

GERMAN RULE: IDEOLOGY AND PRACTICE

STEWART FIRTH

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## Review Article

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*Friedrich Fabri und der Imperialismus in der Bismarckzeit. Revolution—Depression—Expansion.* By KLAUS J. BADE. Freiburg i. Br., Atlantis Verlag, 1975. 579 pp.

DESPITE A RECENT upsurge of interest in German New Guinea, a satisfactory history of the colony has still to be written. Since 1969 Australian historians have produced three brief surveys of German New Guinea and a number of more specialized studies of article length on labour policy, land policy, Albert Hahl's early years in New Britain, Christian missions, resistance to German rule and the style of German administration.<sup>1</sup> Peter Sack has published a book on land alienation by the Germans and Peter Biskup has edited the memoirs of the early trader and planter Octave Mouton.<sup>2</sup> In marked contrast to recent German historiography of Germany's African colonies, Australian writing on German New Guinea has mostly avoided condemning the colonial masters. Indeed, some scholars have applauded what they see as the German achievement in Melanesia: Biskup stresses the wisdom of Hahl's 'native policy' in the Gazelle Peninsula;<sup>3</sup> Sack describes German New Guinea in 1914 as 'an economic and administrative success';<sup>4</sup> Jacobs claims that Hahl's 'well informed and wide ranging' plans for the colony were 'not matched again until after World War II';<sup>5</sup> and Overlack says that the Germans 'took seriously their responsibility to improve the status of the native peoples, in accordance with their task as a civilising agency'.<sup>6</sup> Significantly, Willis, one of the few historians to examine the local impact of the Germans, finds a big gap between intention and practice in German policy and points out that the recruiting system was one 'designed to produce servility and

<sup>1</sup> J. A. Moses, 'The German Empire in Melanesia 1884-1914. A German Self-Analysis', in K. S. Inglis (ed.), *History of Melanesia* (Canberra and Port Moresby 1969), 45-76; Marjorie Jacobs, 'German New Guinea', in P. Ryan (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Papua and New Guinea* I, 485-98; P. Overlack, 'German New Guinea: a diplomatic, economic and political survey', *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland*, IX (1972-73), 128-51; P. Biskup, 'Dr Albert Hahl—Sketch of a German Colonial Official', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, XIV (1968), 342-57, and 'Foreign Coloured Labour in German New Guinea: a study in economic development', *Journal of Pacific History*, V (1970), 88-107; P. Sack, 'Land Law and Land Policy in German New Guinea', in *History of Melanesia*, 101-12; P. Hempenstall, 'The Reception of European Missions in the German Pacific Empire: the New Guinea Experience', *Journal of Pacific History* X: 1-2 (1975), 46-64, and 'Resistance in the German Pacific Empire: Towards a Theory of Early Colonial Response', *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, LXXXIV (1975), 5-24; I. Willis, *Lae—Village and City* (Melbourne 1974), 40-62; E. P. Wolfers, *Race Relations and Colonial Rule in Papua New Guinea* (Sydney 1975), 62-73; S. G. Firth, 'The New Guinea Company, 1885-1899: a case of unprofitable imperialism', *Historical Studies*, XV (1972), 361-77, and 'The Transformation of the Labour Trade in German New Guinea, 1899-1914', *Journal of Pacific History*, XI (1976), 51-65.

<sup>2</sup> P. G. Sack, *Land Between Two Laws. Early European Land Acquisitions in New Guinea* (Canberra 1973); P. Biskup, *The New Guinea Memoirs of Jean Baptiste Octave Mouton* (Canberra 1974).

<sup>3</sup> Biskup, 'Dr Albert Hahl', *passim*.

<sup>4</sup> Sack, *Land Between Two Laws*, 100.

<sup>5</sup> Jacobs, *op. cit.*, 490.

<sup>6</sup> Overlack, *op. cit.*, 151.

unquestioning acceptance of inferior conditions'.<sup>7</sup> Hempenstall also refers to the Germans' use of overwhelming force in putting down New Guinean revolts in New Britain and at Madang. In general, however, the firing squads, floggings and forced labour which Sir Hubert Murray found so distasteful in the German régime have not won a prominent place in recent Australian historiography. Nor has Seaforth Mackenzie's argument that Governor Hahl was overruled by the big companies:

Hahl's régime was characterized by a far-seeing solicitude for native interests, especially with regard to titles to land, but his hands were tied by the acts of his predecessors, and, later, were forced by the large companies with powerful influence at Berlin.<sup>8</sup>

There has been a tendency for some historians to judge the Germans, and Hahl especially, largely on the basis of their proclaimed intentions.

In Klaus Bade's brilliant new biography of the German colonial propagandist, Friedrich Fabri, there is a clue to what has been missing from the debate among Australian historians. With the exception of John Moses none of us has bothered with German colonial ideology. We have ignored the climate of opinion in Wilhelmine Germany and German assumptions about the purpose of colonization.

Friedrich Fabri was a Christian imperialist. For 27 years the leading figure of Germany's largest protestant missionary society, the Rhenish Mission at Barmen, he was renowned in his time less as a churchman than as an advocate of German colonial expansion. His famous pamphlet of 1879, *Does Germany Need Colonies?*, which ran into three editions within months of its publication, created a sensation among the German propertied classes and was the forerunner of a flood of similar literature in the early 1880s. Fabri was tireless in channelling the new German enthusiasm for colonies into an organized colonial movement. First chairman of the Westdeutsche Verein für Colonisation und Export (1881), he became vice-president of the Deutscher Kolonialverein (1883), then a board member of the Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft (1887) and in the late 1880s a confidant of Bismarck himself.

Bade's book is a 'Life and Times', the history of an ideological movement and its political influence as well as the history of a man. The interconnexions of the colonial propaganda organizations with business, the Christian missions and government are described in extraordinarily revealing detail; so too are the internal tensions in the colonial movement which led to the formation in 1884 of Karl Peters's Gesellschaft für deutsche Kolonisation. In a considerable contribution to the debate on what Hans-Ulrich Wehler has called Bismarck's 'manipulated social imperialism', Bade establishes the importance of the emigration question in German expansionist ideology.<sup>9</sup>

Fabri emerges as a man driven to tell the truth, imparting the colonial message as a missionary would bring the message of Christ. Like many self-chosen

<sup>7</sup> Willis, *op. cit.*, 47.

<sup>8</sup> Mackenzie as paraphrased in *Official Handbook of the Territory of New Guinea* (Canberra 1937), 42.

<sup>9</sup> See H.-V. Wehler, 'Bismarck's Imperialism 1862-1890', *Past and Present*, No. 48 (1970), and P. M. Kennedy, 'German Colonial Expansion. Has the "Manipulated Social Imperialism" been ante-dated?' *Past and Present*, no. 54 (1972).

prophets he claimed no personal credit for the popularity of his ideas, seeing himself merely as the articulation of an economic necessity which even Bismarck finally accepted. His fellow missionaries, incidentally, grew so sick of his humble pride, authoritarianism and willingness to use the Rhenish mission for colonial propaganda that they forced him to resign from the society in 1884.

Fabri saw the acquisition of German colonies as a 'crisis-therapy'. The crisis was the economic depression, overpopulation and the growing challenge to the existing order from workers' organizations such as the Social Democratic Party. The therapy was twofold: to encourage mass immigration to overseas possessions within the *Reich* rather than to America or Australia where Germans were lost to the Fatherland; and to provide the workers with alternative attractions to those of socialism, 'counter-utopias' in the form of new opportunities in the colonies and new hope of personal advancement. The intractable revolutionaries among the workers could be dealt with by transportation to German convict colonies, just as the French had sent the Communards of 1871 to New Caledonia.

'Natives' also had their place in Fabri's grand scheme. Fabri saw modern colonial method as a distinct advance upon the 'exploitation systems' of the past because it was designed to raise natives to a higher cultural level, a task which was 'truly civilising and philanthropic'. After Germany acquired her first colonies in 1884 Fabri stressed that the way to civilize natives was to teach them to work. He saw a natural community of interest between the European colonizers, eager for economic development, and the 'coloured natives' who would benefit so much from colonization. Of course natives could not be expected to appreciate the blessings of plantation labour, so that teaching them to work would not succeed without 'gentle' and 'humanely and intelligently . . . supervised coercion'. In performing this 'national task of education' German planters and traders would do the external teaching while missionaries would ensure that natives internalized European values and recognized the virtue of work.

For Fabri Christian missions and colonial policy were interdependent: missionaries were the pioneers who made natives receptive to colonial occupation; the colonial administration in turn created the political order which missions required. At the Bremen conference of Protestant missionary societies in 1885 Fabri saw this interdependence given practical meaning when, after long and bitter debate, the missions decided that God wanted them to combine their sacred and national duties by operating in the new German colonies. The Rhenish mission established itself on mainland New Guinea in 1887, beginning a generation of apparently fruitless activity which produced many missionary deaths and few black converts.

Anyone who has studied the contemporary documents of the German Pacific must have been struck by the constant repetition of ideas like those of Fabri. 'Teaching the natives to work' was a German obsession. Travellers, explorers, planters, traders, scientists, missionaries and governors all shared it. From the journalist Hugo Zöller, who wondered in 1890 whether it would be better for the New Guineans to die out or to be saved by doing forced labour, to the planters of New Ireland who called for labour conscription of New Guineans in 1914, there is an unbroken ideological tradition. Not all colonists wanted direct coercion but the fundamental assumption of German rule in New Guinea

was that, somehow, the blacks had to be brought into the labour lines. Fabri and his contemporaries saw nothing inconsistent in forced labour and the civilizing mission of the white man. Notions of trusteeship for 'native peoples' were by no means foreign to German colonial administrators; trusteeship simply took the form of protecting natives by requiring them to work.

The great service which Klaus Bade has done for Australian historians of German New Guinea is to remind us that many Europeans of that time could reconcile what we find irreconcilable. Albert Hahl, for example, the sympathetic friend of the Tolai people and protector of New Guinean lands, was also the architect of forced labour, the head-tax and large-scale recruiting. But given his views of the black man's destiny, native land reserves and enforced road-building were two parts of the same policy of uplifting New Guineans. Whether there was anything uniquely German about such ideas is doubtful: Australians in New Guinea also liked to think they were doing New Guineans a good turn by making them work on plantations. The German experience of such ideas leads in a straight line to Nazism. As Bade eloquently points out, all the elements of Nazi race-theory were present in the colonial ideology of the 1880s, from expansionism to a brutally aggressive racial prejudice. In the Australian case, the colonial mentality still finds expression in white oppression of black Australians. Bade has shown us that we must reconsider the basic assumptions of the German colonial rulers and the colonial system which those beliefs served to justify. It is not enough to point to particular acts of benevolence on the part of the Germans or even to whole policies which seem to be protective in intention, nor is it enough, conversely, to emphasize only the cruelties and atrocities of the régime. A comprehensive explanation is needed, one which will include a 'critique of ideology' such as Bade's. Then we might understand why the Germans, like the Australians after them, were both cruel and benevolent and why they believed that so much of their cruelty was actually benevolence. There is much else to do as well: we must examine the settler politics of German New Guinea so as to understand why Hahl's hands were tied, as S. S. Mackenzie put it; and above all we must attempt to discover what happened in local New Guinean communities. One thing is already sure: few New Guineans were ever more than hewers of wood and drawers of water for the German colonial masters.

STEWART FIRTH