Georg von Schönerer: The Pan-Germans’ program for the future
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Publisher: Central European University Press
Place of publication: Central European University Press
Year of publication: 2014
Published on OpenEdition Books: 19 September 2018
Serie: Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe 1770–1945
Electronic ISBN: 9789633860953

http://books.openedition.org

Electronic reference
Title: Das Zukunftsprogramm der Alledeutschen (The Pan-Germans’ program for the future)
Language: German.
The excerpts used are from the original edition.

About the author

Georg Ritter von Schönerer [1842, Vienna – 1921, Zwettl, Lower Austria]: political activist and anti-Catholic campaigner. He inherited his railroad-pioneer, ennobled father’s title after the latter’s death in 1881. Schönerer became a political activist of liberal views, chiming with the mood of the 1870s, and gained entry to Austria’s Parliament (Reichsrat) in 1873. His politics then took a radical, right-wing turn, founded on antagonism towards Slavs, Jews, and Catholicism. This culminated in his establishment of the Pan-German Party in 1879 and the subsequent “Los-von-Rom” [Away from Rome] movement seeking mass conversion of Austrian Catholics to Lutheranism, echoing Bismarck’s Kulturkampf in Germany. Schönerer became notorious for his pioneering use of physical and verbal violence. In 1888 he was imprisoned, losing his title and (temporarily) all parliamentary privileges after ransacking the offices of a Jewish-owned newspaper. In 1898 he orchestrated mob protests that expedited the dismissal of Austrian Prime Minister Count Badeni (1846–1909), one year after Schönerer’s own reelection to the Reichsrat. This was in protest against Badeni’s language ordinances obliging civil servants in Austrian Bohemia to speak Czech, excluding Germanophones, and it helped his party reach a high watermark of 21 delegates in 1901. Schönerer helped create an entirely new political form and climate, described as being in a “new key”: sharper, violent, demagogic. Elements of Schönerer’s political philosophy became prototypical for the Austrian Right in subsequent years, influencing Vienna’s popular anti-Semitic mayor, Karl Lueger, and, most notoriously, Adolf Hitler.

Main works: 12 Reden. Nebst einem Anhange enthaltend: Das Programm der Deutschnationalen [Twelve speeches. Including an Appendix: The program of the German Nationals] (1886); § 14 und nationale Politik [Article 14 and national politics] (1907); 10 Reden aus den Jahren 1882 bis 1888 [Ten speeches from the years 1882 to 1888] (1914)
Context

The rise of a unified German state under the leadership of Chancellor Otto von Bismarck (1815–1898) in 1871, which excluded Habsburg Austria, created a political system whereby large populations of indigenous Germans belonged to different states. This solution was the outcome of a power struggle between the emerging northern German power of Prussia and Austria, whose monarchs had supplied the rulers of the collapsed Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. The latter entity had held sway over the patchwork of Germanic principalities until 1806; and likewise Austria claimed leadership of its successor, the German Confederation, which emerged from Napoleon’s defeat and the 1815 Congress of Vienna that followed. However, Prussian military skill, combined with the ambition of Chancellor Bismarck and the ruling Hohenzollern dynasty, led to direct rivalry and conflict with Austria for leadership of the German territories. The rivalry culminated in the decisive defeat of Austria at Sadowa (Königgrätz) in 1866. Together with Bismarck’s successful war with France in 1870, the victory paved the way for what was known as the “kleindeutsch” (Small-German) solution to the question of how to unify the German-speaking peoples, which crowned as monarch the Hohenzollern Wilhelm I (first German Emperor, ruled 1871–1888) instead of a Habsburg. “Klein,” in this context, obviously referred to the exclusion of indigenous Germans located primarily in the Western parts of the Habsburg Monarchy.

Pan-Germanism had been a fractured creed agitating for various forms of unification since the early 1800s, whether large (“gross”), i.e., including Austria, or small. The events of 1871, however, helped spur the development of a new, specifically Austrian variant of Pan-Germanism, propounded by those who advocated the inclusion of Austria’s German-speaking population and territories in the newly created German Reich. The implications of such thinking were manifold, and clearly radical. To effect such a move would most likely entail the break-up of the Habsburg Monarchy, to whom the majority of its German-speakers remained loyal, if only passively so; not to mention willingness on the part of Bismarck’s Germany; and the pressing question of what to do with Austria’s Slavic population and large Jewish minority. As with previous forms of Pan-Germanism, the Austrian variant that eventually came to be expounded by the radical demagogue Georg von Schönerer in fact had hybrid origins, embracing aspects of popular socialism, democracy, and a defensive attitude towards the ruling status of the German population. The latter tenet in particular informed the famous Linz Program.
of 1882, formulated by what would later appear to have been an unlikely alliance: two Austrian Social Democratic pathbreakers, the party founder, Jewish-born Victor Adler (1852–1918) and Engelbert Pernerstorfer (1850–1918), together with historian Heinrich Friedjung (1851–1920), who also had Jewish origins, and Schönerer. The program, which urged that the German language be made the official language of state and its institutions, and also called for closer relations with Germany (e.g., a customs union), was a reaction to the perceived threat of Slavic ascendancy. It came fifteen years after the Monarchy had been forced into a political compromise with the Hungarians, the Ausgleich of 1867, on which point the program demanded purely dynastic, rather than political ties.

However, the political course subsequently followed by Schönerer was shaped by a more direct, verbally aggressive and sometimes physically violent response to these perceived threats. Beginning around 1880, he abandoned earlier, more liberal views and developed a more insistent form of anti-Slavic tendencies and, most notoriously, a toxic and virulent anti-Semitism. This development to some extent coincided with wider manifestations of pan-German sentiment outside, but sometimes overlapping with, his own Pan-German Party, founded in 1879. These included the various newly-founded sports and gymnastics associations (Turnvereine), and the student fraternities (Burschenschaften) that in the same period implemented anti-Semitic entry policies for the first time.

As a politician, Schönerer was controversial, and his successes in the short term were arguably patchy. He gained notoriety for his methods as much as for any policy, for example hectoring opponents or obstructing parliamentary debate, on one occasion in 1888. Schönerer’s popularity was boosted in the short term, and he gained significant electoral successes again in 1901 (21 deputies); but his party, which depended on his personal and autocratic leadership, ultimately lost momentum and membership to the emerging Christian Social movement, leading Schönerer himself to concede defeat in a 1913 speech. As the architect of another anti-Habsburg, or at least anti-Austrian initiative, “Away From Rome” (Los-von-Rom), designed to convert Austrians to Lutheranism, he was—in contrast to the Christian Socials—at odds with the Catholic majority and failed to mobilize more than a small minority to his cause. But on other causes, and on other important figures, Schönerer’s influence was long-lasting, indeed devastating. His anti-Semitic sloganeering, which to some extent played on Catholic prejudice, together with democratic and popular socialism that nevertheless repudiated the class politics of the left, directly informed the politics of Vienna’s mayor from 1897, the
popular figurehead and founder of the Christian Social movement, Karl Lueger (1844–1910). Schönerer and Lueger in turn were direct, cited influences on Hitler, who lived in Vienna during the period 1905–13. Hitler, an Austrian-born citizen, would translate Schönerer’s specifically Austrian cocktail of pan-Germanism into a yet more radical form. To be sure, this involved achieving the fusion of German-speaking Austria with Germany. It also meant reaching the zenith of successful demagogy, with a founding ideology that repudiated Marxism as such, but accepting the fusion of some elements of socialism with ethnic nationalism. Most devastatingly of all, of course, it saw the continuation of political violence and autocratic authoritarianism as guiding principles of rule, while reaching the exploitative limits of anti-Slavism, and the murderous end-point of anti-Semitism.

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The Pan-Germans’ program for the future

It is already a fact that, due to the decisive help of numerous representatives from German electoral districts, an electoral reform will become law, by which, not considering the justified German-national demand for the special situation of Galicia and the Bukovina, and for Dalmatia’s reincorporation into the lands of the Hungarian crown, the Germans in Austria will be stripped of their rights and—facing a large Slavic-Romanian majority—permanently be forced into a minority.

This stance taken by German representatives falls far short even of the declaration insisting on privileging the Germans given by the certainly not German-friendly Minister-President Count Badeni on 22 October 1895, in which he says: “that the historically traditional role of German culture that has illuminated the path for all other nations in Austria must always be given the consideration it deserves.”

Due to this anti-German electoral reform, the Germans’ key national demands, which are included in the Linz Program, will no longer be sustainable, and especially so with regard to the legal protection of German as the state’s official language.

In parliament the Germans, from a national point of view, will be unable to wrest beneficial advantages, and the only thing left to do is to programmatically prescribe the following:

The Pan-Germans deem the enactment of the tabled electoral reform as the basis for determined and ongoing Slavicization policies.
The Pan-Germans continue to insist on their founding program from 1901 that proclaims:

We strive towards such a federative relationship of the German-Austrian lands (former German Bundesländer) with the German Reich that will continuously safeguard our national character.

We, therefore, battle any government that works counter to our goals, and cannot participate in rallies proclaiming loyalty to them so long as such a government policy is in place.

We consider keeping our national character pure of any foreign, and hence also from every Jewish, influences, and freeing ourselves from Rome, as our natural duty.

This founding program is now expanded by the following proclamations:

“The relationship to Hungary is to be replaced by a personal union and will surely expect that Hungary can push through the re-integration of Dalmatia—as well as the acquisition of Bosnia and Herzegovina—with Croatia and Slavonia.”

The creation of the federative relationship with the German Reich: everything and by any means must be done within and outside of the legislative and self-governed bodies to prevent anything designed or suited to the advancing Slavicization and de-Germanization of German-Austria. This must be particularly valid with regard to the creation of any non-German universities.

Educating the German nation in Austria to embrace the insight that German-Austria’s economic and political unification with the German Reich is a national necessity, that shall be the main task of the Pan-Germans’ educational work.

In closing, may Bismarck’s well known words be applied to our future:

“It is a difficult task to bring us together,
But it will be more difficult still to separate us again!”

Hail Greater Germany!
Schönerer

Translated by Tudor Georgescu