

Speech by Friedrich Gottlieb Schulz on the Question of German Overseas Emigration, from the Frankfurt Constituent National Assembly (1849)

Abstract

On March 15, 1849, the Hessian *Gymnasium* teacher Friedrich Gottlieb Schulz (1813–1867) raised the pressing issue of German emigration at the Frankfurt Constituent National Assembly. At the time, thousands of inhabitants of the German states were leaving every year, above all for destinations in the United States of America, where they often lived under difficult conditions. The Economics Committee of the revolutionary Frankfurt National Assembly had presented a report in which it proposed legislation to establish a federal-level German office to oversee not only the process of emigration but also the living conditions of German emigres, both abroad and prior to the departure. In this speech, Schulz broadly welcomed the legislative proposal but at the same time signaled his dismay at the fact that so many productive Germans felt forced to leave their country. It was his hope, at the least, that German settlements in the American West would help emigrants preserve the integrity of their German identity, language, and ties to the mother country. He even went so far as to suggest that some German emigration be steered eastward rather than westward, to the Habsburg monarchy and the Danube as opposed to North America—this, he believed, would be of greater benefit to the newly established German nation-state. In the end, the Assembly did approve the committee version of the Emigration Law, including the two small amendments proposed by Schulz.

Source

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Schulz von Weilburg: Gentlemen! Although many may agree with several previous speakers that the present state of the world offers reason enough to concern ourselves exclusively with our own protection, with the care of those left behind, and with the continued existence of the fatherland; although for the wars that are likely imminent and for our commercial and economic struggles with foreign peoples, we would likely need the thousands of hale and hearty brothers who will leave us again this year to seek a distant, secure new homeland: It nevertheless warms my heart that we are finally all gathered together to discuss a law designed to erase an old blemish from the German name. Despite our political reform, the stream of emigration continues and is even growing. We cannot prevent it, and we do not wish to cast stones at those who despair of the great future of our fatherland and who choose not to persevere with us in struggle, still less at those who, because of the deep social infirmities of our people, which will not be alleviated anytime soon, prefer to seek out a more rewarding field of endeavor for themselves and their children. In spite of the perilous situation of the fatherland, our discussion of the Emigration Law is fully justified at this moment. The previous neglect of this matter has disgraced Germany's name abroad. In foreign port cities there are now entire villages of penniless German emigrants who do not always pursue the most honorable occupations. Several German estate assemblies have begun to deal with this matter, and the central authority of the empire must not lag behind. We gratefully acknowledge the useful stipulations contained in the Emigration Law presented to us by the economic committee; these aim to remove the disgraceful excesses of the system of brokers, to favor German ports and German shipping, to protect the emigrants against maltreatment during their passage and against potential fraud after their arrival in the New World; above all, however, we would welcome the establishment of an Office of Emigration that would oversee all of these suggested

stipulations. As I said, all of this is very good but in my view insufficient. It seems to me that the draft does not yet wholly correspond to the “care” promised to emigration by the Imperial Assembly. It is a very benevolent form of oversight but not yet the actual organization that the committee report paints it to be, nor is it an inner regulation and guidance that penetrates to the heart of the matter, and upon which a true organization is predicated. If, however, we accord the Emigration Office a more comprehensive authority and expanded competencies, many of the criticisms raised against the law will disappear. The Office of Emigration must closely scrutinize both the point of departure and the destination of emigration. To this end I have proposed the following two supplemental motions:

On §1:

“To this end, it must make contact with the individual governments and the emigration associations,”

and §14:

“other preparatory measures abroad deemed necessary for German emigration will also be taken by the Emigration Office.”

First, I believe that we should state with the committee report that the Emigration Law is not intended to promote the desire to emigrate, to encourage emigration and increase it wherever possible; after all, every friend of our fatherland surely regards emigration from Germany such as it has occurred thus far as a great misfortune and a serious sign of sickness. How much spiritual and material energy do we not fling away annually to foreign lands! It has been estimated that in recent times 30 to 40 million gulden have been lost to the fatherland through emigration. It is precisely the productive middle classes that have emigrated, for the poor naturally lack the means for such long journeys. However much we may regret this outflow of manpower and money, we cannot deny that it is our own fault. Feudal obligations have hindered the growth of our agriculture and even today, peasants in many places are groaning under high redemption capital payments. There is no thought to adequate protection for German labor, the industrial power of foreign peoples has been allowed to devastate our trades, and we have neglected our industrial schools; political fragmentation has stymied the energies of the nation, bureaucratic rule has crushed the spirit of the German people. (Bravo from the Center.) Gentlemen, this is how large segments of our middle classes were ruined. We must seal the sources of wrongheaded emigration, we must elevate agriculture and the trades, awaken national sentiment, we must compete with North America in free institutions. Like the Greeks, we must learn from our settlements, for colonies develop more quickly than the motherland; we must transplant the North American spirit of enterprise and fresh courage into our own regions. Gentlemen, there is, however, also justified emigration; this is overpopulation, which occurs with particular ease among the Germanic peoples, who seem particularly destined to take possession of the globe, and which already exists in Germany, especially the in the southwest, as a result of our present economic policies. The children of small landowners are forced into the class of day laborers, so that their parents prefer to make them free landowners in the New World. But poor relief is crushing many municipalities. It is a monstrous debt capital whose interest is used annually to support the poor. The proletariat is growing in town and country, and emigration thus far has only increased the inequality of those with and without property by placing land, and sometimes the boundaries of entire municipalities, within the hands of a few rich families. The peasantry, the pride of Germany, is close to ruin in some regions. We thus need to pass laws against excessive landownership in the hands of a single individual. To alleviate the existing ills, some municipalities have already taken the proper path by beginning to resettle their poor in the New World at the public expense since they correctly disapprove of wasting money on the unemployed who have no opportunity to work. The municipalities in isolation are, however, not up to this major task; private associations and several individual governments have therefore begun to lend them support. Württemberg and Bavaria have each allocated 50,000 gulden to organize the emigration system. All of the estate assemblies should follow this fine example, and several of them are expected to do so. Associations should be formed in all lands on the example of the National

Association, which already encompasses the two Hessian states, Württemberg and Baden, so that North America no longer puts us to shame. If, however, the people are already acting in this area on their own impetus, it is surely also up to the imperial authority, in this case the Emigration Office, to intervene vigorously in these circumstances. The Emigration Office, which should probably be elevated to a ministry because of the importance of its portfolio, must maintain lively contacts with the individual states and later with the individual regions or districts, at first by unpaid officials freely elected by the people. This would be a fine beginning, for the time being, for the office of imperial officials, and more generally for an area of political life in which nothing would be taken from the individual states, since they have not yet done anything in this area. What is more, the Emigration Office must enter into robust connection with all of the private associations in Germany, as the North American government does with its associations, and as §14 of our draft orders our consuls in America to do. Why do we not do the same in Germany? Are our self-sacrificing native associations not equally worthy? The Emigration Office must also have the right to establish institutions of public benefit throughout Germany, for instance, a suitably organized emigration bank with branches, as has already been suggested, so that emigrants do not already fall into difficulties when selling their property. It was in this context that I proposed my amendment to §1. Concern for emigrants should begin before they leave their homeland, and it should begin early. But I wish to see the competence of the Emigration Office expanded not merely with regard to the emigrants' point of departure but also with regard to their destination. For the time being, I believe, the Economics Committee is right to focus above all on North America. One can, however, by and large not channel the stream of emigration at will; no one is clever enough to do so, and since the dawn of history the great migration has gone from East to West. For millennia, humanity has longed for sunsets, for the gardens of the Hesperides, for the happy isles in the Atlantic Ocean, for the goldmines of Peru, the mighty primeval forests of the United States, where a nation of kings is growing up. Here, too, the instinct of the German people has largely led them to the proper regions, in North America's West. The draft law prepared by the Economics Committee addresses this healthy drive of the German people. It is now a matter of directing German emigration there as usefully as possible. A flock of American land salesmen has spread out across Germany, foisting the poorest American land upon Germans. An honest land sale office in New York recently succumbed to the intrigues of greedy speculators. Many men with experience in matters of emigration—Bremen merchants, a North American consul general, in our region the head of the National Association for Emigration—consider it highly appropriate and indeed necessary to send an investigative commission of experts to seek out suitable areas of settlement for annually rising German immigration. This investigative commission would acquire the healthiest regions that are also best suited to manufacturing and commerce. The imperial authority would not find it difficult to purchase large stretches of land from the United States at more favorable conditions than are available to individuals. This would be the best way of looking after the interests of poor emigrants, which is after all our chief task, and at the same time keep the German element together. The Germans would not remain isolated, however, since great and lively communication would sufficiently pull them into American life. They could become Americans without wholly forgetting German language, manners and literature, in which even native-born Americans are beginning to take an interest. The Emigration Office would do everything to promote vibrant communication with the fatherland. A powerful and splendid New Germany can flourish on the great ocean, which would significantly strengthen the natural friendship between the United States and us. But if we do not hurry, we will also arrive too late to the American West, at least for more extensive settlements, which are in a position to exercise an independent influence. To facilitate the proper measures in this regard I have proposed an amendment to §14. We should make haste to send an assessment commission this spring, at the latest at the end of April, as the abovementioned experts propose. If the empire does not have money at the moment, perhaps a portion of the funds already allocated by the individual states could, with their consent, be used for this purpose, which would surely bear the finest fruit. Emigration is almost exclusively to the distant west, but there are also lands of settlement on our immediate borders, in the east and southeast of our fatherland, which could acquire great importance in the near future, as the committee report recognizes to my great pleasure. Such eastward flows, to the rich and wondrous Orient, have at various

times had their profound justification. In Antiquity in the migrations and settlements of the Greeks in Asia; in the Middle Ages in the colonies of Italians. Transylvania and the German Baltic duchies with their Hanseatic cities are evidence for Germany. If the Austrian government is not wholly incompetent, if it does not utterly misjudge the duty of our Eastern March, it will seek, as soon as it has established a secure legal situation in its lands, to win over many millions of initially penniless Germans as settlers in its empty territories on the Danube. There, on our border, is our Texas, our Mexico. Shall our German brothers fight only for the United States of North America? If we do not manage to occupy a proud position here in the East, if in an emergency we do not manage to subjugate Austria in our national interest, if we cannot see that we must settle our superfluous labor force as close to the fatherland as possible, to their advantage and our own, then let us all leave this stunted Lesser Germany for the rising New Germany on North America's great rivers. But I do not believe things have gone that far; fresh twigs and leaves are sprouting from the old German oak. It is my wish that the Emigration Office, as soon as circumstances permit, will reach an understanding with the Austrian government over an orderly system of colonization for the lands on the Danube. It is my wish that the Emigration Office be organized in such a way that it is equal to this great and difficult task. Gentlemen, the French have allocated 50 million francs for the next four years to resettle their poor in Africa. Little Switzerland is making efforts in the same direction. Germany, which is struggling for its rebirth, cannot do less. The imperial authority has a good opportunity here to intervene in the overall life of the nation. If it meets the true will of the people, it can accomplish anything; all sides of the House will support it, if only it acts with vigor. Gentlemen, see to it that the honor of German men and women is not abused as it has been thus far by foreign sailors and brokers; the best sign of a reborn Germany will be the protection we offer to our emigrating brothers on land and sea. Gentlemen, I beg of you, let this sign become visible to all peoples as the finest tidings of Germany's rebirth! (Applause on the left side.)

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Source: *Stenographischer Bericht über die Verhandlungen der deutschen constituirenden Nationalversammlung zu Frankfurt am Main*. Published by decision of the National Assembly by the Redaction Committee and on its behalf by Professor Franz Wigard, vol. 8, nos. 182–209. Frankfurt: Sauerländer, 1849, pp. 5720–22. Available online at: <http://mdz-nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb00011915-9>

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Recommended Citation: Speech by Friedrich Gottlieb Schulz on the Question of German Overseas Emigration, from the Frankfurt Constituent National Assembly (1849), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/from-vormaerz-to-prussian-dominance-1815-1866/ghdi:document-5016>> [July 05, 2025].