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History 133B
Professor Harold Marcuse
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An Exploration into Different Perceptions of Germany's Relationship to Alsace-Lorraine:
A Constitution for Alsace-Lorraine (1911)

— 225 —

Reichs-Gesetzblatt.

Jahrgang 1911.

Nr. 29.

Inhalt: Gesetz über die Verfassung Elsaß-Lothringens. S. 225. — Gesetz über die Wahlen zur zweiten Kammer des Landtags für Elsaß-Lothringen. S. 234.

(Nr. 3897.) Gesetz über die Verfassung Elsaß-Lothringens. Vom 31. Mai 1911.

Wir Wilhelm, von Gottes Gnaden Deutscher Kaiser, König von Preußen u.

verordnen im Namen des Reichs, nach erfolgter Zustimmung des Bundesrats und des Reichstags, was folgt:

Artikel I.

In die Reichsverfassung wird als Artikel 6a folgende Vorschrift eingestellt:

Elsaß-Lothringen führt im Bundesrate drei Stimmen, solange die Vorschriften im Artikel II § 1, § 2 Abs. 1 und 3 des Gesetzes über die Verfassung Elsaß-Lothringens vom 31. Mai 1911 in Kraft sind.

Die elsäß-lothringischen Stimmen werden nicht gezählt, wenn die Präsidialstimme nur durch den Zutritt dieser Stimmen die Mehrheit für sich erlangen oder im Sinne des Artikel 7 Abs. 3 Satz 3 den Ausschlag geben würde. Das Gleiche gilt bei der Beschlußfassung über Änderungen der Verfassung.

Elsaß-Lothringen gilt im Sinne des Artikel 6 Abs. 2 und der Artikel 7 und 8 als Bundesstaat.

Artikel II.

Elsaß-Lothringen erhält folgende Verfassung:

§ 1.

Die Staatsgewalt in Elsaß-Lothringen übt der Kaiser aus.

§ 2.

An der Spitze der Landesregierung steht ein Statthalter, der vom Kaiser unter Gegenzeichnung des Reichskanzlers ernannt und abberufen wird.

Reichs-Gesetzbl. 1911.

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Ausgegeben zu Berlin den 6. Juni 1911.

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Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Author information:

The source was initially authored by an unknown employee of the Prussian Interior Ministry who then had the memorandum presented before the Reichstag. The author's name is unable to be traced through conventional means and therefore will not be part of the textual analysis in this source exploration. However, the source was then compiled by Hans Fenske into his *Quellen zur deutschen Innenpolitik 1890-1914*. Fenske was born in 1936 in Geesthacht, then a part of the state of Prussia during the Nazi era of the German Reich. His academic career was German history from the 18th to 20th century with a particular focus on regional history of Baden, Bavaria and the Palatinate, with papers focusing on "The Modern Constitutional State" and "German Liberalism." His academic method was to be objective and present "historical truth" from what could be gleaned from sources. In this he was against the use of history in politics and applying "modern thinking" to historical sources rather than using them word for word.¹

Background:

This source is the memorandum written by the Prussian Ministry of the Interior 1911. The region of Alsace Lorraine had been a constant thorn in the side for German international politics, as France was bitter over the annexation of its territory after the 1870-71 Franco-Prussian War, and the world at large was concerned at the lack of political power among the Alsatians. There may have also been problems of nationalist sentiments among the Alsatians, as this era was rife with minority ethnicities in empires seeking their own form of self-determination. This memorandum seems to attempt to solve this, as it ostensibly gives the Alsatians political autonomy while still keeping the power within Prussian hands, as most of the highest political positions are connected to the Emperor at the top, who was also the King of Prussia.

Narrative:

From the start of the initial memorandum from February 1911, the bias towards imperial German politics is apparent, as the document is purely a bill from the Reichstag meant to be read by German politicians and for those who wish to see the Imperial German state succeed. The document acknowledges the role of the Emperor and Germany while giving very little credence to Alsace-Lorraine or its inhabitants. This is furthered with the actual 1911 Constitution from May of that year, where we see the articles themselves, such as Article 23 giving the Emperor powers over the region's legislature. While the documents seemingly wish to grant Alsace-Lorraine status as an equal to the other federal states, it is subject to limitations that other states aren't subject to as well as all positions with political power being granted either by the Emperor or through his appointed officials. In this, the area and people of Alsace Lorraine are

¹ "Nachruf Prof. Em. Dr. Hans Fenske (1936 - 2022)." Nachruf Prof. em. Dr. Hans Fenske (1936 - 2022) - Historisches Seminar, March 17, 2023. <https://www.geschichte.uni-freiburg.de/nachrichten/nachruf-prof-em-dr-hans-fenske-1936-2022>.

talked about through the lenses that the Imperial German government wishes to see, which comes out to be a subject of people who are at the whims of a government that wishes to use them to its advantage.

Yet foreign opinions around the time of the constitution's passing reveal the initial diversity in opinions around the world. In 1914 John Redman used the whole event as a way to push Irish interests, claiming that the British could do a similar version of federalism as the German Empire. In this, he took the situation at the surface level in order to make an argument in the British Parliament to allow the Home Rule that he has been fighting for to be passed. This makes him give a positive light to the constitution despite the shortcomings that allow the Emperor to maintain de facto power, which if applied to the Irish Home Rule situation, he would likely oppose. This too with the 1911 *Fresno Evening Herald* claim that the constitution was a Socialist proposal that was able to succeed through certain concessions like the lack of plural voting. This Socialist claim was made in spite of Bethmann Hollweg, the Chancellor who spearheaded the initiative, being an Independent and conciliatory politician. In both of these articles, we notice that the German perspective is still brought to the forefront, yet the international views are misconstrued. These two sources take the passing of the 1911 Constitution and apply it to their own regions, making the true aspects like the constitution changing relatively little in who controls Alsace-Lorraine and thereby being pretty conservative. This may show how little understanding or desire to understand the true power of the constitution compared to its purported power to the international community, as well as completely obfuscating the Alsatians and any role or impact they'd have from the constitution.

In 1914, David Starr Jordan's article offers a different perspective on the region, revealing international opinions amid the threat of World War One. He portrays Germans as imperialist conquerors abusing the Alsatians. This marks a shift in newspaper literature towards condemning Germany, with Jordan initially anti-war but advocating for Alsace-Lorraine's self-determination. American interest in the region persists, as seen in Eckhardt's less opinionated 1918 piece, prompting reflection on its future. Despite Eckhardt's outsider perspective, his American audience may lack full insight into German rule compared to locals. Both documents depict the region as an underdog against Germany's dominant position, likely garnering sympathy for Alsace-Lorraine.

This sentiment is then followed by Hans Fenske's book, covering both the initial memorandum in GHDI, as well as a later rebuttal by Deputy Reich Chancellor Delbrück in favor of the Constitution but without a lot of the stipulations that would inhibit the Emperor's role in the region. In this, he is attempting to represent an aspect of internal German politics leading up to the First World War. It reveals the overarching role that Emperor had in German politics at the time, where his exclusion from having power in a region that is supposed to be a Reichsland or Imperial Land is viewed as wrong and unfounded. This would be Fenske showing the amount of influence the Emperor had and would show how the Emperor has a certain responsibility for policy in the nation despite the power that other aspects like the military and Reichstag would have. In this too, it would seem that Alsace-Lorraine is used as a tool to convey

Fenske's ideal goal of showing the Emperor's role, making the region less important to the reader overall and only a tool in the German political sphere.

Following this shift, since at least 2005, Alsatians began to gain their own voice through the Mémorial Alsace Moselle museum's depiction of the region's history. As an Alsatian, the memorial's commissioner had a personal stake in presenting the region's history from their perspective. The memorial condemns German occupation, labeling it dictatorial during the Imperial era and providing detailed accounts of the Nazi regime's actions in the region. These sections highlight the regime's cruelty toward the Alsatians and the locals' resistance. This shift towards the Alsatians' voice reveals that despite the constitutional promise of political power, Alsace-Lorraine had little autonomy. It portrays Germans as cruel overlords attempting to erase the region's unique identity cherished by the natives, now brought to light by the Memorial.

This is followed by the two Wikipedia articles that have been updated as late as February 2024, but tell two different stories of the region. On the one hand, the German article starts with the historical basis for Germany's annexation and claiming Alsace-Lorraine's equal status following the passing of the 1911 constitution. In this, German readers would be reading a similar narrative that would have been told through the initial GHDI article and 1911 Constitution itself rather than the international opinions that emerged in the subsequent years. However, the French article only starts the historical basis after Alsace-Lorraine's incorporation to France without the Holy Roman Empire's history discussed, as well as describing the German settlers who came to the region and the unrest amongst the Alsatians. This would tell the French readers that the region's annexation and the rule of Germans in Alsace-Lorraine was unjust and the Alsatians were always against the rule even after the supposed political autonomy presented. In this, it can be seen how even though Wikipedia claims to be objective in its telling of history, the two different languages present two different histories where details that make the narrative change are included or excluded, thereby influencing the reader's interpretation.

Overall, the attitude of Alsace-Lorraine and its role in the greater narrative changes depending on the time and the person presenting it. We see through the majority of the articles that those outside of Germany use Alsace-Lorraine and its occupations as ways to condemn German ambitions for conquest while portraying the Alsatians as victims of these ambitions. The lack of Alsatian voices makes it apparent that they do not hold great importance in the greater ideas of the "canon" where French and German, even American voices about the region hold more importance than those who come from Alsace-Lorraine. Even the memorial describing what it was like from the Alsatians is done in the context where they are part of the French nation, pointing to a bias of them wanting to be a part of France rather than Germany. Views of Alsace-Lorraine and its political autonomy, which was supposedly granted in the 1911 Constitution, are subject to the bias of those writing on it, with focuses placed on different aspects of the region's political power depending on the narrative the author wanted to present.

Annotated Bibliography in Chronological Order:

- *Denkschrift des Reichsamts des Innern zur elsass-lothringischen Verfassungsfrage* [*Memorandum from the Ministry of the Interior on the Question of a Constitution for Alsace-Lorraine*] (1911), Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart, E 74 Bü 163.
https://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage_id=1343

This is a translation of a memorandum from the Prussian Ministry of the Interior about the development of the political situation in the region. It outlines the stipulations that granting greater autonomy to Alsace Lorraine would entail, while having several restrictions on voting in the Reichstag and Bundesrat. It shows how certain federal states feared that granting votes to Alsace-Lorraine was a power grab by Prussia, as the governor of the region would be appointed by the Emperor, who was the King of Prussia. However, the fact that the issue is addressed reveals that there are certain problems among the populace of the Reichsland that need to be addressed in order to maintain peace in the region.

- Associated Press Leased Wire. "CONSTITUTION FOR ALSACE-LORRAINE ." *Fresno Evening Herald*. May 19, 1911, Volume XLIV edition, sec. Number 118.
<https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=FHD19110519.2.78&e=-----en--20--1--txt-txIN----->.

This is a small article on the constitution's passing from a local paper in the US. The article notes that the bill supposedly comes from "Socialists," that the constitution was solely passed by the elimination of "Plural voting," and that the use of the French language is permitted in schools in regions where French is the majority language. In this, it can be seen that the passing of the constitution was a large enough event to warrant even a small and local newspaper to report it, if even in a small paragraph. It also reveals how it was viewed by certain individuals as a socialist victory, despite the largest proponent of it, Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, being an Independent.

- Hollweg, Bethmann. "Gesetz Über die Verfassung Elsaß-Lothringens (1911)." Wikiwix Archives, May 31, 1911.
<https://www.verfassungen.de/x/elsass-lothringen/verfassung1911.htm>

This is the actual constitution that would serve as the constitution for the Reichsland Alsace-Lorraine. Bethmann Hollweg was noted during his tenure as being conciliatory between the opposing parties in German politics, seeking compromise while opposing militarist policies of German conservatives. He was also the one who pushed the constitutional reform for Alsace-Lorraine in the Reichstag for the creation of a

bicameral parliament against the opposition of conservatives and the military.² However, while the constitution has a facade to create a constitutional monarchy for the region, certain stipulations, such as article 23's "The Emperor may, while the Diet is not assembled, issue ordinances with the force of law if the maintenance of public safety or the elimination of an unusual emergency so urgently requires," showing the overriding power the Emperor maintained in Alsace-Lorraine. This contrasts Article 5 requiring the consent of the parliament's two chambers to pass laws, which would indicate the legislature had power equal to the emperor, yet the fact that half of the members are appointed by the Emperor defeat that purpose. Thus Hollweg's constitution caused very little change, maintaining a status quo with the Emperor on top, yet attempting to give power in the region through democratization aspects that fall short.

- 60 HC. Rec. 1652-1700 (Daily ed. 6 April, **1914**) (Statement of MP. John Redmond) <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1914/apr/06/government-of-ireland-bill-1>

In this House of Commons record, we see an unconventional take on the constitution granted to Alsace Lorraine by MP John Redmond. Redmond was an Irish Nationalist and a member of the moderate Irish Parliamentary Party. For most of his political career, he advocated for Home Rule for Ireland while remaining a part of the United Kingdom, which would then influence his speech made on 6 April, 1914.³ In this, he regards the accordance of the 1911 Constitution to Alsace-Lorraine as a part of the German Empire's success in Home Rule. He also regards how every federal state being able to have a different constitution is an example that the British should follow in granting home rule. In this, he is using the 1911 constitution in order to further Irish interests while not examining the actual contents of the constitution or its true impact on the Alsatians. He is rather using the pure fact of its existence being a reason for the British to accept Irish Home Rule, giving his argument a superficial basis.

- Jordan, David Starr. "Alsace-Lorraine; A Study in Conquest." *The Atlantic Monthly* . Vol. 113. Boston: Atlantic Monthly Co, May, **1914**. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/22512>

David Starr Jordan was the founding president of Stanford University, and was well known for his attitude in support of eugenics, as well as initially being against the

² Wikipedia contributors, "Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Theobald_von_Bethmann_Hollweg&oldid=1208753949 (accessed February 20, 2024).

³ Wikipedia contributors, "John Redmond," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=John_Redmond&oldid=1204881106 (accessed March 14, 2024).

US entry into World War I, until he believed that German victory would threaten democracy. Additionally, he was President of the World Peace Organization, which immediately plays into the first words of his article where he declares “The Greatest evil in our age is war.”⁴ In his article, Jordan strongly condemns Germany’s annexation of Alsace-Lorraine, viewing them as hapless people conquered by “pangermanist” ambitions. He also notes that Alsace-Lorraine being a Reichsland or “Imperial territory” conveys the lack of political power for the native Alsatians, thereby claiming the 1911 constitution is worthless.⁵ The article seems to have been written in response to the German expansion through military gains as well as being in a naval arms race with Britain, likely the reason for Jordan’s anti-war rhetoric.⁶ There are also nationalist notions as Jordan notes how Alsatians see themselves as neither French nor German and espouses a need for joint French and German collaboration in setting up a system of government in Alsace-Lorraine.

- Eckhardt, C. C. “The Alsace-Lorraine Question.” *The Scientific Monthly* 6, no. 5 (1918): 431–43. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/22512>.

Eckhardt was a professor of Modern European History at the University of Colorado.⁷ The article takes an objective view, analyzing the history leading up to this era, the reasons for German annexation and even comparing it to the US’s own Puerto Rico or Panama Canal Zone. He also discusses how the constitution is a facade as the three Bundesrat representatives are appointed by the governor, who is appointed by the Kaiser, as well as half of Alsace Lorraine’s upper legislative house being Kaiser appointed. This author cites David Starr Jordan’s article when discussing Alsatians’ views of the annexation, again referencing a phrase used in his article, “Français ne peut, Prussien ne veut, Alsacien suis” which means that France can’t have them, Prussia won’t have them, but that they are Alsatian, again focusing on the Alsatians’ own view of themselves and what they want.⁸ The author gives away his reason for writing at the end, wanting for the tenuous situation that had been plaguing Alsace Lorraine to be solved after the war, however acknowledging one side will be hurt by the result

⁴ Wikipedia contributors, "David Starr Jordan," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*,

https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=David_Starr_Jordan&oldid=1208080854 (accessed February 19, 2024)

⁵ David Starr Jordan, *Alsace-Lorraine; A Study in Conquest, The Atlantic Monthly (1857)* (Vol. 113. Boston: Atlantic Monthly Co, 1914), 692.

⁶ Wikipedia contributors, "Anglo-German naval arms race," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*,

https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Anglo-German_naval_arms_race&oldid=1188623432 (accessed March 13, 2024).

⁷ Pamela Cormier, Carl Conrad Eckhardt collection. (Rare and Distinctive Collections – University of Colorado Boulder, University of Colorado Boulder, 2009), <https://archives.colorado.edu/repositories/2/resources/314>

⁸ Eckhardt, C. C. “The Alsace-Lorraine Question,” no. 5. (*The Scientific Monthly* 6, 1918): 441. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/22512>.

- Hans Fenske, ed., *Quellen zur deutsche Innenpolitik 1890-1914* [Sources on German Domestic Politics 1890-1914]. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1991, pp. 389-95.

This is a book of primary source documents from German politics. In this excerpt, the author included both the original memorandum with his own forenote claiming that the memorandum was written in order to show Prussia was willing to make sacrifices in order to not increase its voting power relative to the other federal states. This is followed by a statement made by Deputy Reich Chancellor Delbrück in which he acknowledges the need for representation in Alsace-Lorraine but that the Reichstag cannot come to an agreement on the Emperor's role in the region. Delbrück also acknowledges the inner Reich politics with the other federal kingdoms that force the debate on the restraints on the region's voting to occur. This source reveals how the functions of state and the harmony within its constituent states made the Alsatians position precarious and depend upon these external factors. This reveals the German Imperial view on the Alsatians, where they know something must be done to both appease the Alsatians as well as the international community, but have to keep the peace within their own country as well.

- Mémorial Alsace Moselle. "Bienvenue Au Mémorial Alsace-Moselle À Schirmeck Dans Le Bas-Rhin," February 1, 2024. <https://www.memorial-alsace-moselle.com/>.

This website was interesting as it is a memorial to the history of the Alsace-Lorraine region. The Internet Archive's WayBackMachine first archived this site in November 2005.⁹ As stated in its "Genesis section," the purpose of the memorial and its mission is to tell the story of the "Alsatians and Mosellans." It was the brainchild of the Secretary of State for Veterans and War Victims, Jean Pierre Masseret, at a site near an old Nazi internment camp and a Nazi Concentration camp, Struthof. According to the French Wikipedia, Masseret was born in Alsace to a working class family and served as a representative for Moselle in the French Senate.¹⁰ These reveal that the site is intended to showcase the fraught history of Alsace Lorraine, particularly the detrimental effects German occupation has caused to the region. Within its historical context section, the description of German policy is described with "... basic freedoms were suppressed, public meetings forbidden, press censored. The next day, the mobilization order was posted in all the cities. The military dictatorship was total..."¹¹ This shows how this

⁹ See <https://web.archive.org/web/20051125003249/http://www.memorial-alsace-moselle.com/f/index2.html>.

¹⁰ Wikipedia contributors, "Jean-Pierre Masseret," *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*, https://fr.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Jean-Pierre_Masseret&oldid=209782305 (Page accessed November 18, 2023).

¹¹ "Bienvenue Au Mémorial Alsace-Moselle À Schirmeck Dans Le Bas-Rhin," Mémorial Alsace Moselle, February 1, 2024, <https://www.memorial-alsace-moselle.com/>.

website views German law, including the Constitution of 1911, as reflecting the will of the imperial government, as they quickly turned over basic rights in the “Reichsland” despite the protections the Constitution was supposed to provide. However, the website also shows its view of German influence in Alsace Lorraine by having sections like, “Resistance,” “The Deportation,” “Repression,” and “Germanification and Nazification,” highlighting the atrocities committed in the region by German authorities while the region was again annexed in the Second World War. These overall show how this website takes the French or Alsatians side, with all discussion of German-related occupation highlighting all the wrongs committed, with no reference to anything good

- Wikipedia contributors, “Reichsland Alsace-Lorraine,” Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, https://de.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Reichsland_Elsa%C3%9F-Lothringen&oldid=242195707 (Page last revised February 14, 2024).

This German page begins with the history of the Alsace-Lorraine region, establishing it as part of German nations such as the Holy Roman Empire. It also declares that Alsace-Lorraine’s status was due to “.. the new acquisition initially did not want to be granted independence and could not have its own dynasty...” Finally, this article claims that the Reichsland was equal to the other federal German states. In this, the article takes a kind approach to German annexation, establishing a historical precedent and claiming that the region's status was either due to what the Alsatians wanted or that the German government made them equals.

- Wikipedia contributors, “Alsace-Lorraine,” Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, <https://fr.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Alsace-Lorraine&oldid=212603011> (Page last revised February 19, 2024).

In this French article, the historical context begins with the Napoleonic wars, when the region was incorporated into France, and describes leading Empress Eugenie begging for the region while Emperor William I claims annexation was strictly for military purposes. This also acknowledges that while the 1911 constitution granted greater autonomy, it was still heavily dependent on the Berlin government, and thereby the Kaiser. This page emphasizes the “widespread unrest” of the Alsatians to the rule, going into depth how all aspects of society were apparently rebellious in contrast to the “patriotic German immigrants.” The article paints Germany in a negative light, portraying German rule of the region as despotic and grave for the Alsatians native to the region.