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## **Oswald Spengler: ‘The conservative revolutionary’ during the era of crisis in classical modernism**

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*Abstract.* In the article, political and philosophical-historical views of Oswald Spengler as an ideologist of the German ‘conservative revolution’ in the Weimar Republic are considered. It is claimed that the crisis of world outlook and the ideological bases of the German conservatism after 1918 led to emergence of ‘reactionary modernism’, the feature of which was the use of the modernist manner for the statement of irreconcilable anti-modernism. The analysis of Spengler’s main works shows the theoretic-methodological and heuristic potential of the concept ‘reactionary modernism’ in relation to the ideology of ‘conservative revolution’ and ideological phenomena close to it.

*Key words:* Oswald Spengler, ‘conservative revolution’, modernism, the Weimar republic

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### **Introduction**

The German historian Detlev Peukert provided the following title to his famous work on the history of Weimar Germany – ‘The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity’<sup>1</sup>. In this title, Peukert quite accurately expressed the essence of spiritual, political, socio-economic and socio-cultural processes, which took place in Europe during the interwar period. A liberal image of endless and incremental historical progress was “buried in the trenches” by the First World War. The European civilization faced a tough identity crisis. The project of modernity and the program of modernity, which at one time allowed Europe to make a giant leap in its development, began to be questioned and criticized. Modernity became a problem in itself and required rethinking its basic foundations. There comes the situation of crisis in classical modernity, which was noted by D. Peukert.

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<sup>1</sup> Peukert D. *Die Weimarer Republik. Krisenjahre der klassischen Moderne*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1987. 313 s.

The ‘current spiritual situation’ – as it was denoted by the great contemporary of that era, Karl Jaspers – led to exceptional boost of spiritual and intellectual quest in the European society in the 1920s and 1930s, which had fostered a diverse array of views, concepts, approaches, etc. to reality, often seemingly incompatible with each other for their worldview, political and other basics. In an intellectual field, the crisis of classical modernity was especially experienced by those countries, which due to historical specifics were compelled to pass through all stages of modernity at an accelerated pace.

In their range, Germany is perhaps the most illustrative example. The processes of the growing ‘modernization’ of German society were quite intense and covered all the key stages of its turbulent history of the late 19<sup>th</sup> – first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries: the Kaiser Reich, the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich. The unique feature of the ‘special German path’ (Sonderweg) was the fact that under the conditions of the so-called ‘catch-up modernization’ in the spiritual, socio-political and socio-economical terms, the German state and the society found themselves in different, but simultaneously existing sociocultural layers. Taking into consideration the peculiarity of Germany's political culture, with its clear predominance of ideological conservative attitudes and paradigms, the situation with the crisis of modernity caused particularly acute contradictions in various facets that provoked an unprecedented boost of spiritual and intellectual quest in the German society.

German conservatism found itself in an ambivalent position. On the one hand, the conservatives tried to ‘freeze’ the process of modernization or at least to channel it into the course which was right for them; and that was what the ruling elite of the German Empire did. On the other hand, the conservatives understood that it was not possible to preserve the traditions in their old condition. Per S. Breuer, despite the difficulties and contradictions of modernization, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Germans were generally a bourgeois nation, and the principles of bourgeois political consciousness were deeply rooted among the ruling elite, including in its conservative circles<sup>2</sup>.

The tension between modernism and anti-modernism in the ‘consciousness’ of German conservatives reached its peak in the years of the Weimar Republic, which in specifically radical conservative groups has led to the formation of a peculiar phenomenon of the ‘reactionary modernism’ (the term is introduced into contemporary humanitarian thought by the American historian and political scientist J. Herf<sup>3</sup>), which distinctive feature was the use of the “modernist manner for the assertion of irrecon-

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<sup>2</sup> Breuer S. *Anatomie der Konservativen Revolution*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1993, s. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Herf J. *Reactionary Modernism. Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich*. Cambridge: University Press, 2003. 251 p.

cilable anti-modernism”<sup>4</sup>. The phenomenon of the ‘conservative revolution’ ideology was at the peak of the similar mentality among the traditionalist right-wingers in Weimar Germany.

Under the conditions of collapse of the traditional German conservative ideology, the representatives of the younger generation of German conservatives opposed the return to the traditional form of conservative ideology and politics, which led to the emergence of the ideology of ‘conservative revolution’, the prerequisites of which had been formed even before the war. The paradox of the ‘revolutionary conservatism’ consisted in the desire of its leaders to unite seemingly incompatible things. Per Geoff Eley, “what the conservative revolution wanted to ‘save’ had been already ‘lost’ (if it existed at all, which could be doubted), and therefore should have been re-created”<sup>5</sup>.

On the one hand, the ideology of the German ‘conservative revolution’ absorbed the ideological clichés of German conservatism: nationalism, illiberalism, opposition of the German national spirit and the German culture to the values of Western civilization, search for a special path of Germany's historical development in the course of ‘German (Prussian) socialism’, the idea of a corporate state, as well as an uncompromising struggle against the Weimar Republic and radically strengthened them. On the other hand, it was an attempt to create a new radical German conservatism and nationalism.

The ideologists of the ‘conservative revolution’ moved beyond the class conservatism of the Kaiser Reich and proclaimed a return to the true values of the German history and German society: the cult of the leader, the corporate state, authoritarianism, the state's responsibility before a citizen and vice versa, the unity of the nation and so on. The problem of ‘reactionary (conservative, right-wing) modernism’ in the ‘conservative revolution’ was repeatedly considered in the humanitarian thought<sup>6</sup>.

### **Main text**

Oswald Spengler (1880 – 1936) takes a special place among the ideologists of the ‘conservative revolution’. His scientific and journalistic heritage reflects all the stages of the intellectual evolution of German conservatism, experienced by the Kaiser

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<sup>4</sup> Zhenin I. *Mezhdru ideei i ideologii: politizatsiya akademicheskogo soobshchestva Germanii v pervoi polovine XX veka* [Between the idea and ideology: politization of academic community in Germany in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century]. Logos, 2013, no. 1 (91), p. 142.

<sup>5</sup> Eley G. *Teorii faschisma: problemy interpretatsii* [Where are we at present with the theories of fascism?]. Bereginya 777 Sova, 2014, no. 4 (23), p. 31.

<sup>6</sup> Terekhov O.E. ‘Konservativnaya Revolyutsiya’ kak fenomen pravogo moderna v Veimarskoi respublike v germanskoi istoriografii [‘Conservative revolution’ as a phenomenon of right wing modernism in Weimar Republic in German historiography]. *Vestnik kemerovskogo universiteta* [Bulletin of Kemerovo University], 2013, no. 2 (54), vol. 3, pp. 146–150.

Reich, the Weimar Republic, and the Third Reich within a short period. His works reflect the tectonic shifts in the ideology of German conservatism at the turn of the epochs of the German history.

The author of one of the most famous and controversial cultural and historical concepts in the history of the 20th-century humanitarian thought reflected them in 'The Decline of the West'; Spengler as a conservative advocated the preservation of traditions, but his conservatism was of a different kind than the traditional German conservatism of the Kaiser era. He believed that the old traditions in his era had been already drastically lost. Tradition made way to individualism of classes, layers, and individuals.

Like the 19th-century conservatives, Spengler viewed the society as organic whole, but the essential difference between his ideas about the society and the traditional conservatism was due to the lack of reliance on religion. Spengler was a follower of Nietzsche, who proclaimed that "God is dead". Spengler denied the influence of the church on the state policy formation. In his opinion, the modern state is based on the principle of the 'will to power', and therefore it did not need any divine sanction.

In addition to 'The Decline of the West', among the significant political and journalistic writings of Spengler, which were written by him in the Weimar period and played a significant role in the formation and development of the ideology of 'conservative revolution', the following works can be named: 'Prussianism and Socialism' (1919), 'New building of the German Empire' (1924), and 'The Hour of Decision' (1933).

J. Herf notes that Spengler's political ideas were on the border between Prussian conservatives, who were relying on industry, Junkers, the army and bureaucracy and postwar conservative revolutionaries<sup>7</sup>. A. Mikhailovsky believes that "Spengler's views are characterized by the dissonance between the orientation toward traditional values and the understanding of impossibility of their real implementation. He introduced a new position in the criticism of the era, which cannot be reduced to either purely revolutionary or purely reactionary, or purely pragmatist mentality of preserving the liberal status quo"<sup>8</sup>.

In this regard, let us cite an extensive excerpt from the article by the contemporary German researcher C. Möckel, where the author attempts to formulate the essence of Spengler's philosophic-historical and political views: "In his criticism of culture and man, which in addition to the philosophy of life is also based on social Dar-

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<sup>7</sup> Herf J. *Reactionary Modernism. Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich*. Cambridge: University Press, 2003, p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> Mikhailovskiy A.V. *Filosofiya tehniki Hansa Frayera* [Philosophy of Hans Freyer's technique]. *Voprosy filosofii* [Questions of philosophy], 2011, no. 3, p. 64.

winian and illiberal positions, Spengler deeply penetrates into the essence of modern industrial society and mass production. Despite all his polemic with historical romanticism, Spengler nevertheless, in the depths of his soul is in sympathy with pre-industrial, peasant-soil civilization. He became the voice of conservative circles among the ruling elite, hostile to the Weimar Republic, although Spengler's cooperation with the national socialism, of course, did not proceed due to his elitist convictions"<sup>9</sup>.

After 1918, Spengler switched to the position of 'conservative revolution', which ultimately led him to the number of its leading ideologists. Already in the first volume of 'The Decline of the West' (1918) written during the First World War, from the position of a patriotic German conservative, he builds a grand philosophical and historical concept of human development.

At the heart of this concept, there was one of the central ideas of German humanitarian thought – the idea of the struggle between civilization and culture. Spengler followed the tradition of conservative criticism of civilization and asserted the fact that the transition to civilization in the political sense was the transition from class order to the modern mass society, parliamentary and party democracy. Parliamentary democracy has become a kind of collapse of class order<sup>10</sup>. The establishment of the parliamentary Weimar Republic meant for Spengler the collapse of specific Prussian state-political tradition. The world war showed which civilizational forces would dominate the world empire: the Anglo-Saxon capitalism or the Prussian-style organized socialism.

Spengler, as it seemed to him, found the ideological and theoretical basis for the renewal of German conservatism under the conditions of the collapse of European and German culture in the synthesis of Prussianism – the traditional ideological and political doctrine of German conservatism and socialism. Spengler was that conservative thinker, who not only used the Prussian-German values but transformed them by proceeding from the contemporary political situation and in the social and political realities of the Weimar Republic that allowed transforming the German conservatism from a protective to an offensive and dynamic political course. After 1918, Spengler was among those 'young' German conservatives who gave a new ideological value of legitimation to German conservatism.

The problem of defining and interpreting socialism was one of the most important in Spengler's works. In the first volume of 'The Decline of the West', he tried to substantiate his understanding of this spiritual and political phenomenon of the West-

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<sup>9</sup> Möckel C. Diagnostika krizisa: Gusserl' protiv Shpenglera [The diagnostics of crisis: Husserl vs. Spengler]. *Logos*, 2007, no. 6, pp. 159–160.

<sup>10</sup> Siefertle R.P. *Die Konservative Revolution: fünf biographische Skizzen* (Paul Lensch, Oswald Spengler, Ernst Jünger, Hans Freyer). Frankfurt am Main: Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verlag, 1995, s. 114–116.

ern history of the 19<sup>th</sup>–20th centuries. “Socialism is an irreligious Faustian feeling of life,” Spengler wrote<sup>11</sup>. Socialism in Spengler’s understanding was a kind of an ethical code of the Faustian Man in the civilization era, who had not lost his vital activity yet. He rejected the economic interpretation of socialism and filled the concept of socialism with ethical content. Spengler concludes that the principles of ethical socialism were close to the Prussian spirit, the main features of which were as follows: the right to work, duty and the will to power. Thus, even the first volume of ‘The Decline of the West’ contained the main components of Spengler’s understanding of socialism.

During the existence of the Weimar Republic, Spengler’s political philosophy and his concept of ‘Prussian socialism’ acquired their completed shape. Spengler was one of the first representatives of Germany’s conservative political camp who responded to the military defeat of Germany, the November Revolution and the establishment of the bourgeois-democratic Weimar Republic. His political essay ‘Prussianism and Socialism’ (1919) declared what the main ideas and motives of the emerging ‘conservative-revolutionary’ movement were, and Spengler found himself proud of what he had written<sup>12</sup>.

In ‘Prussianism and Socialism’, Spengler acted “as the guardian of tradition and as the prophet of the German nation of the future at the same time”<sup>13</sup>. The socialistically revamped Prussian idea was understood not as the collapsed one, but as unfinished calling of the nation; and it acted as an ideological counterbalance to the new German ‘Weimar state’. The ‘Prussianism and Socialism’ like all the young conservative works of the time, pursued the dual purpose: a breakthrough to modernity and the destruction of democracy<sup>14</sup>. H. Lübke, while comparing two fundamental works of the German ‘conservative-revolutionary’ thought – ‘Prussianism and Socialism’ and the ‘Worker’ by E. Jünger emphasized the sincere intention of their authors to formulate a new image of socialism. In the books, the project of “post-Marxist socialism as a German political pattern of the future” is outlined<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Spengler O. Zakat Evropy [The decline of Europe]. *Ocherki morfologii mirovoi istorii. I. Geshtal't i deistvitel'nost'* [Outlines of World History Morphology. Vol. 1: Gestalt and Reality]. Moscow: Mysl, 1993, p. 546.

<sup>12</sup> Spengler O. *Politische Schriften*. München: Beck, 1932, s. VII.

<sup>13</sup> Patrushev A.I. Miry i mify Osval'da Shpenglera (1880–1936) [Worlds and myths of Oswald Spengler (1880–1936)]. *Novaya i Noveishaya Istoriya* [New and Contemporary History], 1996, no. 3, p. 136.

<sup>14</sup> Felken D. Oswald Spengler: *Konservativer Denker zwischen Kaiserreich und Diktatur*. München: Beck, 1988, s. 104.

<sup>15</sup> Lübke H. *Oswald Spenglers ‘Preußentum und Sozialismus’ und Ernst Jüngers ‘Arbeiter’*. *Der Fall Spengler; Hrsg. von A. Demandt, J. Farrenkopf*. Köln Weimer, Wien: Böhlau, 1994, s. 137.

Spengler begins 'Prussianism and Socialism' with the assertion that it was necessary "to free the German socialism from Marx, so there is no other"<sup>16</sup>. Speaking of socialism as the initial stage of the civilization of the Faustian cultural-historical type, Spengler proceeded from the conceptual and theoretical constructions of the history philosophy in the 'The Decline of the West'<sup>17</sup>. The ideological and semantic message of 'Prussianism and Socialism' is Spengler's interpretation of the historical opposition of Prussia and England.

The English spirit, the historical and political experience were the embodiment of liberalism, whereas the Prussian was that of discipline, solidarity and a sense of duty. "Every man for himself is English-style; everyone for all – this would be the Prussian-style"<sup>18</sup>. In this connection, Spengler's evaluation of the possibility of democracy in England and Germany was indicative: "Democracy in England means the opportunity for everyone to become rich, and in Prussia it is an opportunity for everyone to reach the highest stage of the social ladder"<sup>19</sup>. While contrasting the Prussian (German) and the English spirit, Spengler introduces his famous imagery symbols of the Teuton (knight who serves the order) and the Viking (robber-getter).

Not only life values, but also the economic set-up of the Germans and the Englishmen were opposing each other. The type of a free trader originated from Vikings, and the type of an official-administrator originated from the knights. If a German would honor the economic authority of the state, Englishmen in their economic activity would hope only for their own strength, which determined the specifics of German and English capitalism. The economic set-up that was called capitalism achieved the highest degree of development in England, per Spengler. It was pointless to copy the economic and political forms of English capitalism in Germany. On the pages of 'Prussianism and Socialism', Spengler repeatedly suggested that German liberalism was a caricature of the English one.

Spengler's strong criticism of the traditions of English capitalist ethos was not accidental. He, like most 'conservative revolutionaries', was illiberal and anti-capitalist. The illiberal political views of the leading ideologists of the 'conservative revolution' led them to the idea of a deep crisis of capitalism and the bourgeois society. Spengler believed that in the system of 'Prussian socialism', the financial capitalism and Marxism were both to be overcome.

Spengler's interpretation of the concept of 'Prussian socialism' shows him as a supporter and an ideologist of the German state bureaucracy. Speaking for the liberation of politics from the economy, struggling with all manifestations of liberalism and

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<sup>16</sup> Spengler O. *Prussachestvo i sotsializm* [Prussianism and Socialism]. Moscow, 2002, p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 39.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 56.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 71.

democracy, Spengler remained committed to the fundamental theory of German conservatism – the theory of the role of ‘pure politics’ in history driven by the individual will of a great personality. But in this theory, he introduced new nuances about the independence of the state not only from the church, but also from the economy.

The influence of the ‘Prussianism and Socialism’ on the formation of a conservative and nationalist ideology in Weimar Germany was significant. Spengler managed to rethink the specifics of German political culture and history. The book outlined the possible prospects for the development of Germany from the point of view of anti-democratic and conservative-nationalist political forces. Spengler rejected the results of the bourgeois-democratic November revolution and called for the accomplishment of a ‘national revolution’ to establish ‘Prussian socialism’, which he understood as a kind of ‘people's community’ aimed at serving the state and the nation.

If the journalistic essay ‘Prussianism and Socialism’ was written by Spengler as a direct response to the current political events, then in the second volume of ‘The Decline of the West’ he turned to the philosophical and historical substantiation of his conservative political views<sup>20</sup>. The main place in the second volume was occupied by political topics. Spengler, while analyzing political history, again returned to the opposition of civilization and culture through the evaluation of the role of social classes in history, which, in his opinion were the reflection of metaphysical moment in history.

The creators and bearers of culture in history, per Spengler, were the nobility and the clergy. It was these two classes where the meaning of the historical process was concentrated. The creative power of the nobility grew out of blood ties with the land. Therefore, the fate itself together with the history assigned the leadership of the state to the nobility. Spengler also positively evaluated the peasantry, which as a class were closely connected with the land and therefore were also culture-bearers.

Spengler referred to the evaluation of the place and role of the state in history. “The world history is the history of states”, he stated<sup>21</sup>. The peculiarity of the conservative understanding of the state, per Spengler, consisted in its morphological approach, in the urge to consider the state in historical dynamics. The state for Spengler is a natural form of historical existence of the peoples, such as a family for a genus. The peoples and the family act as ‘units’ of history for Spengler, and the genus is the smallest one, whereas the peoples are the largest unit in the flow of history.

The peculiarities of the state were determined by the peculiarities of the people and culture; in accordance with it, the state was understood by them as an organic in-

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<sup>20</sup> Spengler O. *Zakat Evropy. Ocherki morfologii mirovoi istorii. 2. Vsemirno-istoricheskie perspektivy* [The decline of Europe. Outlines of morphology of world history. Vol. 2. Perspectives of world history]. Moscow, 1998. 606 p.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 385.



dividual, in which the single will was subordinated to the common will. The problem of state stability is the question of its internal authority, which depended not on the constitution but on the work of the government and the authority of the leader<sup>22</sup>. The state-forming class, per Spengler, was the nobility which held the state 'in shape'. Thus, per Spengler, only the class state could be the true product of culture and, accordingly, the real state.

With the oncoming of civilization and the bourgeoisie coming to political power, the authority of the state began to decline. Instead of the traditional notion of the state, there came interests, material values and the power of money. There came the era of the hated by Spengler democracy with its parliamentarism and the dominance of party interests, corruption and manipulation of public consciousness. Democracy was a sure sign and the beginning of decline and destruction of culture. For Spengler, the state thought was closely connected with the personality of the leader. He understood the democratic forms of government organization as a manifestation of political degradation.

Parliamentarism became a direct product of democracy. Spengler considered the parliamentarism "a continuation of the bourgeois revolution by other means"<sup>23</sup>. Parliamentarism has no depth and no past. The parliamentary form of government creates an illusion of popular representation, but as a matter of fact, the center of gravity of big politics is shifting towards corporative interests of the financial oligarchy.

With the collapse of parliamentarism, the state during the civilization era enters its own closing stage – the stage of Caesarism; domination of personality, which is charismatically strong but free from cultural and historical determination. "I call Caesarism a method of management, which despite all the state-legal formulations ... is formless in its internal essence", Spengler characterized the last stage of existence of the state in history<sup>24</sup>. Caesar simultaneously acted as a gravedigger of democracy, parliamentarism and liberalism and the creator of the world empire.

In the second volume of 'The Decline of the West', Spengler also interpreted the problems of the economy. Proceeding from the principle of morphological understanding of life and history, Spengler wrote: "Economic thinking and activity is one side of life that receives incorrect coverage, it is only necessary to consider it as an independent kind of life"<sup>25</sup>. Thus, he expressed doubt in the justification of the existence of political economy as a science, especially in its English version. In his approach to explaining the economic life, Spengler follows the traditions of the con-

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<sup>22</sup> Eckermann K E. *Oswald Spengler und moderne Kulturkritik*. Bonn, 1980, s. 40–41.

<sup>23</sup> Spengler O. *Zakat Evropy. T. 2* [The decline of Europe. Vol. 2], p. 441.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 459.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, p. 496.

servative German school of national economy, which deduced the specifics of economic life from the national historical traditions of peoples. He deepens this approach, and in his virtuosic morphological elegance he brings it to its logical conclusion, formulating it in a precise thesis “the whole of economic life is an expression of spiritual life”<sup>26</sup>, as the attitude of ‘conservative revolutionaries’ to the problems of the economy. Spengler made a claim that his views on the economy are on the other side of the capitalism and socialism. Politics and economics are two sides of the cosmic stream of history.

The second volume of ‘The Decline of the West’, ‘Prussianism and Socialism’ and several other journalistic works by Spengler (the most significant of them is the essay of 1924 ‘The New Building of the German Empire’) were among the classic texts of the ‘new’ German conservatism in the Weimar Republic, where his main mythologemes were reflected, and Spengler himself became the most influential figure in the circles of German conservatives of the Weimar Republic. Spengler’s ideological engagement contributed to his entry into the elite circle of politicians and industrialists who dreamed of eliminating Weimar democracy, such as the following Germany's leading industrialists, Hugo Stinnes, media mogul Alfred Hugenberg, commander-in-chief of the Reichswehr, general Hans von Seeckt.

However, Spengler himself avoided attributing himself to any direction of German conservatism in the Weimar Republic, preferring to take a position ‘above-the-fray’. He was developing plans for a possible state structure after the overthrow of the Weimar Republic. There is evidence of his participation in the preparation of a coup d’état in Bavaria, which was planned at the end of 1922<sup>27</sup>. Despite his political commitment and active participation in the ideological and political polemics during the first years of the Weimar Republic, Spengler quickly became disappointed in his ability to influence the real politics. In the mid-1920s, he appealed to the ‘pure’ science again.

Spengler’s interest in politics awakened in early 1930s, when Germany found itself at the historic turning point again. The global economic crisis, the approaching fall of the Versailles-Washington system of international relations had shaken the foundations of the world politics once again. In the public consciousness of the Germans, the time came for the triumph of the ‘conservative revolution’ ideas. The term eventually put into usage in the political, cultural and everyday space of Germany by the famous poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal in 1927 and popularized by one of the leading ideologists of the modern conservatism E. Jung in early 1930s<sup>28</sup>, started to be per-

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 498.

<sup>27</sup> Koktanek A. M. *Oswald Spengler und seiner Zeit*. München, 1968, s. 287–290.

<sup>28</sup> Jung E. J. *Deutschland und der konservativen Revolution. Deutsche über Deutschland. Die Stimme des unbekanntenen Politikers*. München, 1932, s. 369–383.

ceived as a call for the coming ‘national revolution’, which was to destroy the Weimar Republic and become the impetus for a new revival of the German Reich.

Spengler's last significant work, ‘The Hour of Decision’ published in the summer of 1933, several months after Hitler's rise to power, is filled with anxiety about the relative future of Western civilization and Germany<sup>29</sup>. ‘The Hour of Decision’ became the result of the evolution of Spengler's historical and political thought. The main ideas of the book reflected Spengler's deep pessimism about the prospects for Germany and world politics. Perhaps D. Felken was right when he pointed out that ‘The Hour of Decision’ should be perceived as the most important ideological and political source of the gradual transformation of the right-wing German conservatism at the last stage of existence of the Weimar Republic before turning into a national-socialist worldview. The book shows how far the ‘conservative revolution’ has departed from its original ideological and spiritual sources<sup>30</sup>. Although, as it seems to us, it is impossible to draw a direct parallel between the ideology of the ‘conservative revolution’ and national socialism.

The subject of ‘The Hour of Decision’ was once again the problem of the decline in Europe, but this time not in the form of abstract philosophical and historical reflections, but rather in the form of analysis of specific political situation developed in the world and in Germany within years after the end of the First World War. Spengler maintained: “We entered the era of world wars”<sup>31</sup>. And this is the natural state of history, as “the history of mankind is the history of world wars”<sup>32</sup>.

Spengler felt sad because of the destruction of old Europe – Europe of Metternich and Bismarck, Europe of dynastic national states. Two kinds of dangers threatened the West. There was “White Revolution”, under which Spengler understood the unrestrained domination of rationalism, parliamentarism, democracy in the public consciousness, state and political institutions of the West. “The old, memorable forms of the state lie in ruins. They were replaced by the shapeless parliamentarism...”<sup>33</sup>. The second danger related to the rise of ‘colored’ people, to which Spengler referred Russia as well. He prophesied the coming ‘color’ revolution aimed at the destruction of the white race.

Spengler's hatred and disgust regarding socialism, liberalism, capitalism in the ‘The Hour of Decision’ is truly universal. Much of the book is devoted to the criticism of the ‘white revolution’, under which Spengler understood the triumph of the idea of class struggle – the main spiritual and political weapon of liberalism and socialism. Based on this vision of the Western history, he again, same as in 1919,

<sup>29</sup> Spengler O. *The Years of Decision*. Moscow, 2006. 240 p.

<sup>30</sup> Felken D. Op. cit, s. 195.

<sup>31</sup> Spengler O. *Gody resheniy* [The Years of Decision] ..., p. 36.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 23.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 127.

equates the working-socialism and liberalism. “There is no contradiction between the economic liberalism and socialism”, Spengler writes<sup>34</sup>. In this context, capitalism, liberalism, Marxist socialism, Bolshevism are the manifestations of the same phenomenon for Spengler – the civilization decay of the culture. Civilization completely supplanted culture in the history of the West.

In ‘The Hour of Decision’, Spengler returned to the problem of ‘Prussian socialism’. Reasoning about ‘Prussian socialism’, he lamented that the original idea of the ‘Prussianism and Socialism’ was never understood by the Germans; that within years since the publication of the book, Marxist understanding of socialism continued to dominate the consciousness of the Germans<sup>35</sup>. He reiterated that “the Prussian idea is directed both against financial liberalism and against working-class socialism”<sup>36</sup>. Spengler repeatedly pointed out his understanding of socialism as a kind of moral life form, which has nothing to do with economic and social problems. Prussian style means, per Spengler, the priority of politics (primarily external) over the economy.

History provided Spengler with another opportunity to get involved in the real-life politics. This time his authority was claimed by the national socialists as one of the factors of legitimization of the Nazi regime<sup>37</sup>. The problem of Spengler's relationship with the national socialism fits into the general context of the problem of attitude of ‘revolutionary conservatives’ to Nazism<sup>38</sup>. The intellectual competition between the two trends of German radical conservatism continued throughout the existence of the Weimar Republic. Hitler's attempts to attract prominent figures of the ‘conservative revolution’, such as A. Möller van den Bruck, to cooperate with the Nazi Party, failed eventually.

The attitude of ‘conservative revolutionaries’ to the ideology of national socialism and later to the political practice of the Third Reich was initially contradictory. On the one hand, they, like the national socialists, were eager to eliminate the ‘Weimar system’, the Treaty of Versailles, the revival of the German nation in the form of a ‘people's community’. On the other hand, the ‘conservative revolutionaries’ had

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p. 161.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p. 160.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 164.

<sup>37</sup> For more details see: Koktanek A. M. Spenglers Verhältnis zum Nationalsozialismus in geschichtlicher Entwicklung. *Zeitschrift für Politik*, 1966, B. 13, s. 33–55; Vollnhals C. Oswald Spengler und Nationalsozialismus. Das Dilemma eines konservativen Revolutionärs. *Jahrbuch des Instituts für Deutsche Geschichte*, Tel Aviv 13, 1984, s. 263–303; Gergilov R.E. O. Shpengler i Tretiy Reih [O. Spengler and the Third Reich]. *Klio*, 2007, no. 2, pp. 33–40, Artamoshin S.V. O. Shpengler i ‘konservativnaya revolyutsiya’ v Germanii [O. Spengler and ‘conservative revolution’ in Germany]. *Voprosy istorii* [Questions of History], 2009, no. 6, pp. 148–154.

<sup>38</sup> Terekhov O.E. Fenomen ‘konservativnoi revolyutsii v istoriografii FRG: osnovnye kontseptsii i problemy interpretatsii [Phenomenon of ‘conservative revolution’ in the West Germany (Federal Republic of Germany)]. *Historiography: main concepts and problems of interpretation*. *Kemerovskiy gosudarstvennyi universitet* [Kemerovo State University]. Kemerovo, 2011. 192 p.

been putting the Nazi movement on freeze since its beginning, noting its plebeian character. The claim of the ‘conservative revolutionaries’ aimed at spiritual and political elitism, at a kind of ‘spiritual aristocracy’ aroused irritation on part of the national socialists, who by no means were keen to admit that the ideological primacy of the ‘national revolution’ in Germany belonged to the ‘conservative revolutionaries’. In addition, the totalitarian practice of the Nazi regime played its negative role. The ‘conservative revolutionaries’ were supporters of the authoritarian model of the state.

During 1933, the prominent figures of the Third Reich repeatedly appealed to Spengler with a request to publicly support the Nazi regime (such as Goebbels). However, even though during the parliamentary and presidential elections in 1932 Spengler voted for the Nazi party, he refused to support the regime publicly. In this connection, a face-to-face meeting and a conversation between Spengler and Hitler at Wagner festival in Bayreuth was quite indicative. The interlocutors did not understand each other. He did not see the draft of Prussian socialism in the national socialism. Other important points that distinguish Spengler's political views from the ideology of national socialism can be singled out as follows: cultural pessimism, absence of ‘nationality’ principle, non-biological understanding of the race.

Moreover, embracing the massive and popular character of the Nazi movement with irritation, Spengler in ‘The Hour of Decision’ announced his cautious criticism of the Nazi political practices. Since autumn of 1933, a campaign against Spengler started in the Nazi press; and since 1934 Spengler's name ceased to be mentioned in the media. The events of 30 June 1934, the so-called ‘night of long knives’, when some of Spengler’s friends from the conservative camp were killed, clearly demonstrated that his further criticism of the Nazi regime could cost him life.

### **Conclusion**

Spengler’s political views evolved as characteristic of German ideology of ‘revolutionary conservatism’ in the Weimar Republic, different from its more moderate-authoritarian forms, followed by the formation of right-wing radical tendencies closely matching the ideology of national socialism, which was quite typical for the representatives of ‘reactionary modernism’ in German conservatism in the years of crisis in classical modernity. Spengler started with building a new philosophical (in this case philosophical and historical) basis of ‘The Decline of the West’ right to the ideology of German conservatism after the disaster of 1918 but subsequently turned directly to the political journalism, relying on it to influence the public opinion.

R. von Bussche notes the duality of Spengler's influence on the conservative thought and conservative movement in the Weimar Republic. On the one hand, most of the conservatives refused to accept Spengler’s pessimistic cultural philosophy; on the other hand, Spengler had drawn his political conclusions from the statement that

the decline of Europe was perceived in the Weimar conservative circles extremely positively<sup>39</sup>. Nor can we deny the fact that Spengler's concept of 'Prussian socialism' had a significant influence not only on the formation of the political ideas of 'conservative revolution' but also the German conservatism in the Weimar Republic in general.

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