

Oscar Müller, “The People and Elections” (January 20, 1919)

Abstract

This article from the conservative *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, which had functioned as an unofficial government newspaper during the Bismarck era, appeared the day after the election to the National Assembly. The author, Oscar Müller, had been head of the DAZ foreign affairs desk since 1918 and was to become head of the government press office in 1920. In the excerpt from his opinion piece reproduced here, Müller describes the difficult relationship Germans had with parliamentarianism in the past while emphatically emphasizing that the future of Germany lies in parliamentary democracy.

Source

The People and Elections

[...]

The experiences of the last few months have brought this realization home to us with almost insistent clarity, so that we can hardly feel satisfaction about political maturation, but almost only deep regret that we needed such trials in order to recognize the essence of the modern state. It is all the more important, therefore, to hold on to what we have learned in these dark hours of our nation's life. Contempt for parliament was once almost a point of pride in Germany. Criticism was voiced in other countries as well, and nowhere was it perhaps as justified as here, so challenged by the achievements of the representatives for the expelled. But apart from the fact that in the old parliament we only mocked our own political incapacity, we now know that parliament is not an institution outside the people or above them, but a part of it, a political expression of life which must be regarded as the essential symptom of state life. If, therefore, in better times, tendencies should arise again – whether they come from the right or the left – to increase the inadequacies of parliament to the point of contempt for the institution and to poison the bloodstream flowing from nation to national representation, let us remember that we once had to turn our weapons against each other in order to secure the reviled good of popular representation as our only salvation from the deepest misery. The internal disintegration of the empire, which began when state governments and state parliaments received their full state sovereignty as the first gift of the revolution, and which was not halted when it became apparent that a central government without a central parliament was not a unifying power, soon became the negative in which the positive value of the Reichstag was mournfully recognized. If the destruction did not come in one fell swoop, we owe this not only to the conscious loyalty of the great masses of the people but also to the mechanical continuation of the Reich machine. But it is almost certain that the point in time can be predicted when this accumulated power will fail: with the final liquidation of the war, which will determine Germany's sacrifices, the machine would stop in the absence of a unifying Reich parliament.

[...]

Source of original German text: Oscar Müller, „Volk und Wahl“, *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 20, 1919.

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