypocrisy of the Allies in persisting to blame Germany for the 1914 war, even though historical documents had been published to the contrary.<sup>65</sup> He did not dispute, however, that because Germany lost the war it had to pay the consequences of being weak. But Seeckt emphasized that such an acceptance had nothing to do with moral guilt.<sup>66</sup> Seeckt's thought placed the interests of the nation above all other values, and in modern total war this was especially true because its very survival was at stake. His message to his people might be put as saying that, no matter what country had the responsibility for starting the next war, Germans must have the moral fibre to do whatever is necessary to win. Seeckt based Germany's future on whether it understood correctly the ethics of force.

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<sup>65</sup>Seeckt, Future of Empire, p. 157.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., pp. 159-160.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE REICHSWEHR

More than any other individual Seeckt was responsible for the preservation of the defeated German Army as an efficient fighting force in spite of the destructive limitations imposed upon it after the war. In his capacity as Chief of the Army Command, he was determined to actively plan and control the development of the Reichswehr, leaving nothing to chance because of the Allied conditions.<sup>1</sup> He considered his main tasks in accomplishing this to be the neutralization of the treaty's various harmful restrictions and the preparation of a cadre army for expansion when the opportunity presented itself.<sup>2</sup> From a purely military standpoint his work was successful in that the Reichswehr was able to make the future transition into Hitler's Wehrmacht and its total rearmament in 1935 without changing his basic policies. In a wider sense, however, his work was meaningless because the German army thereafter allowed itself to become the instrument of a ruthless opportunist who brought destruction not only to it but to the whole of the German nation. The next chapter will examine how Seeckt failed to solve the political problems facing the military of the nascent Republic which proved so fateful for German

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<sup>1</sup>Hans von Seeckt, Die Reichswehr (Leipzig, 1933), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

democracy. The present chapter will confine itself to an examination of Seeckt's significant military ideas such as the plan of the Reichswehr's development, the necessity of universal conscription, the principle of leadership, the lessons learned from the First World War, and the anticipated form of future wars.

To understand the character of Seeckt's Reichswehr it is necessary to begin with the confusion and uncertainty of the sixteen months preceding his assumption of command. In his book, published in 1933, dealing with the creation and policies of Germany's new army, Die Reichswehr, Seeckt described the situation facing the provisional government upon the termination of hostilities as a dual crisis of internal disorder and external pressure on Germany's borders.<sup>3</sup> Under such conditions there was a pressing need for a military organization immediately adequate to the task of insuring the new government's stability. However, in Seeckt's view, the primary consideration which guided the military was not the maintenance of a particular regime but the preservation of the nation's unity.<sup>4</sup> In the desperate post-war situation Seeckt credited the Freikorps with having saved Germany from dissolution.<sup>5</sup> He did not allude to any direct connection of these groups with either the government or its military. However, it is known that when the Imperial Army

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

ceased to exist with the desertion of General Lequis' group in Berlin on Christmas Eve 1918, the General Staff with the knowledge of the government decided upon raising volunteer bodies which would obey their orders.<sup>6</sup>

This was the genesis of the Freikorps which were used by Gustav Noske, the newly appointed Defense Minister, to bring about a relative pacification of the country. These organizations were given some legality when the National Assembly, for whom Seeckt prepared a memorandum, passed the law of March 1919, which created the four hundred thousand man Provisional Reichswehr. The best of the Freikorps were then absorbed into this Reichswehr as brigades. The March Reichswehr was short-lived, however, because in June Germany accepted the entirely different conditions imposed by the peace treaty. In July the government constituted the Preparatory Commission for the Peace Army with Seeckt as President with the task of planning for the necessary changes.<sup>8</sup> At this critical time Seeckt suffered a heart attack and the actual work of setting up the new Reichswehr was carried out by others.<sup>9</sup> He returned to duty in October 1919 as head of the Truppenamt from which he would be promoted in

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<sup>6</sup>Walter Gorlitz, Der Deutsche Generalstab. Geschichte und Gestalt 1657-1945 (Frankfurt am Main, 1950), p. 300.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 305.

<sup>8</sup>Jacques Benoist-Mechin, History of the German Army Since the Armistice, trans. Eileen R. Taylor (Zurich, 1939), p. 345.

<sup>9</sup>Gorlitz, Generalstab, p. 317.

March 1920 as Chief of the High Command.

In this position he was responsible for the implementation of the military clauses of the fifth part of the Versailles Treaty by which the reconstitution of the German army was bound. The army was to be reduced to a hundred thousand men of whom four thousand were to be officers. The length of service for officers was to be twenty-five years and the enlistment of troops was to be for twelve years. The new army was divided into two army commands which together composed seven infantry and three cavalry divisions. Certain weapons were denied to it such as aircraft, heavy artillery, tanks, and armored cars, and all other weapons were limited to specific quantities. The Great General Staff was abolished and plans for war or provisions for German mobilization were forbidden. Conscription or any form of military training was prohibited. All fortifications were subject to Allied approval and periodic inspection. The Allied Military Commission was made sole interpreter of these provisions and the manner of their fulfillment. In effect, Germany's power to undertake another war was abolished. The question for Seeckt was whether such an army could be made capable of defending Germany from attack.<sup>10</sup>

Fourteen years after its inception, Seeckt described the Reichswehr as certainly not the ideal army for Germany but one that was acceptable for the present and necessary for the future.<sup>11</sup> While many of his fellow officers had declined to take any part in the creation of the post-war restricted army,

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<sup>10</sup>Seeckt, Reichswehr, p. 29.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

Seeckt had championed it on the grounds that even its imperfect existence was the first requirement for German security since its weaknesses could be remedied later. The immediate task was to create as effective an instrument of state as possible within treaty limitations in such a way that it was ready for expansion and development whenever that was possible.<sup>12</sup> To accomplish this he felt it was necessary to draw upon the spirit of the imperial army as the source for the Reichswehr. He defined his basic aim as the reconstruction of the previous German army in a new form.<sup>13</sup>

From the first, Seeckt was convinced that the military clauses of the treaty were intended to destroy the German army by attacking its traditions and spirit. This assault on the spiritual foundations of the army by physical restriction was embodied in four points: the novel introduction of a German mercenary army, the dissolution of the Great General Staff, the denial of modern weapons, and the forbidding of universal military training.<sup>14</sup> The reduction in numbers and the large percentage of cavalry to the rest of the Reichswehr did not worry Seeckt as much as these four provisions. The material defects in the new German Army could be repaired relatively easily at a later time, but the loss of its spiritual quality might never be replaced. Consequently, it was precisely this spiritual element in the military that he was

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 21-27.

determined the Allies would never crush. This idea was the primary source for Seeckt's organization of the Reichswehr.<sup>15</sup>

By the spirit of the old German Army, Seeckt meant the interior motivating force which gives any body its distinctive personality, which in the case of the German army was both its highly efficient organization and its instantaneous capabilities of mobilizing its offensive power.<sup>16</sup> The victors aware they could not destroy the German military spirit, consequently attempted to make this spirit incapable of action. He was certain that the Reichswehr had successfully neutralized the harmful purpose of the four key provisions.

Another aspect of the military spirit was its tradition. The uniquely German military experience was founded in its intimate union with the nation and its history of service to the Reich.<sup>17</sup> Seeckt believed that the new army must in some way continue the traditions of the old. Although Seeckt was bound to construct an army within certain narrow limits, there was much he could do in the matter of continuing German military tradition. An example of his preservation of continuity was the question of the Reichswehr uniform. He pointed out how important the uniform was in making the soldier proud of belonging to a special community and also its role in being the symbol with which the German people will be able to identify themselves.<sup>18</sup> For both

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

reasons the field-gray greatcoat of World War I was retained. The uniform served, he concluded as the badge of the inner community not only of the Reichswehr but of all Germans.<sup>19</sup>

Seeckt emphasized the identification of the nation with the army as one of the guiding factors in the formation of the Reichswehr. The preservation of tradition was the chief means of insuring that when the treaty restrictions were lifted the army would once again assume its respected role in German affairs.<sup>20</sup> In an apparent reference to illegal nationalistic and paramilitary organizations, he stressed that by the preservation of tradition people would understand more easily that the Reichswehr was the proper agency for national defense.<sup>21</sup> There could be no separation of the Reichswehr from the German people.

Seeckt's regard for tradition was partly inspired by what he called "the psychology of the military." By this he referred to the fact that both the soldier and the civilian were conscious of the great military heroes and victories of the past. People must be able to identify the post-war army with this tradition of greatness. The means by which this was to be fostered was by the preservation of past military customs.<sup>22</sup>

This was not to become a blind acceptance of the past, however. It was a

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

Careful selection of traditions that were valuable militarily and evocative of patriotism to the public. However much Seeckt emphasized this need for continuity in the military, he was well aware also of history's dynamic force and the value of change. He had been a member of the Great General Staff which had taught him the fundamentals of war but which had prized flexibility in relation to them.<sup>23</sup> His definition of the Reichswehr as the old army in a new form indicated how his conservatism was balanced by progressive tendencies.

He believed that every organization had the tendency to become stagnant and alien to the spirit of its time. This is especially true of armies, he wrote, which are by nature conservative since everything that they have learned has been taught at great cost and it is impossible for them to forget such things easily. He concluded from this that since military men view any proposal of reform as revolutionary, it takes a catastrophe, such as the defeat of 1918, for them to recognize and correct weaknesses that naturally come to exist with the passage of time.<sup>24</sup>

The Reichswehr, he hoped, had taken advantage of the lessons taught by the war but their full implementation would have to wait until the lifting of the treaty restrictions. At the very beginning of his book on the Reichswehr he stated his belief in an Hegelian-like "organic law of being" by which all historical events become simultaneously creative as well as destructive.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Hans von Seeckt, Moltke, ein Vorbild (Berlin, 1931), pp. 81-84.

<sup>24</sup>Seeckt, Reichswehr, pp. 32-33.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 7.



Seeckt's philosophical evolutionism therefore could not regard eradication as static and unchanging. He believed the spirit was dynamically developable, renewing itself and changing imperceptibly each day.<sup>26</sup> For example, attempts to integrate some of the monarchical traditions of the imperial army into the Reichswehr proved failures.<sup>27</sup> In an apparent reference to the Allied Control Commission he criticized those who suspected a "plot" to restore the old army because the Reichswehr was obviously and necessarily quite different.<sup>28</sup> It was an original spiritual community formed from the union of old and new. He concluded that the spirit of the Reichswehr was continuing to develop and would continue to do so.<sup>29</sup>

By preserving the old, Seeckt meant keeping the army distinctively German drawing upon past experience for esprit de corps, patriotic national support, and efficient military organization. Those who find that this preservation of tradition had sinister results for Germany have generally over-stated their case by implying reactionary militarism as the core of that tradition. Telford Taylor, for example, has written that, "The successful transmigration of soul from the imperial alte Heer to the Reichswehr caused a fatal flaw in the foundations of the Republic, and was a most fateful event in world history."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>30</sup>Telford Taylor, Sword and Swastika: Generals and Nazis in the Third Reich (New York, 1952), p. 24.

Leaving the political question for the next chapter, it would seem that what he really meant to say was that by retaining its pride and structure the new German army developed into the strongest in Europe. It was the belief in the philosophy of force, which was not limited to one country, that was dangerous in the rearming of Germany and not the fact that the Reichswehr found strength in its past traditions.

A more carefully thought out position is that the treaty restrictions were responsible for the reactionary tendencies in the Reichswehr. For instance, Stern in his study of various military systems wrote that it was the treaty which "actually imposed upon Germany a military system which practically guaranteed the continued dominance of the old-time officer even in the army of the new republic."<sup>31</sup> Although this was to some extent not wholly the fault of the treaty since no army may be organized without the leadership of experienced soldiers, such criticism is well-founded. Seeckt lamented the difficulty of attracting and promoting younger officers in such a restricted organization.<sup>32</sup> Seeckt's main aim then was to fashion something that was viable and not venerable and it was precisely because he succeeded that the Reichswehr became an aggressive instrument in the service of Hitler. The real danger to peace was

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<sup>31</sup>Frederick Martin Stern, The Citizen Army (New York, 1956), p. 94.

<sup>32</sup>Seeckt, Reichswehr, p. 65.

not found in a corrupt military "soul" but in the political direction.

Seeckt labored at preserving, developing, and broadening a distinctively German military spirit for the young Reichswehr conscious that this was one of the prerequisites for a strong army. The Allies had determined the framework in which this work was to be carried on. But Seeckt never pretended that he was satisfied with the general terms of the treaty and the type of army it afforded his country. Nor did he hide the fact that his ultimate goal was a modern army on the same footing with those of other large nations. He believed it to be the duty of the government and the Reichswehr Ministry to strive for the treaty's revision and he felt it unjust and unrealistic for the Allies to try to maintain them. His main argument was that these provisions of reducing Germany's army was tied to the presumption of a general European disarmament which had proved unfounded and that the Allies would in the near future have to relent.<sup>33</sup> His skirting of some of the restrictions was so limited in scope as to be negligible in retrospect. It seems to be a fair judgment that the treaty's military points were effectively maintained.

The German army ceased to exist as a major fighting force, and no one had to worry about actual war with Germany for many years to come. The occasional evasions were made much of at a later date; and people then talked as though the disarmament clauses of the treaty had either never been observed or were of no value. In fact they achieved their purpose so long as they remained in force.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>34</sup>A. J. P. Taylor, The Origins of the Second World War (New York, 1939) p. 42.

Seeckt attempted by relatively unsuccessful subterfuge to offset the four points of the treaty which he felt were manifestly intolerable if Germany were to provide for her security. He did so in the belief that a country had the moral duty "in spite of and together with treaties" to protect herself and that the Allies, in such documents as the Kellogg Pact, had recognized such a right to self-defense.<sup>35</sup> The first of these restrictions against which he schemed was that Germany was saddled with a mercenary army in which the nation was barred from participation. At the beginning of 1923, under the pressure of the French occupation of the Ruhr, he began an experiment with a clandestine militia. The number of men involved in the "Black Reichswehr" affair was approximately fifty thousand and they were disbanded at the end of the year because discipline and military effectiveness were impossible under the circumstances.

The second limitation was the outlawing of universal military training. After the difficulties with the Arbeitertruppe auxiliaries nothing further was done to expand the army illegally. However, Seeckt continued to emphasize the importance of national military training and maintained that the defense of Germany was hopeless without it.<sup>36</sup> For the time being he was content to foster sports and organizations that taught skills, such as rifle or aviation clubs, anything that was aimed at keeping the youth of the nation physically fit.

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<sup>35</sup>Hans von Seeckt, The Future of the German Empire (London, 1930), p. 136.

<sup>36</sup>Hans von Seeckt, Landesverteidigung (Berlin, 1930), p. 10.

The third restriction was the liquidation of the Great General Staff. The idea of the Allies had been to destroy the efficiency of the General Staff by decentralizing its tasks, but it was obvious that some organization so vital to the modern army, would have to assume its functions. The continuation of the major part of the Staff's activities by the Allied approved Truppenamt was quietly done but on such a small scale for the tiny army that when Hitler began his expansion for the Wehrmacht there were not nearly enough men who could qualify to undertake staff positions.<sup>37</sup> Seeckt pointed out that although the Reichswehr Ministry carried out many of the functions of the old staff, such as the study of foreign relations, he still believed that the Reichswehr could not be a modern army without the reconstitution of the Great General Staff.<sup>38</sup> He explained that its eradication and the education that it provided officers in facing grave and complex situations was a serious handicap to the Reichswehr's successfully fighting a future war.<sup>39</sup>

The last provision that disturbed Seeckt was that of certain modern armaments. There was a limited policy of experimentation in forbidden weapons abroad, especially in Russia, but it was certainly on a minor scale. More important was the careful cultivation of relations with various industries which were secretly coordinated to an eventual rearmament. Seeckt was

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<sup>37</sup>Walter Goerlitz, History of the German General Staff 1657-1945, trans. Brian Battershaw (New York, 1953), p. 227.

<sup>38</sup>Seeckt, Reichswehr, p. 77.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

extremely concerned that German industry have the built-in capacity for undertaking rearmament when the restrictions were dropped.<sup>40</sup> However, the treaty was successful in keeping modern weapons from being used by the vast majority of the Reichswehr and as the eventual rearmament under Hitler showed.

Except for complaints and the occasional attempt to circumvent the treaty, Seeckt was bound to rebuild the German army as the Allied Military Commission indicated. Seeckt tied the success of his work within these limitations to the creation of a military form that was capable of organic expansion when possible. He had to prevent a fatal passivity and stagnation from arising in the externally weak army by conversely concentrating on its internal worth.<sup>41</sup> The Reichswehr would serve the immediate needs of state security as well as its weakened condition allowed, but even more important it would be ready at the proper time to undergo a "transformation, extension, enlargement, and supplementation."<sup>42</sup> This, in effect, was the gigantic conspiracy that General Fuller thought no one but himself wanted to see. It was the aim of the German military to rebuild an effective power instrument for Germany even to the point of secretly violating the treaty on the four points Seeckt found unbearable. If these points had been conceded to the Republic instead of to Hitler, it is conceivable that the German military might not have been so susceptible to the Nazi propaganda and patronage.

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

Except for these ineffectual violations Seeckt remained committed to the idea of fulfillment of the treaty provisions. Because of its material limitations, Seeckt realized that the Reichswehr could not compete with other armies in quantity, but that its hope lay in painstaking concentration on achieving some kind of qualitative superiority. The Reichswehr had to find some substitute for material strength. This necessity gave rise to the concept of the army of leaders (Führerarmee) that is, the reliance upon an exhaustive and never-ending training of each individual which was to be the basis for an elite army. At the end of his book detailing the construction of the Reichswehr, Seeckt concluded that even though it was badly outnumbered and poorly equipped, this Führerarmee had been able to salvage the essential quality of the old army, a well-ordered professional leadership which was "able to gradually develop itself out of the chaos of the post-war period."<sup>43</sup>

This was an extraordinary achievement in view of the required reduction of the officer corps from forty thousand to four thousand men. The end in view for Seeckt was not a recreation of the old officer corps whose members had proved their worth in the war, but to concentrate on the introduction of younger men, thereby displacing experience for the required natural development of the new army.<sup>44</sup> The new officer corps was to be similar to the old in essence, training, and outlook, but it would consist of a new generation who would be the

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 65.

natural representative of the old corps.<sup>45</sup> The selection of these relatively few men was based on many considerations primarily of a technical and professional character.<sup>46</sup> But Seeckt wanted it understood that the Army Command alone had determined in every case who its officers were to be so that neither the government nor the various political groups had been able to infiltrate their ranks.<sup>47</sup> He affirmed that the corps must have a broader national composition than the previous army.<sup>48</sup> The single qualification for consideration of an individual was his ability. Seeckt admitted that some political pressure had been exerted for the admission of enlisted men into the corps, but that most of them had simply not been able to meet the necessary educational and technical standards required, and therefore, he concluded, a practical consideration solved a potentially significant political question.<sup>49</sup>

The greatest handicap in the treaty was in the education of the officer. Military academies were not permitted so that the process of training was changed to provide for learning leadership among the troops rather than military theory.<sup>50</sup> He saw this necessity of training his young officers while actively engaged in command positions as another "spiritual bridge" to the past

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., pp. 68-69.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., pp. 65-71.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 66 and 89.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., pp. 70-71.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 73.



when the Prussian army in Napoleonic times was also severely limited as to number and training.<sup>51</sup> However, he expressed a certain doubt as to the quality of decisions officers trained in this way might make in a future war.<sup>52</sup>

The military clauses of the treaty also set the enlistment of the troops at twelve years and even provided for the yearly percentage of discharges. As a result, Seeckt pointed out, the smallest number of men possible would receive military training and the building of any kind of reserve was impossible. The short length of service made it impossible to make a career out of the army but long enough to discourage anyone of ability. To overcome this handicap, Seeckt decided to emphasize both the appeal of belonging to an elite group and the value of good comradeship.<sup>53</sup>

His ideas on military training were particularly well thought out and he treated them at length in his chapter on the troops. He divided training into three areas: education, drill, and discipline. The goal of education was to create the independent, self-reliant person. Drill was the means to obtain an automatic reaction to routine tasks so as to leave the mind free for more important matters. And lastly discipline was the strengthening of the will to carry out aims.<sup>54</sup> The relationship of these three, he wrote, is that, "drill helps during a moment of the will's weakness, until education regains control

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., pp. 100-102.

of discipline."<sup>55</sup> This stands in sharp contrast to the popular notion of German military training, the so-called Kadgvergehorsam (corpse-like obedience). Since Seeckt's avowed purpose was raising the quality of his small army to offset its material weakness, his emphasis on the individual soldier's intelligence was sincere. In the eight pages he devoted to the training of the soldier, five concern education of the individual's capabilities. The basis of education he believed was the awakening of the person to the ideals of the spirit and his own dignity and capabilities. Formal education was necessary, Seeckt believed to fill in gaps in the soldier's background and would have direct benefit for the quality of the Reichswehr.<sup>56</sup>

The twelve year enlistment meant that training would not have any limited goal but would be diversified in all aspects of military skills so that the result would be an army of elite troops.<sup>57</sup> Further there was developed the concept of double training: to be trained and then to train others.<sup>58</sup> The men who were discharged after twelve years of this intensive formation would be able to train recruits, lead a future national army or militia, or serve as front line reserve soldiers.<sup>59</sup> The Fuhrerarmee principle extended then to the rank and file and beyond to encompass the entire nation. This diversified

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., pp. 106-107.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 100.

training program gave each man extraordinary flexibility, and, in Seeckt's opinion, gave the Reichswehr the required quality to compensate for its small numbers.<sup>60</sup> Seeckt believed in the universal soldier, a man trained in all branches of the army but specializing in one. Although the development of modern weapons had made them impossibly complicated, he saw the advantage of an army of such universal soldiers, which, by knowing at first hand the efficacy of all these various weapons, would be able to cooperate in the most effective manner.<sup>61</sup>

Actual training was hampered by the various prohibitions of the treaty and Seeckt did not believe that the Reichswehr could profit very much from theoretical studies of forbidden weapons. The study of abstract theory could not provide forbidden weapons nor the knowledge to use them in the event of an attack.<sup>62</sup> And worst of all he cited the destruction of the armament industry which would take such a long time to retool and catch up to modern develop-

ments.<sup>63</sup> He ridiculed the necessity of trying to train men with make-believe substitutes for real weapons. No soldier, he said, would be prepared for a tank rolling over the border if he was only used to playing with pasteboard replicas.<sup>64</sup>

And there were many features of modern warfare for which no

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 112.

substitutes could be used and which could not be studied even theoretically, such as the airplane.<sup>65</sup>

There were areas undisturbed by the treaty. The engineers although forbidden certain fixed fortifications could be trained for the erection of mobile defense positions.<sup>66</sup> In actual fact, perhaps because of the treaty, they became expert in the development of demolition techniques. The Signal Corps was completely free to adapt and improve the technical science of communications which was so vital to successful operations.<sup>67</sup> The infantry although weakened in numbers and weapons was still the basic force of the Reichswehr and its value was unimpaired by the treaty because the Reichswehr had been so careful to cultivate the individual soldier's education and spirit.<sup>68</sup>

He was not at all disturbed by the large proportion of cavalry units imposed by the treaty. It was obviously the intention of the allies to thereby weaken the Reichswehr by dissipating its numbers with a military branch that had been proved unsuitable for modern warfare.<sup>69</sup> Seeckt justified his acceptance of the imposition of cavalry by maintaining that the Reichswehr would offset the enemy's offensive fire power with a defensive mobility.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid., pp. 112-113.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., pp. 121-122.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., pp. 113-115.

<sup>69</sup>Alfred Vagts, A History of Militarism (New York, 1959), p. 230.

<sup>70</sup>Seeckt, Reichswehr, p. 114.

He believed that just as technological innovations such as the machine gun had replaced the cavalry, in the same way, the motor would restore mobility.<sup>71</sup>

However, the Reichswehr would continue to employ the horse because its use in rough terrain could never be displaced by the motor. The cavalry, with horse and motorized units, are necessary for decisive movements of men and arms and was valued by him as the most balanced branch of the small mobile army.<sup>72</sup>

He argued that mounted troops remain necessary because of their ability to gather and disperse quickly, their value for reconnaissance purposes, their usefulness in the fluid opening days of a war, especially for the defender, and the educational value for the men trained in such units.<sup>73</sup>

In writing of the value of motorized units in the transportation corps he mentioned that the improvements of science would eventually bring about the complete motorization of the entire army of the future.<sup>74</sup> However, he warned that theorizing about it, before science made it actually possible, was dangerous to its being correctly employed when the time came.<sup>75</sup> Instead, he believed that the Reichswehr should pay close attention to the military experiments conducted along these lines by foreign armies.<sup>76</sup> Although his

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., pp. 116-118.

<sup>73</sup>Seeckt, Moltke, p. 156.

<sup>74</sup>Seeckt, Reichswehr, p. 124.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., pp. 124-125.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 126.

sympathies were for the horse, he was well aware and responsive to the military uses of technology. He obviously did not foresee that technical improvements would come so rapidly. The type of leadership he gave to the Reichswehr is shown by the fact that he allowed those young officers such as Guderian to interest themselves in the study of motorized tactics.<sup>77</sup>

Seeckt's second aim that he had set himself was to construct an army that could be enlarged and modernized instantly either when the treaty restrictions were ended or as the result of an invasion. Some of the features of this army of the future have already been pointed out. What remains to be analysed are the military principles that governed his thinking about future war. These theories arose from his evaluation of the reasons for Germany's defeat in the world war and he published them in a 1930 pamphlet, Landesverteidigung. His basic conclusion was that the side with the most men and materials in any long conflict must ultimately be the victor.<sup>78</sup> This was to be the fundamental consideration for any military planning for German security.

Seeckt had often pointed out the Reich's obvious lack of resources, population, and military allies. Consequently, the first aim of German defense in any future war must be to reach the fastest possible decision against the enemy.<sup>79</sup> Such had also been the plan in the World War but it had failed because

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<sup>77</sup>Heinz Guderian, Panzer Leader (New York, 1952), pp. 19-21.

<sup>78</sup>Hans von Seeckt, Landesverteidigung (Berlin, 1930), p. 37.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

the career army had been sacrificed in an attempt for this quick victory and the reserves that replaced it were not of sufficient quality to achieve the goal.<sup>80</sup> The resultant war of position was not because of poor military leadership but was caused by the influx of such large amounts of men and materials that the battlefield became immobilized with a static mass. The employment of poorly trained mass armies inevitably led to a loss of manoeuverability and the replacement of meaningful strategy with blind attrition.<sup>81</sup>

Seeckt believed there were two reasons for the modern development of the mass army. The first was the historical growth of nationalism which demanded the universal duty of defense by the entire population. The second reason was the modern military concept of total war in which every able-bodied citizen was expected to serve on the battlefield.<sup>82</sup> It was inevitable then that the mass army would be employed. However, it failed to achieve its purpose of total defeat and the war ended because of exhaustion and not from annihilation upon which the use of the mass army was based.<sup>83</sup> In the last war, Seeckt found that the principle of massiveness had reached a point where it had lost all military value. As a result of this he formed the axiom upon which he based his military thought of the future, "As the mass grew larger, the greater its military and spiritual value declined."<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., pp. 42-43.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., pp. 34-35.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

Seeckt's military theory was formed from these considerations born of Germany's defeat in the war. He framed the major military problems of his time in the irreconcilable terms of quantity and quality and this became his principle of action for the formation of the Reichswehr as an army of soldiers whose capabilities would overcome larger numbers.

He saw further that the consequent reduction of quality resulting from the mass army is further deteriorated by the intensification of technical developments in armaments. Total warfare degenerated he felt into a struggle of material in which the low value of the individual soldier is indicated by the use of new weapons, such as airpower, which demand mass targets.<sup>85</sup> He was obviously shocked by the slaughter he had seen on the Eastern Front where the Russians had valued their weapons more highly than their soldiers.<sup>86</sup> He admitted that the mass army which is based on the practicality of short term training of vast numbers of men was possible in the nineteenth century with its relatively simple weaponry, but that technology made such an army unthinkable in modern times because of the invention of highly complicated and specialized equipment and their rapid replacement.<sup>87</sup> He concluded from this that the better the quality of war materials, the greater the quality demanded of the man using them. Large numbers of superficially trained, short-term conscripts could not take the place of the less numerous career soldiers'

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<sup>85</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., pp. 46-47.



professional skill. "In this conflict between quality and quantity we must come to the conclusion that improved techniques and complicated weapons increase the claims based upon the soldier's value, and not to the false conclusion that they can replace his declining worth."<sup>88</sup>

From this analysis of these and other factors in the defeat of Germany, Seeckt drew nine conclusions and stated them in the form of principles which could guide the future development of the Reichswehr. Because they reveal a theoretical soundness of his military ability in the light of the events of the Second World War, the following is their abbreviated enumeration: 1) when a quick victory fails, the resulting long duration brings heavy losses for all sides; 2) the final outcome results not from military successes but through the slow pressure of military, technical, commercial, and political superiority; 3) after the first committment of men and materials, there must be a decline in their quality and an increase in their number; 4) military operations must be handled by a general in the field, but in this he is seriously hindered by the large masses of poor quality; 5) in the struggle between man and the machine, the machine must always be the victor; 6) modern war has taken on a complicated form for which a short period of training no longer suffices; 7) the leaders more than the front line soldiers need exhaustive training in modern weapons technique; 8) modern war demands a long and intensive knowledge of military thought and discipline; 9) it is impossible that a large national army be able to maintain over a long period of time the martial spirit which

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<sup>88</sup>Ibid., p. 48.

is the basis of victory.<sup>89</sup>

Seeckt held that future military strategy must be devoted to the attainment of victory by a small, highly-trained force capable of achieving a decision before the masses are set in motion.<sup>90</sup> In holding this view, however, he did not in any way renounce the right of Germany to build a national army (Volkshcer). The Volkshcer was very necessary as a secondary line of defense if the regular army should fail in its objective.<sup>91</sup> Although the treaty outlawed universal military training, Seeckt insisted that the citizen of a state has the moral obligation of patriotism which meant to defend his country. However, he cautiously made a distinction between the duty of defense (Wehrpflicht) and actual participation in the armed forces (Dienstpflicht), pointing out that the latter was only one of the ways of implementing the former.<sup>92</sup>

He wrote, "The inner worth of the army has suffered both militarily and morally with its enlargement by means of universal conscription."<sup>93</sup> This esteem for quality did not mean that he thereby underestimated the role of numbers in modern warfare. Germany, he believed, must have a national conscript army (Volkshcer) but it would be completely separate from the small

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<sup>89</sup>Ibid., pp. 64-67.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>92</sup>Seeckt, Reichswehr, p. 38.

<sup>93</sup>Seeckt, Landesverteidigung, p. 44.

regular army so as not to impede its high quality.<sup>94</sup> Seeckt spoke of the Reichswehr as the cadre for the Volksheer and by this he meant that those discharged from the professional army would serve as the leaders of the national conscripted force.<sup>95</sup>

The role of the Volksheer in a war was seen by Seeckt as protecting the nation's territory while the regular army was engaged in the task of defeating the aggressor.<sup>96</sup> Besides its military role it also served the state in a political way by keeping the entire populace aware of the necessity of perhaps being called upon one day to fulfill his patriotic duty to defend his country.<sup>97</sup> Because their mission is different the Volksheer was not trained in the same manner as the regular army, but rather the national purpose of patriotism would be stressed.<sup>98</sup>

As a military man who believed that war was inevitable, Seeckt worked against great limitations to ensure Germany's survival in it. Because he believed in the bankruptcy of total war, he concentrated his thinking of future conflicts in terms of making possible the swift victory by an elite force. It is not too difficult to see in this the line of thinking that

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<sup>94</sup>Seeckt, Reichswehr, p. 43.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., pp. 28-29 and 45.

<sup>96</sup>Seeckt, Landesverteidigung, p. 78.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

resulted in the Blitzkrieg. But he did not see that another war of position was unlikely because of the mobility that the motor would provide. Nor did he realize that the motor would make mass armies mobile on a scale never imagined before. But as a military prophet he would score higher than most of his contemporaries. He may have underestimated the tank, but not its principle. There can be no doubt that Seeckt did his work well and that the limitations of the treaty did not achieve their purpose.

## CHAPTER V

### THE UNPOLITICAL ARMY

The international tensions following the Second World War and the rapid progress of weapons technology have shown how close the interaction between political and military affairs may become. The question of their proper relationship in the formulation of policy is common to every form of government and becomes particularly dynamic in times of crisis when the state depends for its security upon a military response. An examination of Seeckt's political thought must determine what function he claimed for the military in the troubled life of the Weimar Republic. The various aspects of this military-political relationship contained in his published work were the position of the army within the state, its relations with the government, the parties, and the nation, its part in the determination and execution of state policy, and the relative importance of military factors in political decisions. Some significant events in his career related to these ideas will also be considered.

Seeckt's conception of the military's role in the state was well defined and his various statements in regard to it were consistent with his actions. He saw the basic relationship between state and military affairs in terms of the interdependence of the part to the whole. He described the military as a state institution, influenced by the state policies, and having direct

political functions.<sup>1</sup> He defined the political functions founded in the nature of the armed forces as being first, the executive arm for the defense of the Reich from its external and, if necessary, its internal enemies, second, the agency which enabled the state to speak from a position of power in its foreign affairs, and third, the model and promoter of national unity, order, and discipline.<sup>2</sup> These three functions, related respectively to the Reich, the state, and the nation, have already been considered in general, but the precise mission of the military within the state's structure remains to be developed.

There was no doubt in any of Seeckt's writings that he acknowledged the army as a dependent of the state and subject to its aims. He agreed with Clausewitz that, "The army, in accordance with its nature, becomes the first servant of the state, of which it is a part."<sup>3</sup> No more unequivocal expression of the priority of state rather than military aims could be found than his assertion, "It cannot be denied that military questions always stand in the closest relationship with political policies, which the soldier will follow in all planning, in all organizational matters, and also in the conduct of war, including its preparation, execution, and conclusion."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Hans von Seeckt, Moltke, ein Vorbild (Berlin, 1931), p. 109.

<sup>2</sup>Hans von Seeckt, The Future of the German Empire, Criticisms and Postulates, trans. Oakley Williams (London, 1930), pp. 135-137.

<sup>3</sup>Hans von Seeckt, Thoughts of a Soldier, trans. Gilbert Waterhouse (London, 1930), p. 78.

<sup>4</sup>Hans von Seeckt, Landesverteidigung (Berlin, 1930), p. 17.

Seeckt did not believe that the army existed for itself but found its reason for being only in a political context.

However, this subserviance of the military to political interests was of an unusual kind. To carry out the political goals of the state, the army must form a special body within the state. He explained that, "The army has its own vital conditions, quite peculiar to itself, and a character distinguishing it from all other State institutions: these traits have to be taken into account if the army is not to become a state within the State, but a reflection of the State."<sup>5</sup> This exceptional relationship consisted in the army's existence as an autonomous organization having the state's complete confidence in its ability and loyalty.<sup>6</sup>

Seeckt emphasized the ambiguity of such a position when he wrote that, "The army should become a state within the state, but it should be merged in the state through service; in fact, it should itself become the purest image of the state."<sup>7</sup> It is of fundamental importance to understand what he meant by this since the words "state within the state" are often quoted in connection with his political outlook.

This remark is not inconsistent with his other statements. As the last part of the sentence indicated, it was intended as a dramatic expression of the type of interdependence which characterized the military as a political

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<sup>5</sup>Seeckt, Future of Empire, p. 138.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>7</sup>Seeckt, Thoughts, p. 77.

institution. He explained that the army must be separated from the shifting, day-to-day bickering of party politics in order to remain strong and united to serve the interests of the state.<sup>8</sup> Freed from such interference to carry on its military duties, the army would be able to execute state policy wholeheartedly and without reservation. In this way the military and its aims became identical with the state. It was in this sense that he concluded this section by writing, "The army serves the state and the state alone, for it is the state."<sup>9</sup> The link that bound the two inseparably together was the commonweal which they both served. Seeckt never entertained the idea that the army was an organization with its own aims separate from those of the state.

The key to understanding how Seeckt envisioned this as working out in practice can be found in his distinction between the Reich on the one hand, and the state, government, and political parties on the other. He considered the state as the political embodiment of the Reich. It was to the Reich and its political expression, the state, that the military owed strictest allegiance and loyalty. When Seeckt spoke of the army as serving "the state and the state alone" it was in this sense of Reich. The form of state and its government were variable factors in the development of the Reich. But as long as they represented the Reich, the military was bound in duty to them.

The Reichswehr took an oath to the constitution and, although this might

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 78-79.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 80.



not be an inspiration to duty, Seeckt never questioned its legal force. This matter of the oath was important to him because it constituted the legitimacy of the political and military hierarchy. Seeckt recalled nostalgically how simple the question of obedience had been when the soldier took a personal oath to the Kaiser and being loyal had meant following imperial orders.<sup>10</sup> In Seeckt's mind, the Republic could never command such unquestioned submission since parliamentary government was factional and divided. Consequently he regarded the matter of loyalty to the Weimar authorities as much more complex than to the Kaiser who had been the personal embodiment of the Reich's wide variety of interests. Seeckt believed the Republic and its party system did away with the identification of the ruler with the Reich in which the officer had founded his allegiance. He thought that the state was "too cold" a concept for the soldier to serve and that "the constitution, which a parliament could change at any moment by a two-thirds majority, was not suitable for the foundation of an inner commitment."<sup>11</sup> His solution for the Reichswehr was that the officer base his loyalty in "the personal, hard-earned conception of the duty due to the Fatherland and the voluntary acceptance of subordination because of his recognition of this."<sup>12</sup> Such was Seeckt's moral solution to the problem of serving the Reich after 1918, and this reveals more

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<sup>10</sup>Seeckt, Moltke, p. 168.

<sup>11</sup>Hans von Seeckt, Die Reichswehr (Leipzig, 1933), p. 67.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

than anything else the estrangement of the Reichswehr from the Republic and its leadership.

The relation of the military to the state which met the qualification of representing the whole nation was clear in Seeckt's mind. Matters of policy were determined by the state leader who imposed his decisions upon the military.<sup>13</sup> The military on its part had needs and demands which the statesman must fit into the general framework of the state's policy.<sup>14</sup> If, however, such demands were rejected for reasons of policy then the military must accede, and Seeckt emphasized that directly military matters, such as organization, armaments, and training, were not outside the scope of state policy and could not be limited to purely military decisions.<sup>15</sup> This is a clear affirmation that the military was to be subservient to the directing will of the statesman and that political decisions take precedence over military considerations.

However, Seeckt did not believe that this relieved the military commander of his own responsibility. In matters of military competency, he must champion his own judgments, although the final decision was even here made by the political leadership. In such conflicts over judgments of a militarily technical nature, resignation rather than insubordination was expected of the officer. Seeckt cited the conflict between Bismarck and Moltke over the

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<sup>13</sup>Hans von Seeckt, Gedanken eines Soldaten (Berlin, 1929), p. 56.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

bombardment of Paris as an example of military responsibility.<sup>16</sup> To Seeckt there was no question that blind obedience was unworthy of an officer. In another connection he wrote, "We hear a lot about leadership and the leader's responsibility, just as if the responsibility of the led were thereby wiped out. No less sense of responsibility attaches to the obeying than to the giving of orders. The fool is without any sense of responsibility; so is the slave."<sup>17</sup>

Seeckt believed that ultimate responsibility for the employment of the military rested upon the political leader. "Wars are not made by soldiers, but by statesmen . . . and the figures of Cromwell, Frederick the Great, and Napoleon, under whom the field army executed the will of the statesman, offer no contradiction."<sup>18</sup> But the military leaders must also be aware of the reasons and aims for what they are required to do. "It is not enough for the field commander to be a good soldier; he must also be at home in the fields of domestic and foreign politics, for he draws his strength from domestic policies, and his victories or defeats are matters which have political effects."<sup>19</sup>

His selection of Cromwell and Napoleon show how close he considered the association between the political and military spheres and his conviction

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<sup>16</sup>Seeckt, Moltke, p. 131.

<sup>17</sup>Seeckt, Future of Empire, p. 26.

<sup>18</sup>Seeckt, Landesverteidigung, p. 91.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

that the "highest and purest type of field commander is the royal commander."<sup>20</sup> This was so, he said, because the king incorporated "the state's raison d'etre" and was able to coordinate his military and political policies perfectly thereby achieving the optimum results.<sup>21</sup> He realized that the end of the monarchy meant the severance of this intimate union between the two spheres, but he continued to believe that, "The more the political leader unites himself with the commander in the field, the nearer will he come to the ideal of the royal commander."<sup>22</sup> Seeckt's monarchism was at least partly based on this consideration that the effective Power State must have a close military-political relationship.

Seeckt's soldier-ruler was neither an amateur general nor an irresponsible visionary. Alexander, he considered the greatest example of a political commander whose exploits were "no adventure, but followed an intuitive plan, as only genius fashions it."<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, Napoleon was a creature of his period in history, a romantic adventurer for whom one aimless victory could only lead to another until ultimate defeat.<sup>24</sup> The reason that Seeckt denied Napoleon greatness while granting it to Alexander was that, although their work of empire was similar, and though Alexander's general aim was

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<sup>20</sup>Hans von Seeckt, Antikes Feldherrntum (Berlin, 1929), p. 8.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 8-9.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 33-34.

not clear, yet "at no moment in his undertakings do we have the feeling of uncertainty, of opportunism."<sup>25</sup> Seeckt's sense of responsibility allowed no compassion for the dilettante or the dreamer, and Napoleon was scorned as a man who allowed his sense of reality to be corrupted by his phantasies.<sup>26</sup>

He believed that only a genius could combine military and political leadership in a single individual and this was the reason most kings delegated the actual military power to others more capable than they. In fact, Seeckt did not believe that it was entirely desirable to have a genius for a leader because "it is the fate of the great man of action that his work, accomplished only through his own efforts, flourishes with him and so also vanishes with him."<sup>27</sup> In his biography of Moltke, Seeckt described the ultimate failure of the following examples of genius: Tantalus, Alexander, Frederick II, Frederick the Great, Napoleon, Goethe, Nietzsche, and Bismarck.<sup>28</sup> His position was that as such genius was self-destructive, unable to be imitated because it was exceptional, "a singular phenomenon which has had no ancestors and can have no followers."<sup>29</sup> He believed that this was for the best because genius was amoral, making its own law from its inner necessity and its good was only good for it.<sup>30</sup> It was fortunate then that it could not engender

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., pp. 17-18.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>28</sup>Seeckt, Moltke, 13.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

successors because the world needed order and tranquility based on mass morals (Massenmoral).<sup>31</sup> It was better, he concluded, for leaders to have talent (Genie) than genius because talent had a pattern that could develop and grow.<sup>32</sup> And he designated the Great General Staff as a good example of talent because it successfully educated the average man and was not concerned with the genius.<sup>33</sup> Seeckt's ideal of military leadership was a talented general who worked within the political direction of the state leadership. He had no desire to unite the two in a single personality and was certainly aware of the future dangers such a development might bring.

Although Seeckt did not absolutely deny the possibility of direct civilian direction of the army, it was entirely contrary to his concept of the correct relationship between the two in which political decisions of policy would be carried out by the subordinate military leader as he thought best. This independence of action and the special position of the army within the state presupposed that the military would have a point of view on policy and that it would be allowed to express it by means of its political liaison, the Reichswehr Ministry. He made a clear presentation of what he conceived as the role of the army in politics in the following:

The army is the basis of the state's power and its most mighty weapon. It must be prepared for its employment at any moment. This it cannot do if its leadership remains without knowledge of the internal

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

political situation and without influence on it. It can quite suddenly be presented with an insoluble problem. The demand that the army be kept outside of politics is unquestionably correct, if by this is understood, that the army, therefore the individual soldier, has no influence in administrative measures or in any parliamentary matter, as well as being kept aloof from party motives. This principle of the unpolitical army should not however be so interpreted, that the leadership of the army, therefore the Reichswehr Ministry, is kept uninformed of the development of state policy. The army desires to exercise its authorized influence on policy, for which end it must possess knowledge about it, in order to form by itself its own opinion. Therefore, it must also educate and develop its capacity for the study of policy and thereby add a broader perspective to its other tasks.<sup>34</sup>

Seeckt's view of the Reichswehr Ministry was that it was a military department within the state apparatus whose function was to keep the army leadership informed of political policy and in turn to inform the government of the military's view of state policy.<sup>35</sup> In addition to this task, the Reichswehr Ministry did part of the work of the Great General Staff such as the gathering of foreign military intelligence, higher military education, and the study of domestic economic and social conditions.<sup>36</sup> In the three pages dealing with the Ministry, Seeckt showed no recognition of the position of the Reichswehr Minister in making military policy or as the civilian head of the army.

The army was a subordinate but special part of the state. Seeckt acknowledged in theory the primacy of the political over the military. He also stressed the fact that the army needed to be commanded by military men in

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<sup>34</sup>Seeckt, Reichswehr, p. 79.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., pp. 77-78.

order to be the effective executive arm of the state. He nowhere explicitly developed the manner in which the Reich President replaced the Kaiser as Supreme War Lord. But from what he wrote concerning military direction by political leaders, he was not anxious to have a civilian head of government involved in military operations.<sup>37</sup> He believed that the practical relationship between the state and military leaders was one of close cooperation in working together for a common goal.<sup>38</sup> In his book on Moltke, Seeckt showed how much cooperation had worked in the case of Bismarck and his chief of staff.<sup>39</sup>

Seeckt's main point was that Bismarck's success was possible only through the planning of Moltke. This was true, he said, because all military planning must be based on political considerations and take into account the situation and aims of the state.<sup>40</sup> In the case of Bismarck, it was Moltke who provided the necessary information of what was possible for Prussia militarily, and hence, politically.<sup>41</sup> Because of Moltke's understanding of the political implications of his military strategy he allowed Bismarck the opportunity to change his decisions in regard to policy aims. Seeckt wrote of this that, "Bismarck, with his will of genius, followed the deadly, steel-hard energy of

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<sup>37</sup>Seeckt, Gedanken, p. 64.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>39</sup>Seeckt, Moltke, pp. 110-114.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 123.



Moltke to victory."<sup>42</sup> Seeckt saw in this cooperation "the greatest example of how the military commander committed to the state's aims must add to the directing will of the statesman, so that both uphold the same energy of action."<sup>43</sup> He concluded his study of their relationship by pointing out two principles: first, the military must keep the statesman informed about military considerations that have a bearing on state policy, and second, although the statesman decided policy, the military must be free to decide on question of strategy.<sup>44</sup> The second point reaffirms Seeckt's belief that the army must be commanded by the military.

If Seeckt's understanding of the government's control of the army was rather tenuous, his attitude towards the political parties and the military was directly to the point. He believed that the army would compromise its very nature and organization if it were to have political commitments other than to the Reich. For that reason soldiers were not to be affiliated with any political association nor did they have the right to vote.<sup>45</sup> In the matter of the various parties, the military had no preference, but they could not accept in their ranks those who came from parties which exhibited "an anti-state sentiment."<sup>46</sup> It was in this sense of isolation from party politics, that Seeckt conceived of the army as being completely unpolitical.

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., pp. 141-142.

<sup>45</sup>Seeckt, Reichswehr, p. 98.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

From these theoretical considerations of Seeckt's thought it is now possible to examine the motivation behind some of his actions. The first of these was his refusal to approve the government decision to use force to crush the Kapp Putsch of March 13, 1920. At the meeting called by Noske, the Reichswehr Minister, only Reinhardt, the Chief of the Army Command, backed the government position. Seeckt, speaking for the other officers present, opposed the use of the Reichswehr against the various military units that had declared for the insurgents, remarking that, "Soldiers do not fire upon soldiers."<sup>47</sup> Learning that the generals disapproved the use of force against the rebels, the government left Berlin to the Kappists who found the civil service and the officers of the Army Command unwilling to cooperate with them. The solidarity of the general strike brought about the end of the Putsch in four days.

In the whole affair Seeckt was motivated by his theoretical consideration of the necessity of maintaining the German army as strong and undivided. The use of the Reichswehr to fire on their fellow soldiers, mostly Freikorps units being mustered out of the Provisional Reichswehr would have had disastrous effects on later discipline. There were also two practical factors in his decision. One was his uncertainty of the discipline of the troops during a period of unsure legality in which commands of the rebel military authorities might appear to have legitimacy. Seeckt assessed the situation correctly because many officers became utterly confused about whose

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<sup>47</sup>Friedrich von Rabenau. Seeckt. Aus seinem Leben 1918-1936 (Leipzig, 1940), p. 221.

orders to follow, some switching sides several times.<sup>48</sup> The second factor was that Seeckt could not be sure whether the loyal troops, in the midst of their reorganization into the new units of the Reichswehr, were a match for the compact and proved Freikorps which made up the bulk of the Kappist forces.<sup>49</sup>

Such were the reasons for Seeckt's opposition to Noske's plan of military resistance. His actions after this decision do not indicate any disloyalty to Ebert's legitimate government nor anything but disapproval of the rebels. His view of the means to quell the Putsch did not coincide with that of his superior, Noske, and hence, after ordering his subordinates not to follow the commands of the Kappists, he formally resigned.<sup>50</sup> He then offered his service and influence to Ebert's representative in Berlin who, after the collapse of the Putsch, chose him to take charge of the confused military situation as acting chief of the Army Command.<sup>51</sup>

Seeckt had remained loyal to his constitutional oath and he was convinced that the military leaders who backed the Putsch were guilty of treason. But his decision was primarily dictated by considerations of military unity and, even if the chances of defeating the Kappists had been much better, it is doubtful whether he would have been for military intervention which would have affected the future army adversely. Granted the

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<sup>48</sup>Harold J. Gordon, Jr., The Reichswehr and the German Republic 1919-1926 (Princeton, New Jersey, 1957), pp. 130-140.

<sup>49</sup>Rabenau, Seeckt, p. 234.

<sup>50</sup>Gordon, Reichswehr, p. 118.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 125.

unsettled conditions of the embryo Reichswehr and the necessity of fashioning an unified organization out of a badly demoralized group of fighting men, it is difficult to imagine another alternative other than avoiding fratricidal warfare.

Such considerations of unity are not limited to one military system, but are a part of military thought. During the troubles that preceded Charles de Gaulle's assumption of power, part of the military became discontented with the authorities of the Fourth Republic. When the army in Algeria involved itself in a revolution against the Paris government, General Ely, although personally opposed to the motives and actions of the rebels, "resigned as Chief of Staff rather than issue an order calling upon units in France to oppose their brothers soldiers from Algeria."<sup>52</sup> In the case of the Reichswehr there was even more reason for such a course of action since the solidarity of the young army was just being formed in its transition from the newly prohibited Provisional Reichswehr.

Seeckt's ideas on the separation of the military from party politics was shown at the time of his first proclamation to the Officer Corps in which he drew the lessons of the Kapp Putsch. He reminded them that "the soldier stands true to his constitutional duty" and treasonable activities" on the part of the military stemmed from political shortsightedness" which would only lead to politicians interfering in army affairs.<sup>53</sup> The burden of the address

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<sup>52</sup>Time Magazine (February 23, 1958).

<sup>53</sup>Edgar von Schmidt-Pauli, General v. Seeckt: Lebensbild eines deutschen Soldaten (Berlin, 1937), pp. 96-97.

was that the new Reichswehr was on trial and must give no justification for such intervention.<sup>54</sup> The tone of his remarks would seem to indicate that Seeckt had a real fear that this might happen.

The case of the 1923 Munich Putsch was entirely different from that of Kapp. First of all, it was bound up with Bavarian separatism whose aim was to destroy the unity of the Reich, something Seeckt had always opposed. Secondly, he was certain as to the loyalty of a tightly unified army. Lastly, there was involved the question of internal army discipline in General von Lassow's direct refusal of an order. For all these reasons, Seeckt from the beginning of the trouble in Bavaria determined upon a policy of immediate use of force and, in fact, was over-ruled by the government, an ironic reversal of their previous roles.<sup>55</sup>

"The Reichswehr stands behind me" was a remark Seeckt made in answer to Ebert's question of the army's political loyalty. This statement has been often quoted as an indication of Seeckt's political power. Seeckt in 1936 gave the following explanation to a fellow officer:

". . . Ebert knew of the attempts of Rightist circles to make the Reichswehr their party army, while he was being pressed by his people to influence it in favor of the Social Democrats. He asked me how I stood on this question. I sharply rejected both influences, whereupon he asked me, excitedly: Behind whom then did the Reichswehr really stand? My answer was: 'The Reichswehr stands behind me.'"<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>Gordon, Reichswehr, p. 239.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., pp. 278-279 quoted from the Seeckt Papers, Stück 278.

The implication of the statement is clearly one of military discipline over party politics within the army. It does not contradict any of his many statements as to the military's duty of obedience to the state nor does it change the limitations he put on the autonomy of the military or its role in influencing policy.

There is also the question of Seeckt's own political ambitions while on active duty. On November 2, 1923, after much urging by his associates, he came to the conclusion that the only way to save the Reich from perpetual disunity was for him to become Chancellor, dictator, or member of a directory.<sup>57</sup> The following day he called on Ebert and then returned to tell his friends that the time was not ripe for him to take power "organically."<sup>58</sup> After this he often considered the idea of running as an independent for President but he was realistic enough to know that he had no mass appeal.<sup>59</sup> In 1924 he decided to seek the Presidential nomination of the conservative parties at the end of Ebert's term of office, but the premature death of the President ended all of his plans of becoming head of state.<sup>60</sup> These thoughts seem to have been prompted by his belief that he alone was the man who could save Germany from continual crisis. He was motivated by good intentions, as

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<sup>57</sup>Rabenau, Seeckt, pp. 363-365.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 364.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 386.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., pp. 413-414.

his visit to Ebert demonstrated, but he violated his own regulations concerning political activities by members of the army. It does not appear that he pursued his quest for political power too seriously and a remark made about him at the time was that he was one of the many military leaders who "having at last reached the Rubicon, simply sit down on its banks and fish."<sup>61</sup>

Seeckt's attitude to Hitler's National Socialist Party is not entirely clear. His biography, published during the war, naturally contained no anti-Hitler material. However, while one illustration pictured the two smiling happily at an army review, it could not have been an accident that another showed Seeckt and General Werner von Fritsch who was disgraced by Himmler in 1938. Seeckt's first meeting with Himmler was March 12, 1923 when Hitler promised that the SA (Sturmabteilung) would never fight the Reichswerh.<sup>62</sup> Rabenau gave a factual presentation of the Munich Putsch emphasizing Kahr's role. Seeckt had a meeting with Hitler in 1931 in which he agreed about his goals but not about the means of obtaining them.<sup>63</sup> In 1932 he advised his sister to vote for Hitler rather than Hindenburg.<sup>64</sup> Other than that there is no direct evidence of his relations with Hitler. From April 1933 to 1935 he was outside Germany and Rabenau presents none of the ideas he must have had about certain of Hitler's activities. This silence in his biography makes

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<sup>61</sup>Ernst von Salomon, The Answers of Ernst von Salomon (London 1954), p. 242.

<sup>62</sup>Rabenau, Seeckt, p. 347.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 660.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 665.

obvious his criticism, the only kind possible in a dictatorship.

Many of Hitler's aims may have been identical with Seeckt's objectives: a unified nation in a centralized Reich, the substitution of a national party for parliamentary government, the abrogation of the peace treaty, the creation of a powerful national army, the resumption of a philosophy of force in a Power State. And yet Hitler, as a leader, represented much that Seeckt time and again in his writings condemned: opportunist, dilettante, politician, dreamer, scoundrel. Seeckt must have been shaken, for instance, by the Purge of 1934, in which some of the leading figures who had taken a part in crushing Hitler's Putsch in 1923, were assassinated out of revenge. Even though the Purge ostensibly represented the end of the SA as a military organization, its lack of discipline and clear illegality must have been abhorrent to a man such as Seeckt. It is surprising that German officers did not earlier than 1944 follow his distinction between party, state, and Reich, although there was the example of General Ludwig Beck's resignation in 1938 as Chief of Staff. Perhaps the best indication of Seeckt's thought as it applied to National Socialism is the fact that General Rabenau, his devoted pupil, took part in the Officers' Plot of July 20, 1944 against Hitler and was executed for it.<sup>65</sup>

It would be an oversimplification to label Seeckt's political thought as militaristic. What seems to be its point of divergence from other military

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<sup>65</sup>Gerhard Ritter, The German Resistance: Carl Goerdeler's Struggle Against Tyranny, trans. R. T. Clark (New York 1958), pp. 92-93 and 270.



systems was his insistence upon the special separateness of the army from other political agencies of the state. It would appear that this was dictated by his fear that the Reichswehr would be fragmented by the divisiveness which he considered the congenital disease of parliamentary politics. He was determined that military personnel would have nothing to do with the struggle of the various political parties and political neutrality became a policy of isolation from the struggles of the young Republic. The individual officer became a political specialist insensitive to the domestic political difficulties of the republican government. Such was the result of Seeckt's attempt to make the army a vital part of the Reich without active participation in its problems. There may have been other, less dangerous alternatives for the creation of a strong defense force under the treaty restrictions. But Seeckt's political thought impelled him to take the course he did. Hans Guderian, one of the men who was trained in the Reichswehr, gave a final judgment on the outcome of Seeckt's political thought.

His struggle to keep the army free from the influence of party politics was undoubtedly correct from his point of view; it had, however, in the long run an unfortunate result in that the Officer Corps in general, and the future General Staff Corps officers in particular, were in consequence largely uneducated in matters of internal and external politics. That was the principle weakness of his system.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Hans Guderian, Panzer Leader, trans. Constantine Fitzgibbon (New York, 1952), p. 457.

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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Henry William Herx has been read and approved by three members of the Department of History.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

Dec. 23, 1963  
Date

Edward T. Gannon  
Signature of Adviser (PK)