The Solf Regime in Western Samoa

IDEAL AND REALITY*

On Saturday, 1 September 1923, there occurred an earthquake in Japan which fully destroyed Yokohama and two-thirds of Tokio. The German ambassador, Wilhelm Solf, was on a train approaching Yokohama when it happened. He survived the catastrophe. Among the messages of congratulations to Solf on his providential escape was an address from the people of Samoa which contained this sentence: Doktor Solf möge bald wieder als Gouverneur nach Apia kommen. Commenting on this in his memoirs the former manager of the German firm (Deutsche Handels-und-Plantagengesellschaft) in Apia wrote: 'That appears to me to be a Samoan answer to the colonial guilt lie which should have caused some red faces in London, Paris and Washington.'

Indeed, that the period of German rule on Samoa was scarcely one which could have been used as an indictment against German colonial methods was recognised by Felix Keesing in his book Modern Samoa (1934) when he said: ‘The Germans ... guided affairs so tactfully that the fourteen years of their administration were without doubt the most settled period in the known Samoan history.'

In large measure this happy state of affairs reflects the efforts of Governor Wilhelm Solf, one of the most captivating of German colonial administrators. The study of the régime he developed in just over ten years is an exercise that is essential if we are to understand the man and to deepen our knowledge of that complex time in German history, imperial and otherwise, known as the Wilhelmine era.

Broadly, the object of this investigation is the process by which the German Reich sought to impose itself upon the Samoan people

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2 Otto Riedel, Der Kampf um Deutsch-Samoa, Berlin, 1938, p. 161. 'May Dr Solf come again soon as Governor back to Samoa'.
3 ibid.
from 1900 to 1914. The problem associated with this is two-fold: first, to explain how Governor Solf tried to establish German law with a view to maintaining the welfare of the Samoans while at the same time creating a favourable socio-political climate for the continued flourishing of a long-established German commercial enterprise; second, to explain how this aim was carried through in spite of the opposition of those German colonial enthusiasts who regarded the land and people as objects for ruthless exploitation.

It will, therefore, be necessary to identify the growth of official German policy as Solf created it — as it grew out of the necessity of checking Samoan political activity on one hand and the hostile aims of a clique of ambitious German settlers on the other. This latter group, the product of a peculiarly German colonial ideology, whose conceptions about Samoa were erroneous and dangerous, were successfully countered by Solf’s humane, though paternalistic realism.

To most Germans of the Wilhelmine Empire, the possession of colonies was a necessary concomitant of great-power status. And just how seriously this view was held is best illustrated by the way Germany conducted the diplomatic struggle with Great Britain and the United States in 1898-9 in order to gain sovereignty over Western Samoa. The German colonial enterprise by 1900 had been in existence only sixteen years, so that there had been little time to produce a body of experienced officials. Everywhere, in Africa and in the Pacific, Germans were still engaged in exploring their new territories and pacifying the natives; and every territory posed its own unique problems. The general aim, however, was always the same: the rapid conversion of native peoples into obedient subjects so that they might become a docile, industrious labour force for German commercial enterprise.

The prevailing attitude may be characterised as follows: colonies were not acquired in order to guarantee the natives a free, comfortable, lazy existence, nor to present them with the benefits of civilization, nor to protect them from epidemic and famine, nor to maintain peace in the land while the Germans worked themselves into an early
grave. For all the benefits which would accrue to the natives it was expected that they would supply a cheap steady source of labour in return. Indeed, the natives had to learn the obligation of work. With the imposition of this upon the natives, Germans believed they were fulfilling a cultural task. A characteristic expression of this goes as follows: 'Of all the obligations, that of work has always been the most effective. It educates the individual and educates the nations. On it is founded the present standard of civilization. Ohne Arbeitspflicht ist eine Entwicklung der Kultur und der Kulturgeschichte nicht möglich.'

For those who reflected on it, the German drive for economically profitable colonies was hallowed with a strongly developed sense of cultural mission to elevate the natives to a higher civilization. However, the execution of this ideal in practice proved extraordinarily difficult. Always the demands of impatient, self-interested settlers and entrepreneurs threatened to take priority over the concomitant aim to preserve and advance the native peoples. The task of enlightened administrators was to keep the priorities in order. Only against this background of concepts can any German colonial administration be evaluated. But the concepts and values of the individual governors must be considered in addition.

Wilhelm Solf (1862-1936) was an exceptionally able man by any country's standards. As a son of a successful Berlin merchant family he developed bourgeois-liberal values as distinct from Junker-military tendencies. And further removing him from the latter world of ideas was his university study as an Indologist which gave him invaluable linguistic training. So here was a German scholar of liberal outlook and cosmopolitan tastes who early in his career evinced a great sympathy for peoples of alien cultures. It is almost unnecessary to add that he had not been bitten by the pan-German dog. On the contrary he displayed a distinct liking for English ways — even a preference for them — an unusual attribute in a German official of that time. It is therefore understandable that this scholarly civilian would approach the problem of how to impose German rule on a subject people somewhat differently from his military-trained colleagues in Africa.

Although Solf was convinced of the cultural mission of advanced European peoples to colonial peoples he was prepared to be flexible and very patient in imposing German rule on Samoa. The new situation into which he was thrust in Apia during the diplomatic crisis prior to the final partition of Samoa and the ensuing years of his...

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9 F. Wohltmann, *Pflanzung und Siedlung auf Samoa — Erkundungsbericht an das Kolonial-Wirtschaftliche Komitee zu Berlin*, Berlin, p. 116. 'Advancement in culture and cultural history is not possible without the obligation of work'.

10 von Vietsch, p. 366.

11 For an interesting list of examples of the ineptitude of some German colonial officials in Africa see Klaus Epstein, 'Erzberger and the German Colonial Scandals, 1905-1910', *English Historical Review*, LIX (1959), 637-63.
governorship caused him to reflect on the basis of German colonial policy and he came up with the slogan, *Kolonisieren ist Missionieren.* That is to say the task of the colonising power is first and foremost the preservation and elevation of the native peoples, not simply in the sense of the missionary whose aim is primarily spiritual-religious, but in the most comprehensive cultural sense, with the aim of combining the best European culture could offer with the best of the native culture. This was a decisive factor in Solf's conception of his role. Contrary to the prevailing pan-German concept of Teutonic cultural superiority (*am deutschen Wesen soll einmal die Welt genesen*) Solf, like the German historical philosopher, Herder, saw something of intrinsic value in every *Volk.* He was certainly to reveal profound insight into and respect for the Samoan culture and a great sense of paternal responsibility.\(^{12}\)

A sympathetic German observer wrote in 1903 that from the day the German flag was raised in Mulinu'u and Dr Solf began with a steady and firm hand to guide the destiny of the islands, peace and order descended on Samoa. The hope was also expressed that the Germans would succeed in their cultural task. 'It would be a great triumph for German colonisation if we succeeded in adapting the Samoan people to modern civilization and to make them into our willing co-workers (*eifrige Mitarbeiter*) in Samoa.'\(^{13}\) The writer went on to suggest that the Germans would not treat the Samoans as the Americans had treated the Indians and Hawaiians. 'The frightful fate of these unfortunate tribes admonishes us to proceed more humanely than the North Americans have hitherto done.'\(^{14}\)

'Willing co-workers' of the colonising power the Samoans did not become — as the past labour problems of the Deutsche Handels- und Plantagengesellschaft might have indicated. German views of the Samoan attitude to disciplined labour expressed a certain despair: 'The Samoan is strong and handsome in appearance with bones, muscle and flesh which should long for work. But powerful, handsome and valiant as he is, he is for all that a shirker.'\(^{15}\)

Or again, realistically, 'Samoanische Eingeborene arbeiten nicht. Sie halten Arbeit für Weisse für eine Schande . . .'\(^{16}\) Solf himself at least once voiced despair of ever getting the Samoans to see the virtue of disciplined labour and it was this fact which led him reluctantly to

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\(^{12}\) See Wilhelm-Solf's *Decennial-Programm* of 1907. This is in the form of a lengthy memorandum to the Imperial Colonial Office which outlines Solf's views on the treatment of the Samoans and on the economic potential of the colony. The original draft is housed in the National Archives of New Zealand in Wellington, catalogue No. CCA 2/46. Here the central theme is that 'colonising is missionising'.

\(^{13}\) Wohltmann, p. 111.

\(^{14}\) *ibid.*

\(^{15}\) *ibid.*, p. 112.

\(^{16}\) *Deutsches Kolonialblatt,* 1900. Article entitled 'Samoanische Ansiedler', p. 290. "Samoan natives do not work. They consider working for whites to be shameful . . . ."
allow the introduction of Chinese coolies for plantation work. However, he recalled once riding two hours through the district of Lealatele on Savaii (towards the end of 1902 or early 1903): the tracks were in first class condition and it was like passing through a garden or tropical park. And all this had been done by Samoans on their own plantations with axes, spades and bush knives. Such examples of Samoan industry, the Governor said, caused him to revise his pessimistic views and to hope that with encouragement the Samoans would in time be educated to work.17

However, in fulfilling their duties as subjects to the German Reich the Samoans, contrary to expectation, initially proved reasonable and co-operative. For example at the end of 1900, Solf decreed that all firearms in possession of Samoans must be turned in. And by the Kaiser's birthday on 27 January 1901, i.e. before the prescribed deadline, over 1500 rifles and considerable ammunition had been voluntarily surrendered.18 After this success Solf could proceed to the next step of imposing German authority, viz. that of raising a poll tax of four marks from all adult males, the purpose of which was to pay the salaries of the Samoan officials appointed by the Governor and also the other costs of the so-called native self-administration.19

Solf's prime difficulty was, of course, to accustom the chiefs to the idea of unrestricted German sovereignty and the need to obey the laws of the Reich, which, as he told them in August 1900 had now and for all time been imposed on Samoa.20 Solf also tried to make it clear to the chiefs that in imposing German law it was by no means his intention to force German customs and morals on Samoa, but rather that the natives should administer themselves under the supervision and control of the German governor. And for this purpose the Samoan administrative hierarchy and institutions of government at Mulini'u known as the Malo were to be retained. The office of king or Tupu Sili had of course been suspended by the powers at the partition in 1899.21

The German aim was gradually to erode the traditional polity and to impose a benign autocracy on the part of the governor. Therefore, the highest Samoan office was only that of Ali'i Sili or paramount chief, a largely decorative, German-paid post for chief Mata'afa. However, Solf reported that, although Mata'afa and the thirteen chiefs had agreed in writing to the abolition of the kingship, they had no juridical understanding of that act and thought that the German governor had merely been appointed by the Kaiser to co-operate with Mata'afa and the thirteen chiefs in ruling the kingdom of Samoa. Because the Germans had traditionally supported the Mata'afa party,
this group could see no reason why the Germans now could not simply call Mata'afa Tupu Sili and let him together with the Tumua and Pule (the orator chiefs of Upolu and Savaii respectively) rule in Samoa as before, \textsuperscript{22} i.e. under the 1889 Berlin Agreement.

Indeed, Mata'afa at the time really did believe he was king, and it was difficult to convince the Samoans otherwise. Solf had even tried to get Bishop Broyer who was Mata'afa's confessor to convince Mata'afa of the impossibility of the restoration of the kingship. It was only when Solf let it be known to Mata'afa that he would be dropped in favour of another Ali'i Sili that he became amenable to the situation. \textsuperscript{23}

Concerning these developments Solf reported on 4 September 1900:

The present system of self-government in Samoa must be regarded as being on trial only; there will need to be many alterations made and many difficulties overcome before the fickle Samoans, ever fond of innovations, acquire anything approaching stability. We have at least succeeded in abolishing the kingship without dissatisfying the people. Tamasese, the most powerful of Mata'afa's adversaries now lives next door to him in Mulinu'u. The ominous thirteen are heard of no more. At the same time I do not wish to depict things too optimistically. The thirteen are only the heads of the Hydra known as Tumua and Pule. The further aim of the government will be to find ways and means to render [it] ineffectual as a political factor and slowly to do away with the instrument of Tumua and Pule which dates back to earliest times. \textsuperscript{24}

The abolition of the Tumua and Pule was indeed proclaimed at Mulinu'u by Solf on 14 August 1905 and accepted without protest by the Samoans. \textsuperscript{25} The background to this virtually revolutionary step is both fascinating and complex because the events of that year which provided Solf with the outward justification for his action were the results of the intrigues of the importunate German opponents of Solf with certain Samoan opponents of the régime.

The German opposition to Solf was led by a reserve lieutenant-turned-cocoa-planter, Richard Deeken. It was he who exploited the Samoan wish to set up their own copra marketing co-operative. The Samoan aim was to use the profits to become financially independent of the German government in the hope that the Germans would then allow the Samoans to govern themselves. \textsuperscript{26} The aim of the Deeken clique was to weaken Solf's control. \textsuperscript{27} If through the co-operative the

\textsuperscript{22} DR, I, 2-3.
\textsuperscript{23} ibid., p. 18.
\textsuperscript{24} ibid., pp. 18-19.
\textsuperscript{25} von Vietsch, p. 75.
\textsuperscript{26} J. W. Davidson, Samoa mo Samoa; the emergence of the independent state of Western Samoa, Melbourne, 1967, pp. 81-82.
\textsuperscript{27} DR, I, 71. Cf. Solf to Foreign Office, Berlin, 4 August 1905, Solf-Nachlass, Bundesarchiv in Koblenz. Solf reported that Mata'afa exploited the embarrassment of the Governor due to the opposition of the dissatisfied planters under Deeken which began in 1903. Mata'afa wished to regain his prestige among the Samoan people. The old Ali'i Sili had therefore allowed himself to be caught up in the intrigues of the Deeken clique which was using every device possible to discredit Solf in the eyes of the Berlin government.
Malo could have become financially independent of the German government it would have struck at the heart of Solf's policy of keeping the Samoan officials subservient to the German state.

The workings of Deeken's mind were complex and devious; he would have interpreted any of Solf's measures as oppressive to discredit him in the Reichstag. This scheming planter was trying by intrigue to have Solf recalled and he used his contacts with the Roman Catholic Centre Party members of the Reichstag to embarrass Solf with the home government. The Centre Party at that time was conducting a crusade against German colonial administrations because of examples of flagrant abuses and misrule. Solf did, of course, ban (14 December 1904) the Samoan co-operative and this could easily be interpreted as oppressive; likewise the arrest of two champions of the co-operative who had criticised the Governor in an insulting manner. These had been gaoled, and during Solf's absence in New Zealand, the Malo, taking the law into its own hands, broke open the gaol and released the offenders.

There seems on doubt that Richard Deeken had played a significant role in instigating this provocation of the government. He was known to be championing the co-operative and intriguing with Samoan leaders including Mata'afa and Lauaki. Solf, frustrated and powerless to banish Deeken as a disruptive element, could at least exert his skill as a tactician to checkmate Samoan political ambitions. Hence the abolition of the Tumua and Pule as well as the two houses of the parliament and their replacement by twenty-seven nominated councillors to be called to Mulinu'u twice yearly at the Governor's pleasure.

Deeken's hostility to Solf went back to 1901 when he encountered the Governor's opposition to his extravagant plans to settle many Germans cheaply on Samoa. From then on Deeken continued in particularly provocative style to challenge Solf to whom he must have appeared as the epitome of all that was wrong with German colonisation.

Deeken represented that pan-German mentality which saw colonies as being exclusively there for the economic benefit of the colonising power. As his own writings (as well as Solf's criticisms) indicate, he believed the native population should serve the dual purpose of a labour force and a consumer group for German goods. And for that reason Deeken was interested in raising the living standards of the Samoans. He proposed to overcome the Samoan resistance to become

28 Cf. Epstein. Deeken was distantly related to the Centre Party member of the Reichstag, Trimborn, who energetically represented Deeken's cause to the colonial administration in Berlin, greatly to Solf's detriment. See Trimborn to Stuebel, Solf-Nachlass, 9 August 1904.
29 *DR*, I, 45, 60-61.
30 *ibid.*, pp. 62-65, 71.
31 von Vietsch, pp. 72-73.
32 *DR*, I, 98.
33 von Vietsch, p. 70.
a regular work force for the planters by importing coolies from China. But perhaps most importantly, Deeken envisaged Samoa as a place for German settlement.\textsuperscript{34}

It is clear in confronting Deeken’s ideas about Samoa’s future that Solf forged his colonial-political concepts. One has, however, to admire Deeken’s dedication to his goal, he began publishing about Samoa after a short visit in 1901 with a book \textit{Manuia Samoa!} (Heil Samoa!) in which he depicted an island paradise and did not forget to include seductive photographs of Samoan girls.\textsuperscript{35} He also was a tireless contributor of articles to the \textit{Samoanische Zeitung} in Apia and the \textit{Deutsche Kolonialzeitung} in Berlin throughout the whole period of German rule.

Deeken wished to fill Samoa with German settlers on relatively small holdings, anticipating that in a short time they would become rich cocoa planters. Indeed, Deeken unleashed a veritable cocoa ‘rush’ or \textit{Kakao-Fieber} among inexperienced hopefuls and it is from their arrival and their difficulties in securing land that the debate about the future style of colonisation begins.\textsuperscript{36}

Solf was so concerned about the possible effects of increased immigration of small settlers that he requested \textit{Das Kolonial-Wirtschaftliche Komitee} in Berlin to send out an agricultural scientist to investigate the real economic potential of Samoa. This was done by a Professor F. Wohltmann early in 1903 (27 March - 2 May).\textsuperscript{37} His findings were clearly of great help to Solf in formulating policy on land and labour questions. Thereafter the Governor was better able to judge the agricultural potential of the islands, which was far below what enthusiasts like Deeken had imagined. The latter’s estimate of the capital required, the productivity of Samoan soil and the availability of cheap labour was vastly unrealistic. But as enthusiasm often triumphs over reason, Deeken successfully launched, on 22 March 1903, the \textit{Deutsche Samoa-Gesellschaft} which acquired 450 hectares on Upolu to plant cocoa, rubber and copra. After one year the company raised the impressive capital of one million marks. Dividends, however, it never paid.\textsuperscript{38}

The rock upon which this kind of enterprise was wrecked was the labour question. Although, through Deeken’s connections, official pressure was brought to bear on Solf to allow transport of Chinese workers and as a result over 1500 had arrived by 1914, this failed to meet the need.\textsuperscript{39} Professor Wohltmann prophetically stated, in 1903,

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  \item \textsuperscript{34} Richard Deeken, \textit{Auszwanderung nach den deutschen Kolonien}, Berlin, 1908, pp. 5-6. Also his article ‘Samoanische Bilder’, \textit{DKZ}, 1911, pp. 145-6. Cf. Solf, \textit{Decennial-Programm}.
  \item \textsuperscript{35} Richard Deeken, \textit{Manuia Samoa! Samoanische Reiseskizzen und Beobachtungen}, Oldenburg, 1902.
  \item \textsuperscript{36} \textit{DKZ}, 1903, p. 417. Cf. Riedel, pp. 172-5, 184-90.
  \item \textsuperscript{38} \textit{DKL}, I, 312, article entitled ‘Deutsche Samoa-Gesellschaft’.
  \item \textsuperscript{39} Cf. von Vietsch, pp. 74-75, and Wohltmann, p. 121.
\end{itemize}
that without them extensive future development would be impossible. 

Die richtige Behandlung der Chinesen bildet daher mit einen Kernpunkt der Entwicklung Samoas.\textsuperscript{40}

Evidence to support this is plentiful. The planters dependent upon coolie labour lamented throughout the period the absence of workers and claimed that this was the reason for their chronic economic crisis.\textsuperscript{41} For these planters the purpose for which they became colonists on Samoa was never realised. And the reasons, in their view, lay in the policies of Governor Wilhelm Solf and his successor Erich Schultz. Neither was sufficiently deutsch-national and both were too considerate of the Samoan population.

In 1911 Deeken’s cry from Apia was: ‘German capital, German planters and a clear German-national orientated policy are urgently needed in Samoa to maintain our south-sea paradise German’.\textsuperscript{42} As far as labour was concerned Deeken was then of the opinion that a new source of men would have to be found quickly from somewhere — e.g. from New Guinea — if the ghost of threatening ruin was to be laid for the time being.\textsuperscript{43}

In 1913 German planters on Samoa had even petitioned the Reichstag for a subsidy for labour transport ships. This was in addition to a previous petition from Samoa requesting far-reaching reforms to allow a degree of self-government to the non-Samoan community.\textsuperscript{44} But Solf had developed a policy for Samoa which had as its core the preservation of the Samoan people. This meant a continuation rather than a relaxation of the hitherto unqualified paternalism. And Solf justified this with arguments of great conviction. If the colony was to have been run for the benefit of the planters alone as they seemed to want it, this would have led to the decline of the Samoan race.

We first see evidence of Solf’s thinking along these lines in 1903 with his opposition to the introduction of Chinese labour. The Governor reasoned that an unregulated immigration of coolies would lead in time to an undesirable mixed race on Samoa and that the Chinese through their renowned industry would come to dominate commerce there. For these reasons he insisted that if the German colonial administration were to allow Chinese immigration it should be only for contract periods of three years.\textsuperscript{45}

It is, however, in the question of land alienation that Solf revealed his mature understanding of Samoan problems and of the nature of the responsibility of a civilised colonial power. The land question was seen as the key to the preservation of the Samoan people. In his memorandum of 1907 Solf wrote:

\textsuperscript{40} Wohltmann, pp. 126-7. ‘The right treatment of the Chinese is one of the key problems of the development of Samoa’.  
\textsuperscript{41} See DKZ, 1911, p. 861.  
\textsuperscript{42} Deeken, ‘Samoanische Bilder’, DKZ, 1911, p. 146.  
\textsuperscript{43} Deeken, ‘Die Arbeiterfrage in Samoa’, DKZ, 1911, p. 861.  
\textsuperscript{44} ‘Die samoanischen Pflanzer an den Reichstag’, DKZ, 1913, p. 102. Cf. Davidson, p. 90.  
\textsuperscript{45} von Vietsch, pp. 73-75.
With the changing preferences for this or that solution [to the land question] I have, after eight years experience and close consideration privately, and with those of conflicting interests, finally come to the conclusion which I present here... I have decided in favour of the Samoan people.

The policy which I envisage for the future is not new: previously the first Swedish judge, Cederkrantz, and the first German president, Baron Senfft von Pilsach opposed the egoistic interpretation of the Berlin Act by the inhabitants of the old municipality with the slogan ‘Samoa for the Samoans’. I do not go as far as that. Indeed, one cannot go so far since Samoa, at that time independent, has become a German colony and the Samoans have submitted themselves to our rule. From now on the Samoans are our charges and the German government has the obligation of making the justified interests of the Samoan people their own. In decisions over the land question where the most vital interests of the Samoan people, where their total existence, are at stake, the government must place itself on the side of the Samoans. We do not wish to exterminate the Samoan nation, we wish to preserve it. That is the duty of honour which we have assumed with the raising of the German flag on the Samoan Islands; the execution of this duty is also wise policy because it creates the possibility of a sensible economic policy.46

Solf continued by saying that if the Samoans were allowed the disposal over their own lands, they would in a few years own no more arable land. The financial gain would be wasted, and the native population soon reduced to poverty. And while he recognised the understandable wish of the ruling power to see its subjects draw material advantage from the colonies, Solf insisted that the colonies were the homelands of peoples to whom Germany had promised her protection and that out of this arose certain obligations.

It was not only the legal duty which the colonising power assumed, but it was also an obligation of the civilised state to the native peoples, ‘to attempt to create for them better and more reasonable living conditions than they in their limitations of mind and spirit could have created for themselves. Colonising is missionising! Missionising in the widest sense of education to culture!’47

This remained Solf’s guiding principle and indicates a highly developed sense of trusteeship — a feature not widely in evidence among German colonial governors. This is illustrated further:

However, it is not very profitable simply to deduce the task of the coloniser from the legal relationship between the colony and the motherland and from the moral postulates of our world view. Whoever has not lived for years among the natives and shared their sorrows and joys, whose heart is not moved for them, who does not have love for one’s fellow-men, even for those on a lower level who think and feel differently, he may hold this deduction to be logically correct but he will not grasp its real significance nor will he ever understand the joy and enthusiasm with which the coloniser with a vocation approaches his work.48

46 Solf, Decennial-Programm.
47 ibid.
48 ibid.
These words need no commentary to elaborate on their significance in assessing Solf’s values. They were directed to the newly-founded Colonial Office with a view to opposing the hitherto exclusively economic motive for colonisation. Not that he despised the economic motive entirely. It was the policy of ruthless exploitation he hated and regarded as stupid, ‘because one does not kill the hen which is supposed to lay the eggs’. Rather: ‘One treats the natives correctly, establishes living conditions in line with their tastes, develops in them what is capable of development and gradually elevates them. But this must be done gradually because fifty or one hundred years are of no significance in the history of the development of nations. The economic development of the colonies will progress vigorously — through the natives and with the natives and not in spite of and against the natives.’

In all of Solf’s colonial legislation, in the question of Chinese immigration, of land alienation to non-Samoans, of taxation, of compulsory copra planting for Samoans, even in the question of forbidding their co-operative and of dismantling their traditional political structure and in the administration of justice to settlers and Samoans alike, the above motives are recognisable.

The basic assumption was, of course, that the Samoans were as yet children and had to be protected from the predatory white man and from their own ignorance and factionalism. And it was in dealing with a dramatic example of the latter that Solf saw his most significant contribution to the education of the Samoans towards civilization. This was in his handling of the Lauaki rebellion in 1908-1909. What precisely motivated Lauaki of Savaii to provoke civil war in Samoa need not concern us here. To the Germans it was a movement to restore the Tumua and Pule and the kingship under Tanu. A full evaluation of the German account of this rebellion would merit separate treatment but here an extract from an official report is illuminating:

The movement did not have the character of a rebellion since the dissatisfied ones were demanding the restoration of their power under German rule. They wanted to be German but not as a colony, rather as a kingdom! After the orator chiefs of Tumua had gained greater influence and had separated themselves from Pule the movement took on a purely Samoan character and resolved itself into a struggle between Pule and Tumua. But even here a peaceful settlement of the conflict seemed not impossible.

49 ibid.
50 ibid. (My italics).
51 ibid.
However, the insubordination of a small group of Chiefs and Orators had to be exemplarily punished. The governor therefore considered it necessary to remind the Samoans of the power of the German Reich by a naval demonstration by three large warships. Lauaki and ten of his followers have been exiled to Saipan.53

Solf had played at the least a most tactful role in the drama; perhaps he had played a heroic one. Admittedly his seemingly interminable negotiations with the rival leaders did not suffice to arbitrate their differences and quell their ambitions. In the last resort naval assistance had to be called in — of course there was no German garrison and Solf had always refused to entertain the idea of one.54 But as Solf’s biographer von Vietsch observes: ‘In historical retrospect it is not the fact of an attempted rebellion which is decisive but rather the fact that it was possible to frustrate it successfully and permanently. Then this was only possible because the natives themselves were for a great part either on the governor’s side from the beginning or could be convinced by his arguments. And this shows that the way the governor addressed the Samoans was understood and grasped by them.’55

The proof that Solf’s methods had borne fruit lies in the fact that when Mata’aafa died in 1912 the office of Ali‘i Sili could be abolished without a murmur.56 It was replaced by the offices of two Fautua (advisers) in June 1913.57

When Solf wrote his 1907 memorandum he said regarding Samoan politics: ‘The customs, usages and legal institutions of the Samoans will have to be further studied in more detail. Whatever is good will be retained and gradually transferred and amalgamated into our forms and concepts.’58 He also knew that the influence of the colonising power would not take root overnight. ‘We are still sowing and not yet for a long time will we reap the harvest; we are still experimenting and not yet fully skilled.’59

When Solf finally left Samoa on leave late in 1910 he had the good fortune to be in Berlin when the post of Secretary of the Colonies became vacant. He became Germany’s third and last such official.60 Commenting on this appointment the chauvinistic Deutsche Kolonial-Zeitung, unable to conceal a mild reproach, remarked: ‘Perhaps now many of the . . . problems of the “Pearl of the South Seas” will be seen by Secretary of State Solf more clearly and dispassionately from Berlin in his elevated post as leader of our entire colonial organisation than from the confines of Apia and he will find a solution to the labour

54 von Vietsch, p. 354.
55 ibid., p. 96.
56 ibid., p. 97.
57 Davidson, p. 88.
58 Solf, Decennial-Programm.
59 ibid.
60 von Vietsch, p. 104.
question and that of the small settlers etc. which was not possible for the governor of the little archipelago.'

The fact is that for Solf these problems were solved. He had tried to make it clear that any solution satisfactory to those Germans who cultivated exaggerated economic hopes from their Samoan enterprises was at best unrealistic and at worst deleterious for the Samoan population. Solf's successor, the former Chief Justice of Samoa, Erich Schultz-Ewerth, continued the administration in Solf's mould and it was during 1913 that the commercial interests of Apia petitioned the Reichstag for a higher measure of self-government. But none of this had time to mature. As Harry Rudin in his study of the German Cameroons stated:

There was little in the German colonial system that was fixed. The evolution of administration was rapid, for no two years were alike. What new principles and policies might have determined the character of the administration if Germany had been allowed to retain her colonies cannot be known with certainty. All that one can point to is the character of the resolutions attached by the Reichstag to the 1914 budget. They demanded better treatment of the natives in many respects. Within the Reichstag and outside there was increasing talk of colonial representation in Germany, of greater independence for the colonies . . . Unjust was the reason and unfortunate was the result when Germany was compelled in 1919 to surrender her colonies on the grounds of maladministration and a general incapacity for colonial government.

There is no doubt that the colonial administration record of such officials as von Puttkammer in the Cameroons and Leutwein in South West Africa contributed greatly to the destruction of Germany's image as a colonising power. Leutwein, as has now been revealed by Helmut Bley, was a conscientious soldier and official but he coined a phrase concerning colonisation which was his own indictment, viz. Kolonisieren ist überhaupt eine inhumane Sache. When we contrast this concept with Solf's, viz. that 'colonising is missionising', we begin to grasp the intellectual-historical problematic of the rulers of Wilhelm Germany — the conflict between an unimaginative Prussianism and pragmatism of a Wilhelm Solf on the other.

In order to gauge the significance of what happened on Samoa and of the greatness and smallness of the actors, it is essential to try to see them and their deeds in relation to their conceptions and understanding of their tasks and roles. The unrealistic ideas of the ambitious planters about the way Samoa ought to have been ruled were diametrically opposed to the ideas of Wilhelm Solf. However, another set of conceptions about Samoa in the light of which Solf's stature is (DKZ, 1911, p. 876).

62 Helmut Bley, Kolonialherrschaft und Sozialstruktur in Deutsch-Südwest Afrika 1894-1914, Hamburg, 1968, p. 102. 'Colonisation is altogether an inhuman business.'
again increased are those of the Imperial German Government at the turn of the century. It was imagined that Samoa would be a very cheap and easy colony to administer especially in comparison to some of the African colonies, and as such a welcome fillip to both colonial and naval enthusiasts.

Due to Germany’s long commercial association with Samoa and the comparative political sophistication of the Samoans, the German Government in 1900 did not envisage great problems like the need to maintain a large expensive garrison as in South West Africa. There colonisation without troops was unthinkable. Further, any colonial expenditure was subject to criticism and control by the Reichstag and so the windfall of a ready-made, productive, going concern which Samoa seemed to be was much welcomed by the Imperial Government.

It was apparently assumed that the international agreement which gave Germany Western Samoa in 1900 merely formalised the long established de facto pre-eminence of Germany there and that it was a simple matter to re-name the German president of the municipality of Apia Imperial Governor and all would inevitably proceed more smoothly than before. This could be expected since the trouble-ridden tripartite arrangements of the nineteenth century had once and for all been eliminated and Germany’s sole sovereignty was universally recognized. Further, the troublesome kingship, the focal point of perennial Samoan intrigue had been abolished, as the Germans hoped, for ever. So the two chief factors of discord and crisis were now happily consigned to the past by a few strokes of Western pens. Samoa was a South Sea paradise which had no other function than to allow Germans to get on with growing coconuts, cocoa and rubber.

Solf was to learn, much to his disappointment, that these to be sure were the assumptions made about Samoa in Berlin. He related that when he was on leave in Berlin in 1906 he gained the impression that officials in the Colonial Department had quite false notions about the content and extent of the Governor’s work in Apia. They had continued to regard it as a consular-type outpost. And this was, according to Solf, due to the fact that the Director of the Colonial Department, Stiibel, who had been secretary for the South Seas section 1900-1906, had himself once been Consul in Apia. Solf recalled that of all the difficulties he had to overcome in Samoa between 1900 and 1906, those of a purely local nature had been easier on the average than those created for him by Berlin due to its erroneous conceptions about conditions in Samoa. And here it should be emphasized what this false, consular-type notion of Samoan problems implied: first, it implied that Berlin expected that native problems would cease, and second, with those problems overcome permanently and German sovereignty proclaimed, conditions would be ideal for what the colony was intended, viz. to become a highly efficient producer of ‘colonial goods’ (Kolonialwaren). The Governor’s function, was, as far as Berlin was concerned, really only that of an up-graded consul.
And Solf relates how, whenever he proclaimed a regulation that was disadvantageous to large capital, the big merchant interests, especially when Hanseatic capital was concerned, exerted pressure on the Colonial Council; or, if it was Berlin capital, they exerted pressure on the newspapers against the local Apia government. In many areas the Governor’s task was made unnecessarily onerous because of the failure of Berlin to appreciate the true situation.

Samoa could not be an ideal German colony for many reasons. There were too many well-established Anglo-Saxons to begin with — businessmen and planters as well as the powerful L.M.S. mission which exerted great influence over natives through its schools. But the supra-national Roman church constituted a point of greater friction for Solf, since its Bishop conducted much correspondence with leaders of the Centre Party in Berlin (as well as with Rome) whenever the administration applied policies considered to be disadvantageous to the mission.

Other aspects of life in Samoa which consumed much of Solf’s time and reduced his enthusiasm for his task were the complaints of small settlers, their petty quarrels, scandal-mongering and feuds in the local press. More particularly dangerous, Solf pointed out, were people like Deeken who, as in the year 1904, was able to stir up a crisis by working on the dissatisfied and sinister elements in both sections of the population to create a kind of unnatural opposition to the government. So, with the need to deal with irritating trivia, the government, in spite of the limited extent of the colony, was confronted with problems the solution of which placed great demands on the intelligence, will-power and patience of the leading official.

Finally, Solf complained in 1908 that regulations imposed by Berlin aiming at overall administrative uniformity in the colonies and based on concepts drawn from the pre-1900 period encumbered the Governor a great deal since they could scarcely fit into new Samoan conditions. As he summed it up these things hindered him in drawing with a steady hand the diagonal in the parallelogram of forces, both public and secret, operating on Samoa.64

This metaphor, originated by Solf himself, contains the key to his conception of his task; he saw himself as the benevolent, but firm arbitrator of the competing, indeed rival elements in Samoa itself and as the interpreter and translator of the initially vague and then later impractical directives from Berlin. Given the values of the times and the available administrative talent in Berlin it is hard to imagine a better German colonial master than Wilhelm Heinrich Solf in Western Samoa. Clearly, his ideas and policies represent an achievement in the realm of colonial history which has not yet found the evaluation its unique standards most obviously merit.

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64 Solf to Colonial Secretary, 12 January 1908 (No. 09174, 13 January 1908), Nachtrag zu dem Decennial-Programm.