

**MUNICIPAL LIFE AND GOVERNMENT  
IN GERMANY**

# MUNICIPAL LIFE AND GOVERNMENT IN GERMANY

BY

WILLIAM HARBUTT DAWSON

AUTHOR OF "THE EVOLUTION OF MODERN GERMANY," "GERMANY AND  
THE GERMANS," "SOCIAL INSURANCE IN GERMANY," ETC. ETC.

WITH APPENDICES

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## PREFACE

THE completion of this book realises a long-cherished wish and intention the fulfilment of which, owing to many reasons, has repeatedly been deferred. In various writings on German life and institutions, now covering a period of just twenty-five years, I have touched upon isolated aspects of the subject of municipal government. Now, for the first time, I have the satisfaction of dealing with the subject systematically, and so of giving to it, as I trust, a treatment worthier of its importance. The actual work of writing has been spread over four years.

The book, as its title explains, is concerned solely with questions of urban administration, yet without the limitation which the use of the word "municipal" might seem to suggest. The larger German cities and towns correspond for all practical purposes to the municipalities of the United Kingdom, as the smaller German towns correspond to our urban districts; hence it has appeared to me justifiable to consider convenience rather than strict historical and technical accuracy in the use of the terms "municipality" and "municipal," and to follow common wont in applying these terms to urban organisations, institutions, and activities generally, irrespective of the question of incorporation as understood in this country.

On the subject of sources, a special remark needs to be made. This is not a book written from books, though German literature has, of course, been freely used. A picture of German self-government derived merely from the study of laws and

commentaries would be not only inadequate but misleading. A true picture must be drawn from the life, and whatever value this book may possess is due to the fact that it shows German municipal authorities as they actually are, and engaged in the practical day-to-day tasks of local administration.

Several facts should emerge definitely and clearly from this story of the life and government of German towns if it has been told successfully.

One is the far wider range of administrative powers which the German towns possess and exercise as compared with the towns—even the large incorporated cities—of the United Kingdom. This fact is illustrated by almost every chapter, and need not be enlarged upon in this place, but municipal workers will find the fact itself, and still more its explanation, deserving of more than passing thought. If it be true that the average English citizen has little idea of the degree to which the authorities which govern him are bound fast in legal fetters, it must also be confessed that these authorities themselves show a strange disposition to accept their fate as natural and inevitable. In the development of its system of urban government Germany followed principles so elastic and so accommodating that its municipalities have been able to cope with their growing responsibilities with surprising ease and facility. Impressed by the larger autonomy enjoyed by German towns, I have even dared to ask the question, whether in this country—the proverbial home of free institutions—we yet really understand what true self-government means? The reader must answer that question for himself after weighing the evidence offered for his guidance.

Stress has also been laid on the important and almost dominant position occupied in German local government by the permanent official and expert. In emphasising its respect for systematic training and special knowledge in that domain,

however, Germany is merely carrying out a principle which rules in every other department of its national life. I am duly conscious of the fact that the setter forth of strange gods, that belong not to the national pantheon, is guilty of the worst kind of sacrilege. Yet I do not forget that an investigation which leads to no clear conclusions is like an uncompleted syllogism; it may affirm interesting propositions, but its main purpose is not fulfilled. Hence the candid avowal of my conviction that, while German municipalities can teach us little or nothing worth learning in regard to the electoral basis of local government or the constitution of the town councils, their institutions of the professional and salaried mayor and aldermen represent the highest and most efficient development of municipal organisation reached in any country.

Most Englishmen at heart prefer the worst of amateurs to the best of experts, and would rather be wrong with the one than right with the other. They will long persist in that preference, and will long cling to the honest belief that the country's greatness is based upon it. Frankly recognising, therefore, the impossibility of carrying all my readers with me on this question, I shall be satisfied if what is said in these pages should serve to secure for the German system of administration by trained officials greater consideration than it has yet received.

It would assuredly be unwise, even if it were possible, to imitate the German system in any indiscriminate and wholesale fashion. Nevertheless, many of those readers whose opposition to that system is rooted in a stubborn prejudice against what is vaguely called "bureaucracy" may be reassured if they remember that "bureaucracy" means different things in different countries, and that bureaucratic abuses seldom threaten and can never prevail where there exist a wholesome public opinion and a vigorous public spirit.

Full recognition has also been given to the further fact that the German municipalities are confronted with most, if not all, of the problems of urban life which beset us to-day in this country, yet with the difference that upon some of them they have been working longer and to more deliberate purpose, with the result that they are able to offer us much useful experience. If I specially mention here the taxation systems, the land and town planning policies, the social welfare schemes, and the educational activities of the great municipalities, it is because these various provinces of local administration best illustrate the large powers and wide jurisdiction claimed by the governments of German towns.

The writer of a book of this kind, necessitating inquiries in great number and variety in many quarters, is compelled, even against his will, to make a severe call upon the courtesy and forbearance of others. Without the assistance given—not for the first time—by German Mayors, Directors of Municipal Statistical Offices, and other public officials and authorities, much of the statistical and other information contained in the following pages would have been inaccessible. Most gladly I record my indebtedness for all such valuable help, and also for a good deal of information, needed for comparative purposes, furnished by the Town Clerks of many of the larger towns of England, Wales, and Scotland. Thanks are equally due to the friendly critics, most of them authorities upon special questions, by whom many of the chapters were read before they reached the publishers' hands. Amongst these I would mention—in Germany, Dr. Hugo Preuss, of Berlin, the historian of German municipal government; Dr. Otto Most, of Düsseldorf, a member of the Municipal Executive of that town and the head of its Statistical Office; Herr Otto Münsterberg, of Danzig, councillor of commerce and member of the Prussian Diet; Dr. Hugo Marx, of Moabit, Berlin;

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Dr. Stübben, of Berlin, the authority upon the housing question; Herr J. Weydmann, head of the Poor Relief Board of Strassburg; Dr. F. Nüchter, of Nuremberg; Herr Karl Mackensen-Rogers, of the Schöneberg (Berlin) municipal authority; and the directors of the Central Office of the German Municipal Congress; and in England, Mr. H. G. Pritchard, the secretary of the Association of Municipal Corporations, and Mr. F. Stevens, clerk to the Urban District Council of Beckenham. The debt due to my wife, for advice, help and encouragement, cannot be paid with thanks.

NOTE.—In the conversion of German values the Mark has for convenience been taken in all cases as equivalent to the Shilling, though its value in exchange is in fact more than two per cent. less.

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