

Appeal to the German People and Culture (1919)

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Appeal to the German People and Culture

RUDOLF STEINER, 1919

The German people used to believe that their Federal Building, constructed half a century ago, would stand indefinitely. In August of 1914 they still believed the building would prove invulnerable to the catastrophic war that was then just beginning. Today there is only rubble to look at. Surely, self-reflection is called for after this experience, which demonstrates that the beliefs which prevailed for half a century—and especially the dominant thinking of the war years—were an error with tragic consequences. Where can we find the reasons for this fateful error? This question forces self-reflection on the German people, whose survival depends on having the necessary strength for such self-reflection. The nation's future depends on seriously pondering the question of how it fell into this error. If Germans ask themselves this question today, the answer will be illuminating.

Half a century ago the German people founded an empire but neglected to endow it with a mission born out of the essential content of German ethnicity. In the empire's early years attempts were made to align its inherent possibilities with demands that arose from year to year on the basis of old traditions and new needs. Later, the empire's outer position of power, based on material strengths, was consolidated and expanded. Alongside these efforts, measures related to the societal demands of the new age accommodated some momentary needs but lacked any greater purpose derived from insight into the evolutionary forces that humankind must take into account in modern times.

The German empire emerged in a global context, but no essential goals were formulated that would have justified its continued existence, as the course of the ensuing catastrophic war so

tragically revealed. Before the war broke out, the empire's behavior showed non-Germans nothing to suggest that its stewards were fulfilling a unique mission in world history that ought not to be simply swept away. The absence of any such obvious mission shaped the views of the non-German world. For anyone capable of real insight, these views constitute the deeper reason for the collapse of Germany.

For the German people immeasurably much depends on a bias-free assessment of this situation. Misfortune is encouraging the emergence of insight that has been lacking for the past fifty years. Petty thinking about immediate, momentary demands needs to be replaced by a broad view of life that makes every effort to recognize the evolutionary forces affecting humankind at present. The trivial urge to dismiss anyone who focuses on these forces as an impractical idealist must be abandoned, as must the pride and pretensions of those who think themselves practical but are the very people whose narrow vision, masquerading as practicality, brought about our misfortune in the first place. We must consider what truly practical people, currently condemned as idealists, have to say about what is required in modern times if humankind is to continue to evolve.

"Practical" people of all schools of thought have long been aware of the emergence of new demands on humanity but have attempted to meet these demands within the context of traditional institutions and habitual thinking. Modern economic activity has given rise to these demands. Meeting them through private initiatives seemed impossible, and to individuals of a certain class the shift from private to public activity seemed indispensable *in certain areas* and was implemented wherever this class deemed it beneficial. Radical conversion of *all* individual work to public work was the goal of a

different class with no vested interest in preserving private goals as modern economic activity developed.

To date, all efforts with regard to these new demands on humanity have had a common foundation. There has been a general push for the socialization of private activity, which is to be taken over either by communities (such as state or local authorities) that are based on old premises having nothing to do with the new demands or by new communities (such as cooperatives) that are also based on old forms and traditional thinking and are not fully aligned with these demands.

The truth is that no community based on old, habitual thinking can assume these responsibilities. The forces of our times are pushing for understanding of a social structure for humankind that looks very different from anything we see today. To a great extent, our social structures have been shaped by our social instincts. It is the task of our time to become fully conscious of the forces involved. Like the natural body, the body social is made up of different systems. In the natural body, thinking is a function of the head, not the lungs. Similarly, the body social must also be divided into different systems that cannot assume each others' functions. They must work together while preserving their independence.

Economic activity can thrive only if it develops as an independent part of the body social, according to its own forces and laws, and only if its structure is not confused by the effects of another part, such as the political system. The political system must coexist with but be totally independent of the economic system, just as the natural body's respiratory system coexists with the head. These social systems cannot interact healthily if the same legislative and administrative body governs them both. Each must have its own legislative and administrative organ, though these organs must interact. Of necessity, the political system destroys

economy activity by attempting to control it, and the economic system loses vitality when it attempts to become political.

In addition to these two systems within the body social, a third must also develop, completely independently and on its own terms. This is the system of cultural productivity, which also includes the cultural portions of the two other areas. This third system must have its own lawful governance and administration. It cannot be controlled by the other two systems and is influenced by them only to the extent that a natural body's organs also influence each other. Already all of the details of what has been said here about the necessities of the body social can be scientifically substantiated and worked out. These brief remarks merely offer guidelines for all those who wish to pursue these needs.

The founding of the German empire occurred at a time when these new needs were beginning to appear to humankind. The empire's administration did not understand how to endow it with a mission based on these needs. Such a mission not only would have provided the appropriate internal structure but also would have justified external policies allowing the German people to live in harmony with other nations.

Now, however, misfortune must lead to mature insight. We must develop the will to establish a body social based on current possibilities. Germany must not present itself to the outer world as it did in the past. Independent representatives of its cultural, political, and economic systems must meet with those who vanquished the old Germany, which was an impractical hodgepodge of these three social systems.

In spirit we hear so-called practical people brooding over the complexity of what has been said here. Merely thinking about the interaction of three corporate bodies is uncomfortable for them, because they choose to remain ignorant of life's real demands and attempt to shape everything according to the comfortable requirements of their own thinking. They must realize that if their thinking does not adapt to the challenges of reality, they will have learned nothing from our recent misfortune and will perpetuate it indefinitely.

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