CHAPTER III

The Minister of Reconstruction

"What a dish I'll make for the little professor of 1950!"
—Rathenau in his diary, February 18, 1912.

The Ministry of Reconstruction was broadly responsible for administering compensation to the Allies. This suggested reconstructing France's war-damaged areas as a part of the general reparation burden. In giving the ministry its name, the German government had taken the part for the whole because it sounded better. Germany could assume the character of a good neighbor, sacrificially setting to right in peacetime what she had regretfully harmed in the war. French industry and labor objected, however, since they wanted the reconstruction contracts and jobs. During its five years

1 "Welches Fressen werde ich für den Privatdozenten von 1950 sein!" (Tagebuch 1907–1922, edited by Hartmut Pogge-von Strandmann [1967], p. 159). The editor’s notes in this recent edition, identifying persons mentioned and explaining the issues, are very helpful. The original edition was published in 1930 by the Reichsdrukkerei, the National Printing Office, under the guidance of Edith Andreae, Rathenau's sister. In all likelihood she carefully censored the material, as Pogge-von Strandmann suggests. We know, for example, that Rathenau's published letters were heavily edited, since they show important differences from photographic
of life the Reconstruction Ministry reconstructed nothing in France, its total physical accomplishment having been limited to erecting a score of new wooden sheds. The ministry’s true function was vaguer than reconstruction or compensation. The Minister of Reconstruction was equally ambiguous.

The background of Walther Rathenau was rich in accomplishments and problems. Fifty-three years old when he entered the government, he was a member of a prominent Jewish family of Berlin. His father was an unqualified industrial genius and one of the creators of modern Germany. Emil Rathenau had developed a feeling for mass production as a successful manufacturer of small steam engines. He saw Edison’s light bulb at a Paris exhibition in 1881 and bought the German patent rights to it. In 1883 he founded the company that became the Allgemeine Elektricitäts-Gesellschaft. By 1919 the AEG was an electrical company of world

reproductions of several original pages. In any case, the Tagebuch, whatever changes it endured, was more a collection of mnemonic notes than a diary. Most of the entries were impersonal and dealt with a scattering of business matters, the whole reflecting only irregular fragments of Rathenau’s many activities. There is nothing on the years 1909, 1910, and 1919. Most useful for this study were Rathenau’s detailed notes on his negotiations in London at the end of 1921, but they only emphasize how much is missing.

Rathenau’s private papers disappeared during the last war. They may have been shipped to a collection point in eastern Germany which was overrun by Russian troops, according to the archivists in the Deutsches Zentralarchiv. Soviet scholars have published nothing making use of what the Rathenau papers might contain. Most of the important or relevant records in the company Rathenau headed were destroyed when its Berlin main office was annihilated in World War II. There is a collection of material called Rathenau-Nachlass (Private Papers) in the Bundesarchiv, but this contains only a few-score letters.

The best biography is still the one by Harry Kessler, Walther Rathenau: Sein Leben und sein Werk (1928). A recent edition has as an appendix the reminiscence of Hans Fürstenberg, “Erinnerung an Walther Rathenau” (1963[?]). All references here are to this newer edition. An English translation was published in London in 1929. A wealthy, cultivated diplomat and aesthete, Kessler had been an acquaintance of Rathenau’s and his book is sensitive and sympathetically objective in spirit. Kessler could not be entirely objective in effect, since the book was evidently inspired and its research clearly assisted by leaders of the Weimar Republic who were seeking to develop that great rarity, a republican hero. In his Tagebücher 1918–1937 (1961), Kessler is more critical of Rathenau. In the biography, the section by Fürstenberg, whose family was closely associated with Rathenau’s, provides friendly additions and corrections. Etta Federn-Kohlhaas, Walther Rathenau: Sein Leben und Wirken (1928), is worshipful, but gives some useful details.

importance, with 61,000 employees and 40 subsidiary firms. Emil Rathenau's wife, Mathilde, was the cultivated daughter of a Frankfurt banker. She was in her own way as forceful as her husband. A bitter, melancholy, and jealous person, she was especially possessive about her elder son. When Walther was an adult he had to arrange secret meetings with his sister, Edith, who was 15 years younger and looked upon him as another parent. Walther tended to take his mother's side in the marital conflicts that frequently erupted, but he knew how to protect himself against maternal excesses, withdrawing behind a wall he lowered for no one more than temporarily. Doing justice to both parents, he became an engineer with an active interest in art and ideas. When he was 25 years old Walther Rathenau listed his strengths in a letter: "My capacity to see through people and deal with them, to talk, to write, and to work up combinations." He was writing to his mother.

Walther Rathenau worked in AEG subsidiaries in various parts of Germany and in other countries, and returned to Berlin in 1899 at the age of 32. He joined the Vorstand, the group of five or six officers who ruled the company. Relations between Walther Rathenau and his father were difficult. In 1902 the young man left the AEG and joined a bank, the Berliner Handelsgesellschaft, as an expert in industrial investment. The alienation had its strict limits, since the head of the bank, Carl Fürstenberg, was a close friend of Emil Rathenau's and vice-chairman of the AEG board of directors. A few months later, in January, 1903, Walther Rathenau's younger brother died. Erich Rathenau had been the father's favorite. For a period Emil Rathenau was incapacitated by grief and leaned on Walther for comfort and efficient seconding. Walther spent more and more time with the AEG, leaving the bank in 1907.

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4 50 Jahre AEG, p. 184; Fürst, Emil Rathenau, p. 36. The AEG was then—and has remained—about two-thirds of the size of Siemens und Halske, Germany’s electrical pioneer and developer of the dynamo.


7 Vorstand, for which there is no English equivalent, is the collectivity of leading company officers, i.e., what we might call a board of officers as compared with the board of directors.

8 His father failed to support him in a difference with other company officers, according to his vague account in Kritik der dreifachen Revolution (first published in 1919), in Gesammelte Schriften (hereafter cited as GS), vol. 6, Schriften aus Kriegs- und Nachkriegszeit (1929), p. 424.
In 1912, when his father fell gravely ill of diabetes, Walther became chairman of the board of directors (Vorsitzender des Aufsichtsrats), formally the father's superior, since Emil remained chief executive officer (Vorsitzender des Vorstands). Walther Rathenau accepted more responsibility. He was also elected a director of many other companies; the total eventually exceeded one hundred. Emil Rathenau died on June 20, 1915. Felix Deutsch, his closest associate, succeeded him as chief executive officer. Walther Rathenau, continuing as chairman of the board of directors, was then elected Präsident (a foreign word in German and generally unknown in the nation's business). The title suggested that his position was analogous to that of a constitutional monarch, with vague powers and important representational duties. One of his most important functions was the negotiation of mergers or trust agreements. He worked amicably with Felix Deutsch.

Rathenau was developing his presence in other worlds. In 1910 he began building a villa in the Grunewald, a prosperous suburb of Berlin, where his neighbors included Gerhart Hauptmann, Fritz Kreisler and the descendants of the composer Felix Mendelssohn, the Fürstenbergs and other members of the banking and industrial community, the Ullstein publishing family and his own publisher, Samuel Fischer, and Maximilian Harden, the editor of the polemical weekly, Die Zukunft. A year earlier Rathenau had bought and begun to restore Schloss Freienwalde, which was some 40 miles northeast of Berlin. Chaste but exquisitely royal, it had been the country home of Queen Louise of Prussia (1776–1810). Rathenau was a great admirer of the Prussian classical style; Schloss Freienwalde had been built by Friedrich Gilly, one of its masters, and Rathenau himself tried to design the Grunewald villa in the same style. Severe but undistinguished, the villa was little different from its neighbors, except for a disproportionately narrow entrance. The interior of both residences reminded visitors of museums. When Rathenau entertained he usually had his guests to dinner in the Berlin Automobil-Klub.

Rathenau was making his way in society like the Swann of Proust, but more purposefully. He was one of the first Jews or members of the middle class to become salonfähig, socially acceptable, in aristocratic Berlin homes. A bachelor, Rathenau was a valuable extra man. Sensitive to women's sensibilities and a great
talker in small groups, he could pour out streams of seductive ideas in his musical baritone. He was a favorite guest of Prince Bernhard von Bülow, Chancellor from 1900 to 1909, and of his Italian-born wife. He also impressed the Kaiser. Wilhelm II had met Rathenau in 1901 and saw him a score of times, drawing on him for his scintillating explications of industry and economics. Rathenau also endured agonizing humiliations.

With affectionate malice Prince von Bülow recalled his first meeting with Rathenau: “A very sympathetic presence. He was flawlessly dressed. He approached with a bow as flawless as his dress—in the manner of a *jeune premier* of the Théâtre Français. . . . ‘Your Highness,’ he said in his pleasant-sounding voice, ‘let me, before I am honored by the favor of being received by you, make a statement that is at the same time a confession.’ He paused briefly and then, winningly: ‘Your Highness, I am a Jew.’” Rathenau was mounting a social triumph on a condition which he experienced as both a social *gaffe* and a sacred illness. He once wrote: “In the youth of every German Jew there is a painful moment which he remembers all of his life: when he becomes aware for the first time that he is a second-class citizen and that all the ability and accomplishment in the world cannot free him from this condition.” The hurt was genuine, but Rathenau was dwelling on the minor disadvantages of being a Jew, and also exaggerating them, thus confusing and diluting his tragedy. He was forgetting his fortune, and his directorships and dinner invitations.

Rathenau reacted eccentrically to the problems of being Jewish. While he was in his thirties he met with Martin Buber to discuss the Chassidic movement, which appealed to his taste for mysticism,

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11 *Denkwürdigkeiten* (1931), 3: 40.
13 His sister Edith expressed the sense of their condition better: “What do others know about this loneliness, this magical ring that separates us from the world?” she wrote in her diary. “They admire us, they depend on us, they use us, but they don’t love us or understand us. We Rathenau have always been strangers among them . . .” (quoted by her daughter, Ursula [Andreae] von Mangoldt, *Auf der Schwelle zwischen Gestern und Morgen* [1963], p. 24). She was suggesting that the problem of being Jewish was complicated by the difficulties of being a Rathenau.
and he earnestly studied Hebrew. He was drawn by the figure of Christ, however, and talked as if he had accepted the bulk of the Christian teachings. He refused to become a convert. He explained that he preferred to belong to a community of pure belief, an ideal which he thought Judaism approached. In any case, although conversion would have ended any formal career disability, it would have aroused withering attacks by Christians and Jews. Rathenau remained a Jew, but one who was deeply attracted to his enemies. He entertained a remarkably enthusiastic friendship with a racist publisher and even financed the distribution of his books to the troops. He wrote to a lieutenant: "Thank you for your forceful and well-argued letter. . . . I saw you before me, strong, intelligent and solid, and I liked you. . . . You . . . hate—no, disapprove of—us Jews." Rathenau invited the lieutenant to visit him. His biographer remarked on Rathenau's fondness for the young, blond Nordics of the type that would murder him.

In 1897 Rathenau wrote an article on the condition of the Jew in Germany. The article compounded his pain and ambition. From a small town 60 miles in the hinterland, preparing the way for his entry into Berlin, he turned his pain on his fellow Jews. Under the thinly pseudonymous anagram, "W. Hartenau," in Die Zukunft, he rapped for attention—"Höre [Listen] Israel!" He told the Jews to stop acting like Jews. "From the first I want to make it known that I am a Jew," he wrote. He showed the Jews how they looked on Tiergartenstrasse or in a theater lobby: "Remarkable sight! In the middle of German life a strange and isolated tribe, glitteringly and ostentatiously decked out, hot-bloodedly mobile of expression. An Asiatic horde on Brandenburg sand . . . not a living part of the nation [Volk], but a foreign body in it." Yet how could the Jews continue to exist if they lost all of their distinctiveness? Rathenau proposed that they strive to become "Jews of German character" ("deutsch geartete Juden") and "not imitation Teutons" ("nicht imitierte Germanen"). The problem was real; his solution was a verbal trick. The article was characteristic: Rathenau spent the rest of his literary life tactlessly discovering and magically solving real problems.

14 Kessler, Rathenau, pp. 89–90n.
15 Rathenau, Briefe: Neue Folge (1928), October 11, 1919, pp. 201–2.
16 Kessler, Rathenau, p. 72.
17 Published under his own name in the article collection, Impressionen (1902), pp. 3–20.
With his Grunewald neighbor Maximilian Harden as patron and Harden’s *Die Zukunft* as platform, Rathenau developed his ideas and his public personality as a literary thinker. He wrote a number of articles for the magazine and then, seeking more solidity for his reputation, published them in two books, *Impressionen* (1902) and *Reflexionen* (1908). Both books were luxury editions, obviously financed by a wealthy amateur, *Reflexionen* in quarto with huge type and chapter headings in red ink. Rathenau expanded widely on these beginnings. The many editions and reprintings, combined with the various collections of his letters and speeches, suggest an even greater bulk to his literary production. In sum, he wrote ten works of greater length than articles, two of them books of more than 300 pages and eight shorter flights of 70 to 140 pages. Many of them sold well and one of them, *Von kommenden Dingen*, became a great best-seller in 1917, going to 100,000 copies. Rathenau wrote or dictated easily, and was said to send off his first drafts without corrections. A busy executive who depended on subordinates to tidy up the details, he expected the same service of his readers. The books were completely lacking in original ideas, self-indulgent, pretentious in style, and disdainful of proof as they proceeded from one arbitrary statement to the next: the sermons of a masterful moralizer who knows better. Each book was a re-working of older materials, so that all of the larger ideas could be contained in one short volume and were indeed covered in the rather long *Von kommenden Dingen*. But the writing served many more purposes than the exposition of ideas.

Rathenau was essentially a moralist, and yet all his ideas came from or through Nietzsche, the enemy of Western morality. Rathenau had begun with a contradiction that could not be resolved. He resolved it with words. His writings were complex sets of logical impossibilities. He attempted to assist the moralism by attaching unassimilable elements from the Hebrew prophets, Jesus Christ, the Romantics, and Karl Marx to the Nietzschean core. Furthermore, while setting intuition above reason, he argued with such

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18 Most of Rathenau’s writings were reprinted in his collected works, the *Gesammelte Schriften*, published in Berlin, which appeared in two editions, in 1918 and in 1925–29. The 1918 edition is in five volumes; the later edition reprints those five volumes and adds one more for the writings that came afterward.

19 According to Fürstenberg’s “Erinnerung,” Kessler, *Rathenau*, p. 393. Fürstenberg’s father, asked about a book of Rathenau’s, was reported to have said: “You know, a book like that is easier to write than read” (quoted in Friedrich Rosen, *Aus einem diplomatischen Wanderleben* [1959], 3–4: 315).
intellectual instruments as scholastic or talmudic logic, and analogies drawn from science, pseudoscience, and technology. All this made him vulnerable to annihilating rebuttal. He defended himself artfully. Admitting that he had no talent for “the persuasive art of dialectical proof,” he argued: “Every clear idea carries the sign of truth or error on its forehead.”

If all of Rathenau’s thought derives from Nietzsche, all of its Nietzschean character is reducible to the superman-slave dichotomy. Rathenau went through life drawing up various lists of positive and negative qualities associated with superman or slave. Courage and intuition were characteristics of the superman, according to Nietzsche and Rathenau; fear and calculation were the propensities of the slave. In a series of aphorisms published in 1907 Rathenau attributed to the superman “a sense for the truly important, capacity for pure admiration, trust, good will, imagination, confidence, simplicity, meditative, and transcendence.” The slave personality was described by “the pleasure in the novel, delight in criticizing, dialectics, skepticism, pleasure in the troubles of others, the drive to outshine others, garrulity, overrefinement, and aestheticism.” This was the sum of Rathenau’s philosophy.

It was clear that Rathenau used the Nietzschean dichotomy to express his feelings about the Jew—himself. The Jew was the slave.

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20 In dedication (to Gerhart Hauptmann) of Kritik der Zeit, in GS, vol. 1.
22 Rathenau tried to build a logical system upon Nietzsche’s original dichotomy, producing a curiosity that might interest amateurs of the process of intellection. The system required that his readers accept the claim made in one sweeping sentence about nature and society. In the article, “Von Schwachheit, Furcht und Zweck” (“Weakness, Fear and Purpose”), originally published in 1904 and re-published in GS, vol. 4, he wrote: “Instinct... assures us and reason demands that a regularity, indeed a polarity be discernible” (GS, 4: 11). In that one sentence Rathenau made several arbitrary statements about instinct and reason. (He was using reason, incidentally, although he consistently rejected its validity.) Thus he moved without explanation from regularity to polarity, as if the one necessarily followed the other. Obviously Rathenau wanted to arrive at his Nietzschean polarity. He then proceeded to find his polarity in nature in such pairings as granite and clay, and thorns and mimosa. Satisfied with these evidences, he reduced all existence to sets of static polarities or dichotomies. These natural polarities had their social analogues in courage and fear, “the polar protoelements [sic] in the temper of human souls” (GS, 4: 12). This was the sum of the logic and data serving as a base for all of Rathenau’s philosophy.
Beneath all the complexities of his explications lay the simplest form of self-contempt.

Rathenau added one element to his Nietzschean derivatives. Characteristically, it contradicted the sense of Nietzsche. The new element was the soul. Rathenau had ended his first book, the brief Kritik der Zeit, with a six-page dithyramb to the soul. He gave it his full attention in his first extended work, Zur Mechanik des Geistes oder Vom Reich der Seele, published the next year, in 1913. Nothing that he wrote explained the subject very well. The soul seemed to be a substitute for the emotion Rathenau failed to experience. In the thinking itself the conception of the soul permitted him to avoid the small-minded demands for clarity and data; it was another stroke of verbal magic. The readers were asked to dissolve their thoughts in a contemplation of the ineffable. A mystic might well ask this of his disciples, but it was an extraordinary command from an intellectualizing businessman like Rathenau. Innocently emphasizing the monumental flaws in his views of himself, his work, and his world, Rathenau called the Mechanik des Geistes his "major work" ("Hauptarbeit") and its ideas the central element of his thought system. It was his emptiest book.

Von kommenden Dingen was Rathenau's major work. It addressed itself to economic and social problems, but retained his moralism. Rathenau built his economics on Marx in approximately the same way he built his moralism on Nietzsche. (He believed that Marxism was out of date and that he had made "the only effective attempt to establish a . . . modern economic system in its place." He constructed no system. In his usual manner he delivered a series of exhortations: the right of inheritance should be limited, "the equalizing of property and income is a commandment of morality and economics," the proletariat should be better educated and

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24 Comprising all of volume 2 of GS. The title might be translated as The Mechanism of the Spirit or The Realm of the Soul. Geist more frequently means intelligence, but it can also mean spirit, and Rathenau seems to have used it like a theologian approaching the third personage in the Trinity.
25 In a letter to Gaston Raphael, a French scholar who wrote a book on Rathenau's ideas, December 14, 1921, Briefe (1926), 2: 339-40.
27 GS, 3: 140.
raised in dignity, and luxury should be sharply restricted. It was revolutionary socialism, but only at first glance. The author's call for sacrifice, furthermore, contrasted oddly with his luxurious way of life. The head of the immensely profitable AEG conceived of an economy organized around nonprofit foundations (Stiftungen). He had not credibly explained how they would function without self-interest, leaving them curiously unreal. Also, he defined them as autonomous, although he knew that such powerful economic bodies had to be under some sort of control. The word "autonomous," promising a kind of corporative anarchism, was one more deception. Indeed, in another section of the book, where he discussed the postwar problems to be expected, Rathenau advocated strict regulation of labor and investment. This was the totality of his economics and socialism. He proceeded to more moralizing. Discussing luxury, he drew up a long condemnation of the Luxusweib, the female buyer of luxury goods, as if she were a major factor of economic and moral evil. The attack revealed much about Rathenau's relation to women. The book reduced itself to a command to economic man and woman: be good.

*Von kommenden Dingen* established the author as a figure of some importance in Germany's intellectual life. While the better minds and the cultural establishment smiled over him or ignored him, Rathenau won a wide audience among people who yearned to think and had half the capacity for it. He offered them a Nietzsche and a Marx made harmless. Unfriendly critics might call him the "prophet in a dinner jacket" or "Christ in evening dress." Nevertheless, he gave useful values, if it was often for the worst reasons. His concern for the victims of society had strains of sincerity in it, doubtless deriving from his own conflicts and suffering. His keen executive's intelligence had located many of the problems of the period and applied the ideas of the best thinkers to them.

Besides making his large formulations, Rathenau also suggested specific action on immediate problems in his speeches, articles, letters, memoranda, and salon talk. In later years he claimed to have warned his nation against making her greatest errors. It was true.

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29 *GS*, 3: 295.
He forgot, however, that he had also urged Germany to make those errors, having managed to be on both sides of almost every question. He had been unhappy about the naval race with England, recognized the dangerous threat in attacking the heart of British security, and pointed out that "little acts of friendliness" were no solution. But then he had his own nonsolution: "With every year that passes the maritime ratio becomes more favorable for us, and this results in a steadying of the balance [of power]." Similarly, while calculating the high costs and doubtful returns of colonies, he argued: "We need land of this earth." He suggested taking over Latin America because "the earth is neither large nor rich enough to permit the luxury of independent demicivilizations at the cost of world productivity." In his depths he was horrified when the war broke out. He cried: "The world has gone mad." But he also enjoyed playing at power, and in a letter of September 7, 1914, to Chancellor Theobald Bethmann-Hollweg, he advocated "the political and economic reduction of France and England" and also "important changes on the map and massive indemnities." Too often, Rathenau permitted himself to be seduced by the warriors. He approved the deportation of Belgian labor to Germany. Freely offering advice to Quartermaster-General Erich von Ludendorff, he supported the establishment, in early 1917, of the semidictatorship of Field Marshall Paul von Hindenburg and Ludendorff. He disagreed with Ludendorff on the issue of unrestricted submarine warfare, however, and broke with him. He then opposed the Ludendorff request for an armistice: the civilian was more warlike than the military man at this moment. The final disagreement inspired a Rathenau article in the Vossische Zeitung of October 7, 1918, which called for a new wave of resistance by means of an emergency draft. Rathenau had not been able to defend his sense of proportion against the disproportions of the war.

The thinking, the writing, and the advising were the means to power. "Rathenau’s drive was the will to power," the most important woman in his life after his mother said of him. "Everything else about him was just a decorative frame." Rathenau inevitably tended toward politics. His connection with political power began in 1907, and with the help of Prince von Bülow. The Chancellor selected him to accompany Colonial Secretary Bernhard Dernburg on inspection trips in Germany’s African colonies in 1907 and 1908. Rathenau published a report of his first trip in *Reflexionen*. Dernburg, who had introduced Rathenau to Bülow as his best friend, was enraged at what he thought was an effort to overshadow him. The report was uncritically and impractically imperialistic, advocating, among other things, a railroad construction program costing 200 million marks in a colony with an annual trade of 24 million marks. Africa was an excursion, professionally as well as theoretically. The war gave Rathenau his first opportunity for important service to the state.

Rathenau’s wartime accomplishment was unqualifiedly important, the first in his life that could be so described. He organized the War Materials Administration (*Kriegsrohstoffabteilung*, or *KRA*) of the Prussian War Ministry. Rathenau had gotten the idea from an assistant of his at the AEG, an engineer with an interest in economic administration named Wichard von Moellendorff. In his position Rathenau was able to make an appointment with the War Minister immediately after the war broke out and impress him with the need to act. The purpose of the KRA was to assure the supply of crucial war materials which the army had completely neglected. Creating hundreds of "war companies" to manage all materials necessary to the war, it was an ad hoc administrative stroke of

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37 Kessler, *Tagebücher*, interview with Lili Deutsch (see below) on November 21, 1927, p. 552. Kessler did not use this comment in his biography.

38 Innocently imperialistic in his vanity, Rathenau forgot who thought of the idea for the KRA and claimed it for himself. Moellendorff, however, could easily prove his authorship. Furthermore, he could show that Rathenau had denigrated it originally. In a letter of August 8 to Rathenau he sketched the basic conception of a raw materials administration. Rathenau replied the same day. He discounted Moellendorff’s idea and instead placed more hope in another idea—namely, mobilization of the resources to be made available in Belgium and France. Two days later Rathenau reported to Moellendorff that he had discussed both ideas with the War Minister and indicated that the Minister had little interest in Moellendorff’s. The Minister, however, very quickly saw its importance, and Rathenau was given his assignment to implement it on August 13. Rathenau not only forgot where the idea originated, but resisted Moellendorff’s documentary evidence when his former assistant published their letters in 1920. (These and
the first order. The country treated Rathenau shabbily. No longer needed in the KRA after he had established its basic character, he was permitted to resign on April 1, 1915. His abilities and imagination surely promised even greater services to the nation, but the leadership contented itself with assigning a calligrapher to write a letter of thanks. There was no place for a Jewish industrialist on a higher level of responsibility. Rathenau's hopes for power were frustrated.

Rathenau was a distinguished ambiguity at the age of 50, in 1917. Life had been growing more difficult and lonelier despite the accomplishments and social activities. His associates held a birthday party for him, and he talked about himself, showing a certain amount of insight into his problems. Mentioning the conflict between his desire to philosophize and “to act upon the world,” he said he suffered “tensions which were very hard to bear for any length of time.” A few years earlier the expressionist Edvard Munch had painted a famous portrait of him: dark, cool, masterful, capable of enormities—demoniac in impeccable evening dress. Well over six feet tall, Rathenau liked to put his arm overpoweringly around the shoulders of other—almost always smaller—men. The demoniac aspect had since been softened by the unhappiness in his dark eyes and the white of his goatee. It was this softer Rathenau who was the subject of a literary portrait by the Austrian novelist Robert Musil. In the long, unfinished Mann ohne Eigenschaften, Rathenau appears as Paul Arnheim, who pays court to
a Viennese lady but fails to require more of her than “extreme soul-embraces.” Bringing the soul into stock quotations as well as into love, he produces frustrations, but also profits. He incorporates the grandiose impotence of Europe.

Rathenau’s sexual character was inevitably as ambiguous as the rest of him. For more than two decades he was almost the official lover of Lili Deutsch, Felix Deutsch’s wife, and still she told his biographer in 1927: “To this day I have no idea what his love life was like.” Kessler noted: “She spoke... very frankly about their relationship, which never got to the ultimate... although he was very sensual....” Lili Deutsch concluded: “He never had any real feelings. He just had a longing for feelings.” Actually, Rathenau responded somewhat more freely to men. An acquaintance of his told me that Rathenau took an active part in a milieu of homosexuals. The theater critic Alfred Kerr, who wrote a book about him, claimed to have seen him make an assignation with a servant girl and theorized that he divided women into two groups, ladies to whom he could talk and lower-class women to whom he could make love. Psychology would not find this irreconcilable with homosexuality. In any case Rathenau’s relationships with men were odd. There were, for example, the friendships with the racist publisher, an obscure figure named Wilhelm Schwaner, and with another small editor-publisher, the latter a Jew. Schwaner, attracted by Rathenau’s ideas, reacted to his personality in the Nietzschean lingua franca of the period. “I hurl this question down into your soul like a plummet,” Schwaner wrote on April 2, 1914, “Are you fond of me? I am fond of you! I am very fond of you!” He wrote in the familiar, and Rathenau replied in the familiar.

42 P. 434. Musil’s hero finds “Arnheim-Rathenau,” as the notes call him in one passage (p. 1619), an unendurable “compound of intelligence, business, luxury, and erudition” (p. 181). The hero adds: “What we all are divided out amongst ourselves—he is that in one person” (p. 195). Musil explained Arnheim-Rathenau’s success: “Surrounded by the magic glitter of his wealth and the rumor of his importance, he dealt with men who surpassed him in their fields of expertise but who found him sympathetic as a layman surprisingly knowledgeable in those fields. Then he intimidated them because he embodied the connection of their world to other worlds—worlds about which they knew absolutely nothing” (p. 199).
43 Kessler, Tagebücher, pp. 552–55.
44 Edwin Redslob, Kunstwart (director of ceremonies and art) of the Weimar Republic, interview, November 18, 1966.
46 Correspondence in Rathenau-Nachlass, BA.
Jewish editor, Constantin Brunner, the relationship began with an exchange of letters and works in January, 1919. A month later Rathenau, who had not yet met Brunner, was writing: “How long has it been since I held... a letter in my hand and read, and thought, and thought again, and read.” He enclosed verses. After a meeting, Rathenau wrote on March 14: “It comforts me to know that you are there. I thought there wasn’t anybody any more.” On April 8 he wrote: “The house is still full of you.” 47 In both cases, however, the relationships very quickly lost their intensity. With Schwaner, Rathenau’s letters had become merely polite and kind three or four months after the April beginning. Brunner was commenting on Rathenau’s failure to write three months after his first emotional letter. The relationship with Lili Deutsch persevered.

Many of Rathenau’s important personal relationships tended to produce explosions of hostility when they were not carefully controlled, and sometimes when they were. Kessler recorded an “undertone of disappointment” in Lili Deutsch’s feelings about Rathenau. His erstwhile assistant Moellendorff wrote: “I can well believe that anyone who thought he was Rathenau’s friend must have been disappointed to the extent of becoming an enemy.” 48 Lili Deutsch’s remarks to Kessler showed that she continued to nurture bitterness against Rathenau even after his death. In life she had taken treacherous action against him, showing a letter of his which was critical of Maximilian Harden—the Zukunft editor—to Harden himself. Rathenau told Harden this caused him to break off with her for a year, 49 but the friendship of the two men was already deteriorating. The envious, irascible Harden did not need a good reason to get angry with Rathenau. By 1920 Harden had become an active enemy, attacking Rathenau viciously in his correspondence with important people. 50 Other friends, like Gerhart Hauptmann, to whom Rathenau had dedicated his Kritik der Zeit, fell away quietly. Still others, recognizing his excellent qualities, learned to tolerate the difficult ones. But Rathenau’s talent for arousing resentment was a constant in his life and extended to people who hardly knew him or did not know him at all. This was suggested by

47 Original letters, Leo Baeck Institute, New York City.
48 In a handwritten memorandum, entitled “Walther Rathenau’s Grösse,” dated July, 1922, Moellendorff-Nachlass, BA.
49 Letter of December 26, 1912, Harden-Nachlass, BA.
50 E.g., Hugo Stinnes, in Harden-Nachlass, BA.
an episode at an upper-class luncheon during the war, as recalled by Alfred Kerr. Siegfried von Kardorff, a leader of the Prussian Free Conservative Party, suddenly announced the desire to make Rathenau responsible for everything that had gone wrong in Germany, "even for things with which he had nothing to do." The others fell in with it and denounced him in a kind of social lynching. It was not an anti-Semitic exercise, at least, not directly or consciously. Kerr was Jewish and probably there were other Jews at the luncheon. People enjoyed hating Rathenau.

Toward the end of the war Rathenau swung wildly from ambitious hope to depression. "I am like someone in the middle of packing," he wrote to Schwaner on September 24, 1918. "My father and brother are waiting for me in that neutral country to which no railroad leads. They cannot understand why I am delaying." He was, however, writing more and more books and articles. *Vom kommenden Dingend* appeared early in 1917 and *Die neue Wirtschaft*, a revision of some of its ideas to fit the immediate situation, at the end of the year. In 1918 he tried to capture the attention of Germany's youth by directing a brief book at it, while Samuel Fischer, his neighbor and publisher, brought out his five-volume collected works. In 1919 Rathenau produced two other derivations of *Von kommenden Dingend*, the short books *Der neue Staat* and *Die neue Gesellschaft*, thus encompassing state and society in the new Germany. This was all literary action, and Rathenau tried to move beyond it. In November, 1918, he founded his own party, the Democratic People's League, but it perished within the month. He sought membership in the (First) Socialization Commission; the Independent Social Democrats blackballed him because of the *Vossische Zeitung* letter calling for an emergency draft. He joined the Democrats; the provincial electoral district to

51 Kerr, *Rathenau*, p. 185.
52 Kerr considered Kardorff a decent fellow—hence his puzzlement over the episode. Hans Fürstenberg, in his postscript in Kessler, *Rathenau*, pp. 409–10, remembered that Kardorff was a good friend of Max Liebermann, a second cousin of Rathenau's and the leading Prussian painter of the period, and that Kardorff had the courage and decency to go to Liebermann's funeral during the Nazi period, in 1935.
53 Rathenau-Nachlass, BA.
54 *An Deutschlands Jugend*, in *GS*, vol. 6.
56 In a letter to Friedrich Ebert on December 16, 1918, he reacted like a hysterical woman scorned: "I beg you not to nominate me on second thought" (*Ein preussischer Europäer*, p. 293).
which he was assigned put him so low on the party listing that he had no chance of being elected to the National Assembly. On February 7, 1919, at the second meeting of the National Assembly, a telegram nominating him for the nation's presidency was read; the delegates reacted with startled laughter. Later in February Kessler visited Rathenau and found him diminished from the figure of a few years ago and profoundly out of joint with the times: "The man of false notes and circumstances gone awry—the Communist in a damask chair, the patriot out of condescension, the avant-garde musicmaker on an old harp." Kessler reflected: "And yet a virtuoso."58

Kessler's second thought had recognized that Rathenau's possibilities were not extinguished. A few months later Rathenau said: "When the Revolution came they were all agreed to get me out of the picture."59 Kessler had been closer to the truth: "they" had not given Rathenau a thought. Having never participated in politics he was not seriously considered as a political figure. Rathenau was also continuing to give reason for mistrust. The left-wing groups thought of his warlike letter and the conservatives disliked his socialistic ideas. Nevertheless, he began to take on political dimension precisely in early 1919. It began with an attack. On March 8 the Economics Minister, the labor leader Rudolf Wissell, gratuitously criticized Rathenau in the National Assembly.60 Wissell was seeking to cover the pillage and inversion of Rathenau's ideas. Wichard von Moellendorff had become Wissell's assistant and achieved intellectual domination over his mediocre chief. He had persuaded the Minister to sponsor a plan for what they called a social economy (Gemeinwirtschaft), a conception deriving from Von kommenden Dingen. Rigid and dogmatic, Moellendorff transformed the loose inconsistencies of his former chief into a monolithic system. Although the idiom was socialist, the essence was corporative, quite in the manner of Mussolini's fascist state.61 Wissell had tried to defend himself against the charge of authoritarianism by accusing Rathenau of it; Rathenau turned the charge back

57 Kessler was told by Rathenau's secretary that anti-Semitic arguments had been used (Kessler, Rathenau, p. 272).
58 Tagebücher, p. 131.
59 Letter to a well-wisher, November 11, 1919, Politische Briefe, p. 267.
60 Kessler, Rathenau, pp. 274–75.
61 Copy in Wissell-Nachlass, BA. Many details of the issue are in this and in the Moellendorff-Nachlass in the BA; also in the larger Wissell-Nachlass in the Historische Kommission zu Berlin.
upon its author and argued that conditions in any case were too chaotic for a revolutionary reorganization of society. His own sense of reality, a characteristic which persons he influenced often did not share, prevented him from being led too far astray by his own ideas at this moment. The Social Democrats agreed with the practical Rathenau and voted down the plan at their party conference in June. Wissell and Moellendorff resigned the next month, having rendered Rathenau's ambitions important service.

Rathenau was being associated with socialism, his ideas having captured wide attention through the debates in the National Assembly. Those ideas, moreover, had found the great opening between doctrinaire socialism and irresponsible capitalism. Many felt that he was correct in general, whatever error in the details. He was continuing to give public advice, now and then using the Vossische Zeitung. In a lead article on January 11, 1920, for example, he attacked the government for failing to solve problems beyond its control; he could be as unfair as his own critics. The outcome of the Kapp Putsch gave him his opportunity.

The militarist-authoritarian conspiracy, operating with a Free Corps unit, put the government to flight and held Berlin for four days, from March 13 to 17, 1920. It failed after the bureaucracy refused to function and the capital's workers went on general strike. In April, 1920, the (Second) Socialization Commission was organized to reward the workers. It was only reasonable that Rathenau, the socialistically minded industrialist, should become a member. He was also named to the (Temporary) National Economic Council, which was meant to be a kind of economic parliament. He had to wait to fill a vacancy, but it came quickly enough for him to attend the council's third meeting on July 22. Both positions attested to Rathenau's new political or semipolitical character, but the strength of rival business leaders like Stinnes in the National Economic Council prevented him from being effective there.\textsuperscript{62} The Socialization Commission, on the other hand, was the ideal platform. It provided precisely that combination of the hopeful, the technical, the trivial, and the unreal, of which Rathenau was the master.

Many persons felt that the government was morally obliged to

\textsuperscript{62} Germany, \textit{Stenographische Berichte über die Verhandlungen des vorläufigen Reichswirtschaftsrats} (1920–23).
introduce socialism or, at least, more socialism. The commission represented a renewal of the socialization efforts initiated with the revolution. By December, 1918, the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils, modeled on the Russian soviets, had failed to take command of the country and lead it into socialism. In January, 1919, government troops and Free Corps formations killed hundreds of radicals in Berlin and crushed the socialist ambitions associated with Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. In April, 1919, the (First) Socialization Commission resigned after failing to get anything done. Then came the Wissell-Moellendorff failure. In 1920, with the second commission, the prognosis was hardly more favorable. Two months after the commission began life, on June 6, new elections were held and the result was a victory for the middle-class parties. The elections brought the Centrist Konstantin Fehrenbach into office and a new coalition with him. The Social Democrats dropped out of the government on the Left, and the People’s Party joined it on the Right. Fehrenbach’s government had no mandate for a socialization program. That made little difference, as it turned out.

The new Socialization Commission, meeting for the first time on April 17 and thus before the conservative electoral expression, had set the modest objectives of socializing the coal industry and drawing upon a program for the municipal ownership of utilities. These objectives were so limited that they were not affected by the election results, and the commission went on sincerely talking, the businessmen in it as sincerely as the Social Democrats and the socializing bureaucrats. At the first meeting Rathenau made sensible proposals for the coal organization and also intervened tactfully to keep the other commission members from bringing up too many irrelevant subjects. On April 28 he was elected a member of the most important of the four committees, the Coal-Potash-Iron Committee. A week later, at the meeting of May 5, he had already produced a complete coal scheme, which was henceforth known as the Rathenau Proposal. The Rathenau Proposal became the subject of the commission’s most important debates. Rathenau had established his leadership in one governmental area.

Rathenau’s plan provided for a mixed public and private corpo-
ration. It had to compete with the plan of a doctrinaire socialist expert, who wanted to expropriate the coal mines without compensation to the owners. On May 10 Rathenau argued: “I am far from being an enemy of complete socialization—absolutely not—but it would be impractical and unfeasible under the present circumstances. . . . Coal production would collapse if you eliminated the mine owners suddenly.” With his generalist’s sense of the wider issues Rathenau took the occasion to mention another problem: “The reparation question is becoming more and more urgent. . . .”

Over the next months he fought the expropriation plan with the help of Rudolf Wissell, who was a labor representative on the commission. The former Economics Minister, no longer under Moellendorff’s influence, was happy to accept Rathenau’s compromise with capitalism. Rathenau achieved the victory of his proposal before the summer adjournment.

The Rathenau Proposal went to the government and the victory vanished. Under the leadership of Hugo Stinnes the mine owners bypassed the Socialization Commission and introduced a coal plan of their own in the National Economic Council. They wanted a coal cartel under governmental aegis—capitalism with all the advantages of socialism. In the Economic Council the Stinnes Proposal easily overcame Rathenau’s plan, the latter receiving less than a third of the votes. At a meeting of the Socialization Commission on November 20 Rathenau admitted defeat.

Once more a socialization effort had failed, but Rathenau has made the acquaintance of Joseph Wirth.

Rathenau impressed Wirth immensely. “The cabinet ministers did a lot of babbling without getting through to any real understanding of the problems,” Wirth told Kessler in 1928. “So [Kessler’s note continued] he got into the habit of calling Rathenau and discussing questions of finances and reparations. . . .” The leverage point was reparations.

“There soon,” Kessler went on, “developed a half-political, half-intellectual friendship between them.” It was a special friendship, surely political, but more personal than Wirth was willing to admit,

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64 Ibid., no. 104. The expert was Professor Emil Lederer of the University of Heidelberg.
65 July 31, 1920, ibid., no. 127.
66 Ibid., no. 146.
67 Tagebücher, interview, February 27, 1928, p. 559.
and hardly intellectual. Politically, Rathenau could be very useful to Wirth, as shown by his reparation plan at the time of the London Conference. The plan had been impossible, but its egregious impossibility was an important part of its value. It had an aura of moralizing that was the best defense against the moralizing destructiveness of Allied reparation policy. Rathenau promised to be an Ariel to Wirth's Caliban. Wirth, who was barely forty and also a bachelor, had proved his capability in dealing with the more conventional problems of domestic politics. After teaching mathematics in a secondary school, he entered politics in Baden and became a dedicated professional politician. A Reichstag member by 1914, he got through the war as a medical orderly and became Baden's Finance Minister following the 1918 revolution. Establishing himself on the left-wing of the Center, he became a favorite speaker of the Catholic workers. Confident of his own talents, which were entirely different, Wirth could enjoy being dazzled by Rathenau without suffering from his condescension. Rathenau, for his part, could act somewhat like an older brother, since he was a dozen years Wirth's senior, and somewhat like a son, since he was the political subordinate. Rathenau's relationship with his own brother had been excellent, while he had worked well with his father after Erich had died. Here, the specific character of the Rathenau family relationships were helpful. Personally as well as politically the Rathenau-Wirth association went deep.

The connection between the two men was strong enough by July, 1920, for Wirth to insist on adding Rathenau to the delegation to the Spa Conference. Wirth had to overcome the "rabid" resistance of the Foreign Ministry, he told Kessler in 1928.68 It was at the Spa Conference that Rathenau first dealt actively with reparations.

Wirth constructed a legend about Rathenau at Spa. Referring to a speech of Rathenau's, he told Kessler: "At that moment the fulfillment policy was born."69 Neither the records nor Rathenau quite make that claim.

The Spa Conference was another stage in the slow and tentative development of the fulfillment policy. Kessler, taking his facts from Wirth, would have the policy given its complete form during a confrontation between Rathenau and Hugo Stinnes. There had in-

68 Ibid., p. 559.
69 Kessler, Rathenau, p. 297.
deed been a debate between the two men at a meeting of the German delegation on July 14.\textsuperscript{70} The Wirth-Kessler account of it establishes a hero-villain pattern in perfect balance: the conciliatory, democratic internationalist Rathenau and the recalcitrant, nationalistic, and domineering Stinnes. Yet, as Kessler admitted, Stinnes was a convinced republican, enjoyed excellent relations with labor because of his genuinely enlightened policies, and was no more nationalistic than Rathenau. It was true that Stinnes and Rathenau took the opposite views on whether or not Germany should accept the Allied ultimatum, which demanded the delivery of two million tons of coal a month. It was also true that Stinnes had fired a provocative speech at the heads of the Allies four days earlier in which he told them they were making ridiculous demands.\textsuperscript{71} Kessler did not mention the fact that Rathenau was only an expert adviser to the actual negotiators and that two other experts had preceded him in debating with Stinnes. With uncharacteristic modesty Rathenau himself said he had a small position at Spa, adding inaccurately that he had “no influence on the decisions.”\textsuperscript{72} According to the minutes of the meeting, Rathenau’s former friend Bernhard Dernburg as well as Chancellor Fehrenbach’s consultant on reparations, Professor M. J. Bonn, had also urged yielding to the ultimatum. Rathenau, in fact, had insisted on making a condition about Upper Silesia which the Allies would have found unacceptable. Bonn gave his version of the debate in his book and said he himself had been the first to contradict Stinnes.\textsuperscript{73} All this does not deny that Rathenau’s opinion was a significant factor, as Kessler would have it, in convincing the German delegation, including General von Seeckt, of the need to make an effort toward fulfillment. Nevertheless Germany had to undergo many experiences before she formulated a true fulfillment policy. Rathenau was not being inconsistent—not betraying his position at Spa—when he opposed the policy almost a year later, in May, 1921, during those days when Wirth was trying to form his government of fulfillment. Furthermore, while Rathenau always qualified his definition of fulfillment, Stinnes, for his part, represented a policy that was much more constructive than

\textsuperscript{70} Minutes, Reichskanzlei: Spa, Allgemeines, BA, R431/403.
\textsuperscript{71} Copy of speech, Büro des Reichsministers: Spa, Deutsche Sitzungsprotokolle, Politisches Archiv, Auswärtiges Amt, Bonn (hereafter cited as PA, AA).
\textsuperscript{72} Letter to Schwaner, July 19, 1920, Briefe, 2: 246.
\textsuperscript{73} M. J. Bonn, So Macht Man Geschichte (1953), p. 247.
mere recalcitrance. Stinnes was so important that Alexandre Millerand had a secret meeting with him in Brussels before the Spa Conference began, treating him as if he were a foreign power. The French Premier, who was concerned about the coal requirements of the steel plants in Lorraine, respected his command over coal resources and was not unwilling to consider Stinnes a good European. At the Spa Conference itself the Allies reacted to Stinnes's speech with a show of indignation, but the industrialist, supported by the union leader Otto Hue, was important in winning their respect and in forcing them to lend Germany the $90 million to import food for the miners. Two days after the Stinnes uproar Viscount Edgar d'Abernon, the British Ambassador to Germany, recorded in his diary: "A turning point in European history was reached this afternoon, when M. Millerand described Germany as a 'necessary and useful member of the European community.'"

He would hardly have done so, had he taken Stinnes's remarks so tragically. At a German cabinet meeting on July 19, Foreign Minister Simons "paid warm tribute to the positive effect of the intervention of Stinnes and Hue." Men like Stinnes were as necessary as the Rathenaus in dealing with the Allies, a fact which Rathenau always recognized. Rathenau spent the last night of his life arguing with Stinnes over fulfillment policy. They were differing, but only to a precisely limited extent; they were partners in the German concern. To the end Rathenau, like Stinnes, believed the fulfillment policy to be tentative.

The ambiguities of Spa were in accord with Rathenau's style. The conference meant an important advance in his career. His giving of advice, so central an element in his functioning, began to extend beyond Wirth to the government itself. A Rathenau proposal had naturally been part of the Spa delegation's armament. It was eloquent and impractical. After the summer of 1920 Rathenau continued to be active in the Socialization Commission, but he was addressing himself more and more to greater questions.

74 Handwritten letter by Stinnes to Foreign Minister Simons, July 4, 1920, in Büro des Reichsministers: Spa, Kohlenfrage, PA, AA.
76 Diary entry of Interior Minister Erich Koch-Weser, Koch-Weser-Nachlass, BA.
77 Copy in Büro des Reichsministers: Spa, Allgemeines, PA, AA.
London Conference showed how far he had progressed by March of 1921. It had been extraordinary for Chancellor and cabinet to tell the Foreign Minister to break up his own negotiating pattern in favor of a proposal drafted by a private person. At that moment Simons had been able to ignore the advice from Berlin. A moment later he was out of the government and Rathenau was making policy.

Wirth's ability to identify himself with an approach to a fulfillment policy had made him a logical candidate for the chancellorship. Owing this largely to Rathenau, Wirth wanted him for the reconstruction post very badly. Rathenau's own reluctance prevented Wirth from making the nomination immediately. The political situation required the creation of a new government as soon as possible, and Wirth, who was charged with the chancellorship at noon on May 10, presented his cabinet to the Reichstag by eleven that evening. At the time he carefully avoided mentioning the Reconstruction Ministry, although it was one of the most important posts because of the fulfillment crisis that had put him in power. It was clearly on his mind. The day after he formed his government Wirth took the time to lunch with Rathenau. He offered Rathenau the Reconstruction Ministry. Rathenau refused. His vanity and his tendency to errors of instinct misled him. He wanted the Foreign Ministry. It was utterly impossible at that point in German history. Aside from the fact that Rathenau was a Jew and a Jew with numerous enemies, he was a man of no political experience and undefined political character. His qualifications for Reconstruction Minister, on the other hand, were splendid. One could forget his opposition to the London Ultimatum, or rather, such was the pathology of domestic politics and international relations that one could use the opposition to advantage. To the German nation one could argue that it had proved his patriotism; to the Allies his change of mind could demonstrate his deeper wisdom and sense of responsibility. Now, all the factors that had previously handicapped Rathenau's political career came to his aid. The industrialist clearly had the technical competence to deal with reconstruction and reparations generally; the economic and social philosopher

78 A mutual acquaintance, a Geheimrat Kreuter, was with them and reported on the luncheon to Ernst Laubach, author of Die Politik der Kabinette Wirth 1921–1922, Historische Studien (1968), 402: 36n.
could claim a broader sweep to his competence; the idealist could represent a trustworthy, democratic, and peaceful Germany to the world, and a Jew could minimize Germany’s German character. On May 11, 1921, however, Wirth had to accept Rathenau’s refusal. Wirth then discussed the reconstruction post with the director of a large manufacturing company who had won a doubtful and, in any case, irrelevant reputation as an expert in reconstruction, and a Social Democratic member of the Reichstag who was a leader of the Construction Workers Union and thus had a similarly unnecessary relation to a Reconstruction Ministry that would reconstruct nothing. Wirth also spoke vaguely with Otto Wiedfeldt, a Krupp director with an interest in government, about the Reconstruction Ministry, but he mentioned the Finance and Foreign Ministries to him as well. Everything indicates that Wirth did not really want any one of these three for the Reconstruction Ministry. Meanwhile, on May 23, after a number of candidates had refused or shown themselves to be unacceptable, the Chancellor named Friedrich Rosen, the 66-year-old Minister to the Netherlands, to the Foreign Ministry. Rosen was a professional diplomat and a scholar of Persian literature, but he had neither imagination nor a real understanding of foreign relations. He promised to be harmless, and Wirth, who had set the main direction in foreign policy by accepting the principle of fulfillment, expected to continue making the major decisions. If someone else were also to become important in that area it would not be Rosen, but Rathenau as Reconstruction Minister. Now with a Foreign Minister snapped into position, Wirth devoted his best energy to capturing him. He used Rosen himself in the wooing. When Rosen told Wirth that Rathenau was “not to be taken seriously,” Wirth tried to get him to withdraw the remark by asking if he would say it to Rathenau’s face. Rosen said he would, and he did. Wirth then got President Ebert to talk to Rosen. Ebert asked Rosen to give up his objections and to try himself to persuade Rathenau to take the position. Rosen thereupon lunched with Rathenau, who “gave no evidence of ill-feeling against me.” Rosen’s reminiscences continue: “[He] brought up an

79 Laubach, Die Politik der Kabinette Wirth, pp. 36–37. One rumor, however, had been sufficiently forceful to persuade Le Temps of May 12 to list the Social Democrat, Hermann Silberschmidt, as Wirth’s Reconstruction Minister.
overwhelming mass of arguments against joining the cabinet—in the midst of which there was clearly evident his desire nevertheless to get into the cabinet, if at all possible.” Rathenau also asked the opinion of his fellow Democrat Eugen Schiffer, who had joined the cabinet as Minister of Justice. Schiffer, who was not enthusiastic, suggested that Rathenau ask another opinion, and Rathenau talked to Defense Minister Gessler in Schiffer’s presence. Gessler was negative. Rathenau responded: “Now that I have learned your reasons, my dear Minister Gessler, my self-respect obliges me despite my own misgivings to accept the post in order to prove those reasons wrong.” Schiffer felt certain that Rathenau was going to accept and that he only wanted encouragement. On May 29, a Sunday, Wirth nominated Rathenau. It was two days after Rathenau had written to his mother that he was going to refuse. On June 1 he wrote her again: “The decision was really very, very difficult.” Viscount d’Abernon, who saw Wirth after Rathenau had finally accepted, noted the Chancellor’s words: “Do not let us discuss current affairs today. There is a great, most important event: Rathenau has joined the Ministry.”

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81 Rosen, *Aus einem diplomatischen Wanderleben*, 3–4: 319; Rosen’s account of Rathenau’s nomination may be found on pp. 314–19.
82 Schiffer-Nachlass, memoirs in manuscript, p. 23, Hauptarchiv (Berlin-Dahlem).
84 Ibid., p. 392.
85 Versailles to Rapallo, p. 42.