

THE GERMAN CENTER PARTY, 1914-1924.

A STUDY OF POLITICAL CATHOLICISM

by

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CHAPTER I

THE CHARACTER OF THE CENTER PARTY, 1871-1914

The role of the Catholic Center Party in German history is a controversial subject whose rudiments only can be treated in this paper. The Center Party's character has alternately been damned and praised but seldom written about with dispassion and often with misunderstanding. The Center has been called a party devoid of political principles, opportunist, confessional, ultramontane; while on the other hand it has been credited with exerting a moderating influence during the period of the Weimar Republic and with being a staunch defender of the Constitution and the ideals of republicanism. Some have accused the Center of yielding to Hitler with the selfish desire to perpetuate itself at the expense of the Republic; yet defenders of the Center have pictured political Catholicism as one of Hitler's staunchest foes.

The origin of the Center Party is rooted in Bismarck's fight with the Catholic Church which a Catholic representative, Rudolph Virchow, designated the Kulturkampf. But the seeds of religious hatred are buried deep in German history. "No other party has been so deeply and lastingly affected by the religious cleavage that took place in Western Europe in the sixteenth century as the German -- the

people among whom it took its rise¹

At various periods in German history the Protestant or Catholic denomination has stigmatized the other as being "opposed to the German tradition." The Catholic, proud of the traditions of the Holy Roman Empire, could not forget that the Protestant Princes, allied with France and Sweden, had fought against the Empire. The Protestant confessionals periodically revived the familiar anti-Catholic accusations which charged the German Catholics with being "foreign dominated" and "anti-Reich." The Protestants regarded the large Catholic minority congregated in Southwestern Germany and in Silesia as an insidious threat to German unity and to Germany's peculiar Kultur. The battle of Sadowa brought shudders of foreboding to German Catholics and their apprehensions were confirmed by the Kulturkampf.

"The fact that the Roman Catholic Church is in a minority in the German Empire explains in the first instance its presence as a political force."² Religious distrust, combined with geographical particularist sentiment and solidified by the Bismarck system, produced the Center Party of 1871. Henceforth, the Church regarded itself as a persecuted minority, and its members never forgot the discriminations it suffered under the House of Hohenzollern. The Center Party capitalized on the historical reality that martyrdom

¹ Waldemar Gurian, Hitler and the Christians (London: Sheed and Ward, 1936, trans. by E. V. Peeler), p. 16.

² Robert Herndon Fife, The German Empire Between Two Wars (New York: McMillan and Company, 1918), p. 201. Hereafter cited as Fife, German Empire.

rallies the faithful to the side of the Church. Even after the Weimar Constitution brought religious equality to Germany's Catholics the Center never disregarded the contingency of another Kulturkampf.

The Church fought the Kulturkampf with the only political means available to it under the Constitution, by a political party supported by a militant minority unified by fear, strengthened by martyrdom and determined upon a moral crusade for religious and social equality. Long before Bismarck had "unified" Germany a truly unified Catholic population lay organized and ready for use as a political weapon. Hundreds of thousands of Catholics were organized in various religious and social organizations, acutely conscious of their peculiar position in relation to Prussia and of their dormant power. It was principally due to one man, Ludwig Windthorst, that this latent power was forged into a powerful political instrument.

Windthorst was the George Washington of German political Catholicism. His name recurs again and again in the Center Party literature during the Weimar Republic. He was a North German aristocrat who had been a Hanoverian minister before 1866, and he never forgot Prussia's seizure of Hanover or the man who had been responsible for the outrage. He hated Bismarck and the Prussian state with bitter resentment, but he was an extremely flexible man. His diplomacy and clever opportunism soon characterized the party he led. In 1870 he met with Bavarian Catholic leaders and laid plans for the representation of Catholic interests in the Reichstag. The following year their successful candidates made their entry into the Prussian Landtag and the

Reichstag. These deputies were called the "Center Fraktion" for two reasons: because of their position in the center of the Reichstag and because of their policies. They were to the right of the Liberals in questions of religion and education, but to the left of the Conservatives in questions of foreign policy, treatment of minorities, and in supremacy of the military power and state power generally.

The real victor in the clash of the Catholic Church with the German Empire has been frequently disputed. Arthur Rosenberg contends that Bismarck won his point when he drew the Center Party to the support of the government,¹ but in Center Party literature the defeat of Bismarck's program is one of the "glorious chapters" in the Center's annals. R. H. Fife expresses the opinion that it is an idle question as to whether Bismarck really carried through his program or whether like Henry IV he was forced to "go to Canossa." Fife contends that actually the Kulturkampf ended in a compromise, "because Bismarck saw that to prolong the conflict would irretrievably weaken the state, not merely in its attitude toward foreign foes, but also in its ability to deal with economic questions and meet the rising socialist danger."² Another writer sees the Kulturkampf as an invented legend which the Center Party has exploited to keep the

¹ Arthur Rosenberg, The Birth of the German Republic, 1871-1918 (London: H. Milford Ltd., 1931, trans. by Ian F. D. Morrow), p. 15. Hereafter cited as Rosenberg, Birth of the German Republic.

² Fife, German Empire, p. 204.

"good Catholics" in solid support behind the politicians of the Center.¹ Regardless of which historical interpretation one may accept, the important fact is that the Center glorified the results of the Kulturkampf as a clear-cut victory for political Catholicism over Prussian attempts to limit the sphere of the Church. Whether the Kulturkampf was a myth or a grave conflict, the majority of Germany's Catholics were convinced that the rights of the Church were threatened and that the existence of a political party to represent Catholic interests was essential to the security of the Church. Johannes Schauff's important statistical study upon the support given the Center Party by Germany's Catholics reveals a decided fluctuation in the loyalty afforded it from 1871 to 1924.² In 1871, 57.2 per cent of German Catholics supported the Center; in 1874, 83 per cent; in 1881, 86.3 per cent; but by 1912, the percentage had dropped to 54 per cent. In 1924, the percentage of Catholic men voting for the Center was 51.8. Schauff's statistics clearly indicate the willingness of the German Catholics to support the Church when it was in danger, but to grow indifferent when the

¹Bernhard Menne, The Case of Dr. Brüning (London: Hutchinson and Company, Ltd., trans. by E. Fitzgerald), p. 10. Hereafter cited as Menne, Dr. Brüning.

²See Johannes Schauff, Die deutschen Katholiken und die Zentrums-
partei, eine politisch-statistische Untersuchung der Reichstagswahl
seit 1871 (Cologne: Bachem Verlag, 1928). Unfortunately Schauff's
statistics only cover the elections from 1871 until 1924; Emil Ritter,
a prominent Catholic publicist, reports that Schauff estimated that
by 1928 only 39 per cent of Catholics eligible to vote voted for the
Center. Emil Ritter, Der Weg des politischen Katholizismus in Deutsch-
land (Breslau: Bergstadt Verlag, 1934), p. 245; for a more readily
available account of how Germany's Catholics voted see John B. Mason,
"How the Center Party Votes," Commonweal, XII (1930) 574-576. The
title of Mr. Mason's article should read, "How the German Catholic's
Vote."

threat lessened. The Center recognized this fact and continued to warn the Catholic electorate throughout its history of another possible Kulturkampf.

After Bismarck had concluded negotiations with the Vatican to the satisfaction of both parties, the intransigent leaders of the Center still were not appeased. Bismarck had completely ignored them to negotiate directly with the curia. The leadership of the Center was principally drawn from the Westphalian, Bavarian, and Rhineland gentry. Their interests were primarily agrarian. They were autocratic, patriarchal and remained rigidly conservative until the threat of the Social Democratic Party among the Catholic workingmen caused them to alter their policies, if not their sentiments.

In its social composition the Center during the period of the Kulturkampf as in the time of the Weimar Republic was heterogeneous. The supporters of the Center were united in their opposition to the militaristic and autocratic Prussian centralism and to the middle class. "The priest and the nobleman no less than the peasant and the workman had in common nothing to gain by furthering the middle class capitalist evolution in the cities"¹ But above all economic and particularist ties the religious motive was and continued to be the excuse for the existence of the Center Party.

The alliance of the Center and the Conservatives which resulted

¹ Rosenberg, Birth of the German Republic, p. 10.

from the Kulturkampf¹ caused Bismarck to order protective measures established for the agrarian class. The leadership of the Center was thus converted to the tariff policies of Bismarck. This was a fundamental change in the policy of the Center. As long as Bismarck was in office, however, the Center under Windthorst's leadership fought centralization of the Reich under Prussian leadership, militarism and state interference in educational and religious affairs. In 1887, long after peace had been concluded, the Center fought tooth and nail against the Septennat, a bill providing military supplies for seven years. They also opposed any anti-Polish moves of Prussia and were stout defenders of any persecuted Catholic minority within the German Empire.

Time healed the wounds of the Kulturkampf. With the passing of Bismarck there was a decided change. William II soon showed himself desirous of winning the affection of his Roman Catholic subjects. He was careful to soothe points of irritation. He founded a Catholic theological faculty in the Strasburg university and made several personal gifts to the Church. On the occasion of his visit to Jerusalem he presented the celebrated Dormitio Mariae to the

¹The new laws for the secularization of the schools and the introduction of civil marriage were equally offensive to the Protestant Church and to its temporal right arm, the Conservative Party. Bismarck's alliance with the Liberals and the threat of parliamentarianism were additional stimuli to a Center-Conservative alliance, a partnership which recurred again during the Weimar Republic when the Center turned to the German Nationalist Party to gain aid for a new school law.

Catholics there.¹ In general he showed a very fair and tactful consideration of the rights and sensibilities of the German Catholic population which belied his diplomacy in foreign affairs.

Caprivi and Hohenlohe, Bismarck's successors, regarded the Center with much greater favor than Bismarck had.² Hohenlohe, who was himself a Catholic of liberal views, and Caprivi both made alliances with the Center. In 1895 a delegate of the Center was chosen President of the Reichstag, and for twelve years representatives of the party presided over the national parliament.

With the death of Windthorst and the passing of the old Center leaders particularism weakened considerably. A Kamburg tea merchant, Lieber, became the new leader of the Center. The vision of a greater Germany had penetrated all parties and the Center was no exception. Lieber was an enthusiastic supporter of Germany's colonial aspirations and a great friend of the Kaiser's Big-Navy policy. He believed in expansion in the army and navy and forced expansion abroad. On domestic policies he favored the "dear bread" policy of the agrarians.

¹ For an interesting account of the Kaiser's "crusade" and a complete explanation of his motives see William L. Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1935), II 637-639.

² In a speech at Jena on July 31, 1892, Bismarck said: "I consider the Center as an enemy to the country in its tendency even if not in all its members. There are plenty of good Germans amongst them, but the general tendency is such that I consider them as a danger to the country. If the Government were to choose its authoritative advisors from the Center Party and formulate its policy so as to please the Center, a procedure which can have no lasting stability, it would be a misfortune for the Fatherland." Rosenbergs, Birth of the German Republic, p. 30n.

In a period of twenty years the Center had completely altered its role from that of an opposition party to become a loyal supporter of the Empire. The policies which the Center had once condemned were made possible by its votes after 1890.

There were other changes in the Center also. The party was forced to democratize to retain its working class voters. The Social Democratic Party was making rapid inroads into the predominantly Catholic industrial regions of the Ruhr and the cities of the Rhineland. Cities, like Munich, Cologne, Düsseldorf, and Mainz had become largely Social Democratic by 1907.¹ Among the Catholic miners in the Ruhr, and among the Catholic workmen's organizations which had their center at Munich-Gladbach, the Social Democrats met with stiffer resistance. These two regions remained the heart of the Christian Trade Unions until 1933. Thus, agrarian interests and religion were no longer enough to insure the votes of the Roman Catholic peasants of Southern Germany or of Catholic workmen.

The Papal Encyclical, Rerum Novarum, which was issued in 1891, was the Vatican green light to organize Catholic unions, but sympathetic priests and the Center Party had prepared the way for the new social policies of the Church.

Following the lead of Bishop von Ketteler the Center Party worked for the amelioration of the lot of the laboring classes nearly two decades before the famous Labor Ency-

¹ In the 1907 elections, Cologne, an overwhelming Catholic city, had its ballots distributed in this manner: Socialists, 15,000; Center, 17,000; National Liberal, 10,000. Anonymous, "The Victory of the German Center Party," Dublin Review, OXL (1907), p. 374

lical was issued by Pope Leo XIII, which in fact sounded like a solemn approval of the Centrist's Program.¹

Competition with the Social Democratic and the Independent Trade Unions often forced the Catholic organizations to lay special emphasis upon their differences with the Social Democrats. This rivalry for the laboring man's vote never ceased. The Christian Trade Unions appealed to the religious duty of the Catholic workingman to repudiate the "Godless" Social Democrats, and during the Weimar Republic the Social Democratic unions generally referred to the Christian unions as the "scab unions." Nevertheless, they had much in common. Their fundamental common enmity for Prussianism and capitalism brought them together. Although as a party the Center was not affected by the Prussian three-class suffrage system, the Catholic workingmen were, and they backed up the Social Democrats with their fullest sympathy and support.

The opposition of the Catholic workingmen to their traditional leadership found expression in a group of liberal and more youthful leaders who did not approve of the tactics of the die-hard party leaders, and in a group of social reformers who were motivated by the Social Catholic Movement. The outstanding figure among the Center's left wing was a brash young journalist, Matthias Erzberger.² As the other Center leaders he was guilty of compromising with the Prussian

¹ Frances S. Betten, "The Catholic Church in Contemporary Germany," Catholic Historical Review, XVII (1931), 423.

² Infra, pp. 81-85, 96-99.

government to eke out concessions for his party and his Church, but he also was capable of attacking the government with great effectiveness and with complete lack of scruples when the political situation called for resistance. In the immediate years before the World War he appeared to be the only figure in politics who would be capable of welding the left wing of the Center, the Social Democrats and the Progressives into a moderate coalition.

During the reign of William II there was only one incident of any importance in which the Center risked its "national reputation" to oppose the government. In 1906 a conflict arose between Bülow and the Center over certain minor questions of personnel policies in the Colonial Service. It was not a question of principles but an argument over the distribution of political spoils. A few minor concessions to the Center would have placated it, but the Bülow government in common with other Empire cabinets, was not willing to admit the slightest Reichstag control. The Center was piqued by the rejection of its request and combined with the Social Democrats to veto a part of the financial estimate for the defense force in South-West Africa. The dispute ballooned to much greater proportions than it merited when a native revolt occurred in the region where the funds were to be allocated. The Center refused to be swayed even by "national interest" in this instance, and Ersberger took the opportunity to attack the distressing inefficiencies of the Colonial Administration. The result of the defeat of the government's measure was the dissolution of the Reichstag and the elections of 1907.

Many Catholic authors and publications have pictured the Center as the champion of peace, the working man and liberal government during the immediate pre-war period. There is little to justify this contention. The Center on the contrary was generally nationalistic, conservative and a strong supporter of a system of government which was a mockery of constitutional monarchy.¹ In 1907, an excellent opportunity was given the Center to merge with the Social Democrats and to force the government toward a representative government, but the Center declined such a step and with almost pathetic eagerness seized the first opportunity to return to its peculiar position in support but not as an active member in the government. For its loyal support of the German Empire the Center received very little in material reward. Occasionally a minor bureaucratic post or a figure-head Reichstag position was given the Center, but its "spoils" were paltry. This dumb obedience to a government which

¹ That the earlier view of Bismarck's toward the Center's loyalty to Germany had been dispelled is shown in the following quotation. The late leader of the Free Conservatives, Herr von Kardorff, said on April 13, 1904, "We cannot say that the gentlemen of the Center have pursued an Ultramontane policy with us to any extent. No, Gentlemen, they have been German and National in helping us to restore the German National Defense, they have been German and National in the Colonial policy which they have inaugurated in unison with us, and finally they have carried out a German and National policy in supporting the Customs Tariff, which restored to agriculture those rights of which she was robbed in the days of Caprivi, whose loss has been answerable for the distress which prevails even in our time." The following day Bülow echoed these words, "I thoroughly endorse all Herr von Kardorff has said about the praiseworthy cooperation of the Center in great national questions." Anonymous, "The Victory of the German Center Party," Dublin Review, CXL (1907), 374.

ignored its loyalty is difficult to understand but regrettably true. One can only conclude that the Center as a party favored the system of government under William II and espoused its policies.

In 1912, the Center lost heavily in the elections while the Social Democrats gained enormously.¹ Undoubtedly the Center lost its votes to the Social Democrats for its domestic and foreign policies as evidenced in the Reichstag, if not in its "official programs," were very similar to the Rightist policies. A Centrist reactionary, Peter Spahn, was elected president of the Reichstag after the 1912 election in a move by the Conservatives to avoid embarrassing the Kaiser by electing a socialist to that august but impotent position.

The following year the Center joined the Social Democrats and the other parties, with the exception of the intransigent reactionaries of the Conservative Party, in censuring the action of the military in the "Zabern Affair" which had aroused a storm of protest from the nation. A Centrist leader, Fehrenbach, later Reichs chancellor during the Republic, delivered the most effective attack upon the military regime. It has been claimed, even by the socialist historian, Arthur Rosenberg, that the "Zabern Affair" was conclusive proof that the Center could not resist any great mass movement in opposition to the

¹ At the elections of 1907 the number of recorded votes rose to 11,263,000. The Social Democrats received 3,259,000 and the Center 2,180,000. At the elections of 1912, 12,208,000 votes were registered. The Social Democrats rose to 4,250,000 while the Center sank to 1,997,000. Rosenberg, Birth of the German Republic, p. 69n.

government, and that in times of crisis Prussian Conservatives and the Prussian governmental system could not rely upon the support of the Center.¹ Actually the "Zabern Affair" was too clear-cut a case to judge the Center's character. No party with any degree of political realism would have defended the military in the "Zabern Affair."

The World War proved to be the acid test for the future of the Center Party and determined its role in the early years of the Weimar Republic. The pre-war period had witnessed the gradual evolution of the Center from an opposition role to that of a loyal partner with William II. Within the Center there were groups which had grown in importance with the great increase of Christian Trade Unions after 1891. The old oligarchy which guided the Center's destinies for four decades had lost its grip upon the party by 1914. A group of political strategists within the party whose headquarters was at Cologne had already enforced interconfessional provisions in the Center as well as in the CTU² in an effort to create a great non-Socialist Christian party.³ Their efforts to form a Conservative-

¹ Rosenberg, Birth of the German Republic, p. 57-58.

² Hereafter the Christian Trades Unions will generally be abbreviated to CTU.

³ The Cologne group, which was headed by Julius Bachem and included Peter Spahn and other prominent Centrist leaders, sought to fashion a truly political party supported by Christians, conservatives and nationalists; and they denied that the Center was purely a confessional party devoted solely to the protection of a Kultur program.

National-Christian Party were later to be seen in the post-war years, especially in the schemes of Adam Stegerwald, the chairman of the CTU. But the story of the Center's role in the First World War must be told to illustrate its role in the Weimar Republic after 1919, for its character was brought into bold relief by the events which occurred between August 1914, and November 1918.

CHAPTER II

THE CENTER PARTY'S ROLE IN THE WORLD WAR

When the Reichstag was confronted with the facts of war on August 4, 1914, those facts were "accomplished facts." Among the evidence presented in 1928 by a Reichstag investigating committee into the causes of Germany's collapse was the testimony of a Centrist leader, Johannes Bell. Bell's report substantiated other Reichstag members' testimony.¹ The political parties had not been consulted; their leaders were ignorant of the urgency of the political situation. From August 1 to August 4, 1914 the Reichstag had not been in session, but once the Reichstag was convened it voted unanimously the necessary war credits, agreed on the Burgfrieden² and then for all practical purposes retired to give the governing clique a free hand in conducting the war. A few politicians entered actively into the administration of the war effort. Erzberger was asked to form a government propaganda agency and to direct the flow of propaganda to neutral countries.³ The majority

¹ Rosenberg, Birth of the German Republic, p. 69n.

² The Burgfrieden was the political truce agreed upon by the political parties whereby they agreed not to criticize each other or the government.

³ The Supreme Command undertook the direction of their own propaganda bureau after July 1917.

of the Center's representatives, however, continued to perform the same hollow parliamentary and bureaucratic activities which had occupied them before the war.

During the first two and one-half years of the war the Center supported the war vigorously. It proved that it was "German and National" during the war as it had been in supporting a large navy and the expansion of the Empire. There were rabid annexationists among the center as among the other parties. Peter Spahn was a prominent annexationist, and Professor Martin Spahn was a fiery chauvinist.¹ Erzberger, the leader of the left wing, was an unblushing jingoist and a brash spokesman for German expansionists. He formulated the policy of the victorious peace as well as the Center's declaration of October 16, 1916, which legalized the dictatorship of the Supreme Command.² His ambitions for a victorious Germany were prompted by varied interests: iron ore for the industries of Thyssen,³ more Catholics to increase the influence of the Center and the common desire of all German nationalists, a greater and more powerful Reich.

Characteristically, the Center Party never flatly stated its

¹ Martin Spahn, who changed his affiliation to the Nationalist Party during the Weimar Republic, also published a Pan-German pamphlet in May 1915, entitled, Im Kampf um unsere Zukunft, which the Dublin Review says out-does Bernhardi, "alike in the general immorality of its principles, and in its application of them to the particular circumstances of the present war." Anonymous, "German Catholics and the War," Dublin Review, CLVIII (1916), 23.

² Infra, p. 19, note 3.

³ Infra, p. 26, note 2.

war aims.¹ Its aims were couched in veiled generalities, but they subscribed to the war aims of the Conservatives, of the industrialists and of Ludendorff until the Peace Resolution of 1917 caused a new party alliance in the Reichstag and a modification of the Center's war aims. Until July 1917, the traditional conservative leadership of the Center still controlled its party policies, and the discipline of the party allowed no insurgents.² But the Peace Resolution coupled with the discontent of the Catholic masses overthrew the old leadership and rallied the majority of the Center electorate to the leadership of Erzberger and the war aims of the Socialists. "The question of war aims broke the unity of the Center."³ Henceforth the left wing of the Center controlled the party's policies although the conservatives continued largely to nullify any liberal tendencies derived from the Christian Trade Unions. Thus, the distress and suffering among the majority of the Center electorate forced the Center to undertake and support reforms which were directly opposed to the ideas of the conservative leadership and to their interests. Erzberger capitalized on this discontent and directed the Center

¹ See for example the speech of Dr. Peter Spahn in Ralph Haswell Lutz, ed., Fall of the German Empire (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1932) I, 206. Hereafter cited as Lutz, Fall of the German Empire.

² While the "Program of the Center Party of the German Reichstag" allowed the individual party member to vote "otherwise than has been settled in party meeting" the discipline of the party has been notable. See Matthias Erzberger, The German Centre Party (Amsterdam: International Catholic Publishing Company, 1911), p. 17.

³ Rosenberg, Birth of the German Republic, p. 106.

toward the domestic policies as well as the war aims of the Social Democrats.

The Center was also divided on the question of "unrestricted U-boat warfare." Generally the Center's conservative leadership favored unrestricted submarine warfare as necessary to conclude the victorious peace which it desired. Erzberger stood virtually alone in his opposition to unrestricted submarine warfare. Before 1917, and afterward, Erzberger was a consistent opponent. Baron von Hertling expressed the conservative Center's viewpoint in a speech to the Bavarian Landtag on February 1, 1917.

As for unrestricted U-boat warfare, the people are wrong to expect that America's attitude will be one of indifference, but the time for weighing pros and cons is over now There is only one possibility of a speedy and successful end of the war, and that is the ruthless prosecution of the U-boat campaign, which the chancellor today supports just as strongly as the High Command.¹

Peter Spahn in attempting to define the Center Party's official attitude toward the question gave tacit support to unrestricted submarine warfare in a speech on February 27, 1917.² He referred the Reichstag to the Center's declaration on submarine warfare, presented in October 1916, which not only gave support to a "ruthless submarine campaign" but legitimized the dictatorship of Ludendorff as well.³ Spahn

¹ Lutz, Fall of the German Empire, II, 283.

² Ibid., II, 287.

³ "The Imperial Chancellor is solely responsible to the Reichstag for all political decisions in connection with the war. In taking his decisions the Imperial Chancellor must rely upon the views of the Supreme Command. If it is decided to initiate a ruthless submarine campaign, the Imperial Chancellor can be certain of the agreement of the Reichstag."

typically qualified the Center's policy with a tender regard for international law which belied an earlier speech of his in the Reichstag on the Belgium question.¹ Erzberger's objections were realistic not moralistic. He was convinced Germany must not goad the United States into war by ruthlessly attacking her shipping, and he was equally certain Wilson would have used his good offices to negotiate a peace,² but more basic was his statistical proof³ that the U-boat was failing to halt the flow of war material to Britain and France.⁴ As a result of his opposition to the Supreme Command, Erzberger's propaganda bureau was supplanted by one more directly controlled by the military; but strangely enough he continued to maintain good relations with the navy chiefs.⁵

By July of 1917, it was apparent the submarine campaign had not

¹ Dr. Spahn's concern with international law was illustrated in his speech to the Reichstag in the spring of 1916: "Peace aims must be power aims. We must change Germany's frontiers according to our own judgment Belgium must remain in German hands politically, militarily, and economically." Quoted in Menne, Dr. Brüning, p. 13.

² Lutz, Fall of the German Empire, I, 440.

³ Erzberger proved that the Supreme Command had been basing its claims for success of the U-boat warfare only on British shipping losses. He contended that this was an entirely false procedure since the Allies controlled most of the world's shipping tonnage and were actually employing it. He therefore proved that the elaborate claims of the Admiralty in regards to the U-boat warfare were deceitful and were misrepresenting the true picture of German chances for victory.

⁴ See Scheidemann's account of Erzberger's speech and its effect in the Committee Meeting. Philipp Scheidemann, The Making of New Germany; the Memoirs of Philipp Scheidemann (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1929, trans. by J. E. Mitchell), I, 246. Hereafter cited as Scheidemann, Memoirs.

⁵ Anonymous, "Matthias Erzberger," Contemporary Review, CXX (1921), 455-460.

fulfilled the promises of the Supreme Command. It had become clear that England would not sue for peace in July or August as had been assured and the Russian Revolution had not brought a collapse of the Russian armies but a vigorous counteroffensive. Disappointment, failure, increasing slaughter at the fronts and increasing economic distress at home created the setting for the dramatic presentation of the Peace Resolution of July 1917.

For the immediate background of the Resolution it is necessary to trace the steps of the roving Reichstag representative, Matthias Erzberger. In the spring of 1917, he had made a trip to the headquarters of the Eastern front with von Richthofen, a member of the National Liberal Party. General Hoffmann, chief of staff to the Bavarian Prince Leopold, informed Erzberger of the true condition of the German armies and their chances of victory. Erzberger who was much better informed regarding the military situation than most Reichstag members was amazed by the disclosures of Hoffmann. He returned to Berlin determined to bring the war to a conclusion before it was too late to save the German Reich of 1914. In addition, Erzberger had known since June of a coming attempt of the Pope to mediate between the belligerents. He could thus not only serve the Fatherland but Catholicism as well by forming a Reichstag majority to express the war aims of the German people and the conditions whereby peace might be negotiated. There was still another immediate cause for the Peace Resolution, the Czernin report.¹ This

¹ See Czernin's Memorandum, April 12, 1917. Lutz, Fall of the German Empire, I, 408.

document which confessed the hopelessness of further Austrian participation in the war fell into the hands of Erzberger.¹ Soon after Erzberger's return from Vienna he read the report to a group of Center Party delegates at Frankfurt. The news soon leaked out of Center Party circles and shortly reached the Allied governments in Switzerland.

On July 5, 1917, Erzberger, at a meeting of party representatives formulated the demands which were later generalized into the vague Peace Resolution. Erzberger demanded in substance the immediate cessation of war; otherwise, he argued, the last stages would be frightful.² The following day he made a speech to the Reichstag which had great historical significance.³ It was in this speech that he repudiated the statistics of the Supreme Command on Allied shipping losses. He asked the Reichstag to withdraw its support from those who were conducting the government because of their deceit. He also outlined the growing economic distress in Germany, protested against the censorship of the press⁴ and warned the Kaiser to take

¹ Von Bülow says, ". . . it is almost proved that the Duchess of Parma . . . showed a special copy of it to Erzberger . . ." Prince Bernhard von Bülow, Memoirs of Prince von Bülow (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1932, trans. by Geoffrey Dunlop), III, 299. Hereafter cited as von Bülow, Memoirs; Erzberger later refused to tell who gave him the copy of the report. See Lutz, Fall of the German Empire, I, 142.

² See Scheidemann's account of Erzberger's speech in Scheidemann, Memoirs, II, 25-28.

³ For the text of Erzberger's speech see Lutz, Fall of the German Empire, II, 262-266.

⁴ In July of 1914, Erzberger had suggested in an article to Der Tag that the irresponsible editors of the Social Democratic organ Vorwärts, be arrested as a precautionary means. Scheidemann, Memoirs, I, 210.

note of the Czar's fate -- urging him to reassume the reins of the government. He concluded with the following statement:

I repeat: Can we obtain a more advantageous peace later on? Our colonies are in English hands, Mesopotamia is English! We are not able even to make it possible for merchant ships of the external world to enter our ports. Should we not then come to an agreement in order to tell the government that we are ready to make peace on the basis of 1914? During the war of 1870-71, Bismarck tried three times to obtain an armistice, with the end in view of entering into peace negotiations. He tried to seize every opportunity; no one accuses him of weakness. Moreover, no one can accuse us of being feeble because we extend our hand. I have spoken frankly; I should like to see one who can prove my conclusions are wrong. Until then, I hold them valid.¹

On July 19, 1917, the Peace Resolution² was presented to the Reichstag by Fehrenbach, the president of the Reichstag and a member of the Center. He also presented the Center's official interpretation of the Resolution which appeared to alter the original intentions of Erzberger considerably.

It does not interfere in that which is the business of the Government; it makes no peace offer to the enemy Governments; it is the business of the Government to decide as to the time and precise circumstances for that. What it undertakes today is only a peace demonstration. It affirms the readiness of its own people for peace, and solemnly invites enemy nations to let themselves be animated by the same willingness for peace. Its intention is a peace of understanding³

¹ Lutz, Fall of the German Empire, II, 266.

² For the text of the Peace Resolution see Ibid., 282.

³ Ibid., p. 283.

On July 24, 1917, the Imperial Committee of the Center Party unanimously supported a "peace of understanding and compromise which guarantees Germany's security and freedom of economic development" Fehrenbach explained that this pronouncement, although differently phrased demanded the same things as the Peace Resolution.¹ In the same speech, in commenting on the question of autonomy for Alsace-Lorraine, Fehrenbach demonstrated that the Center was not willing to go that far in extending the hand of peace. The treaty of compromise did not involve the loss of an inch of German territory.

Erzberger's attack on the Supreme Command on July 5 had been a complete surprise to the conservative "old guard" of the Center. Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg and the Supreme Command were amazed at the subversive charges of the Center leader, but Erzberger's party was probably even more surprised. A Center organ, the Kölnische Volkszeitung, reported that his attack had caused ". . . a far-reaching and immediate orientation in internal as well as external affairs . . ." but emphasized that his remarks were made without the foreknowledge of the Center Party. Dr. Peter Spahn was quoted as saying that the Center Party had not yet officially defined its attitude toward the remarks of Erzberger.² The following day the Center still had not settled the revolt of the Erzberger-led left

¹ Ibid., pp. 290-291

² Ibid., p. 275.

wing and declined comment on its reaction to the new turn of events brought about by Erzberger's charges.¹

The results of the internal rupture in the Center were more lasting than the innocuous generalities finally accepted by the Supreme Command as the Peace Resolution. Even Erzberger's remarks on July 5, and his speech on July 6, contained familiar Socialist aims and criticisms. His only original charge was the repudiation of the Admiralty statistics, but as Scheidemann admits the Socialists alone were incapable of forcing the Reichstag's hand in a bid for peace.² Erzberger's acceptance of Socialist war aims and his capture of the Center Party from conservative leadership provided a working majority for the advocates of a peace without annexations and without indemnities.

Although the Peace Resolution is generally considered to have been the work of Erzberger, he was not a participant in the group which drew up the resolution. "Dr. David did most of the work,³ helped by a Democrat and a member of the Center It reached its final touches in the garden of the Home Office in the Wilhelmstrasse, with Ludendorff's assistance."⁴ Hindenburg considered it too weak and thought it would have a bad effect upon the army, but neither Ludendorff nor Hindenburg considered blocking the resolution completely for fear of creating a true parliamentary Reichstag. Erz-

¹ Ibid.

² Scheidemann, Memoirs, II, 24.

³ Dr. David was a prominent Social Democrat.

⁴ Scheidemann, Memoirs, II, 29.

berger erred gravely in not seizing the moment to denounce the dictatorship of the Supreme Command in forthright terms. Instead he adopted the traditional circuitous criticism of the Center. He failed again when he neglected to convert the newly formed majority of the Reichstag into a true parliamentary government. The National Liberal, von Richthofen, urged him along this path but he declined. He felt that his first duty was to the demands of the common people and that parliamentary government could wait.¹ Erzberger was a realist. He was inordinately ambitious, but he declined to move from the customary position of the Center -- a foot in each camp. He certainly had no illusions about the effect the Peace Resolution would have upon the enemy powers,² but skillfully estimated its effect in Germany and based his bid for power within the Center upon the demand for peace among the Catholic peasants and working men.

The parties which favored the Peace Resolution, together with the Supreme Command, forced Bethmann-Hollweg from office. The Reichstag majority demanded a chancellor who would accept the Peace Reso-

¹Rosenberg, Birth of the German Republic, p. 170.

²Max of Baden relates in his Memoirs an interview with Erzberger regarding the Peace Resolution in which Erzberger remarked, "You see, your Highness, this way I get Longwy-Briey by means of negotiations." Prince Max of Baden, The Memoirs of Prince Max of Baden, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928, trans. by W. M. Calder), II, 159. Erzberger before the World War had been one of the directors of the Catholic Industrialist, August Thyssen. Bernhard Menn says ". . . on behalf of these interests, Erzberger was one of those who called for the annexation of French iron deposits of Briey" Menn, The Case of Dr. Brüning, p. 13. Erzberger's relationship with the Thyssen Industries is clarified below. See Infra, p. 81.

lution as the basis for the government's war aims; while the Supreme Command wanted a chancellor without ideas of strength or originality. Erzberger and the Center desired Bulow¹ but he was completely unacceptable to William II. An unknown Prussian bureaucrat, Michaelis, finally was chosen by the Supreme Command, but even this nonentity was capable of dealing the Peace Resolution its death blow,² although for all practical purposes it was stillborn. It was apparent the Supreme Command was not to be shaken from its position by talk and resolutions and that the Reichstag majority was too servile to the military to lead the nation it represented.

The final collapse of Russia brought embarrassing problems to the parties which had voted for the Peace Resolution. They had all supported the Eastern policy of Brethmann-Hellweg which contemplated the creation of Poland, Lithuania and Courland as independent or partially dependent states. These aims were obviously in contrast to a peace without annexations, but the Center was equal to the occasion. With characteristic casuistry Erzberger explained the Center's attitude on the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk:

We warmly welcome the Russian peace . . . since it is within the limits of the Peace Resolution. In the Eastern border countries it is only police troops that are to remain, and we intend to withdraw them as soon as possible.

¹ For Bulow's estimate of Erzberger see von Bulow, Memoirs, III, 233-235.

² By qualifying the Peace Resolution in his opening speech to the Reichstag with the famous "as I understand it" phrase, Michaelis betrayed the Reichstag majority. See Scheidemann, Memoirs, II, 41.

We have not marched in the East against a defenseless people, but have simply answered many calls for help¹

Another Center leader, Groeber,² further explained the Center's attitude:

Peace negotiations after such a struggle are not a kind of academic discussion . . . if one party has not the moral courage to recognize its position and the consequences of it, the other must come to the rescue and show it exactly the lines on which it must act. That was done, and thus we obtained peace. If it is not a peace of understanding, the Bolsheviks are to blame There is not a single provision that can be regarded as hard or unjust.³ There is not a single annexation in the whole treaty. All the fault that can be found is, perhaps, in the alienation of important, great and productive portions of territory⁴

It is not necessary to quote further to illustrate the Center's stand on the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, nor is it necessary to point out the shallowness of Center morality.

The collapse of Russia had once again strengthened the Center's faith in the Supreme Command. The Treaty of Bucharest with Rumania was approved unanimously by the Center. Erzberger, in a speech to the Reichstag on February 27, 1918, commented upon the Rumanian Treaty in the following manner: "Rumania has acted as a disloyal traitor to us, and must pay for it."⁵ The Center also heartily

¹ Lutz, Fall of the German Empire, II, 344.

² Groeber was the first Chairman of the Center's Reichstag "Fraktion."

³ "Russia was deprived by the treaty of an area nearly as large as Austria-Hungary and Turkey combined; of fifty-six million inhabitants; of a third of her railway mileage; 79 per cent of her iron and 89 per cent of her coal production." A. J. P. Taylor, The Course of German History (New York: Coward-McCann, 1946), p. 177.

⁴ Lutz, Fall of the German Empire, I, 789-791.

⁵ Ibid., I, 344.

approved of the treaty negotiated with the Ukraine.¹ Groeber saw it as the " . . . foundation . . . for the peace treaties to come"² He did object to the fact that General Hoffmann signed the treaty in the name of the government instead of in the name of the Supreme Command, and he also objected to Chelm being given to the Ukraine instead of Poland. In Groeber's concluding remarks he contributed a typical Center touch to an otherwise political statement. He called for protection of the Catholics in the Ukraine. "Guarantees must be created for the Catholic population. The Ukraine has appealed to us for help against the Bolsheviks, who devastated it; this opportunity must be turned to account to afford these guarantees to the Catholics"³

Brest-Litovsk, the Treaty of Bucharest and the treaty with the Ukraine, while soothing the Reichstag majority failed to bring peace to the German population whose difficulties increased day by day. Erzberger, always aware of the wants of the peasants and workers, resumed the offensive against the Supreme Command.⁴

. . . . I give place to none in love of our great German Fatherland, but I do not shut my eyes to anything which adds to the burdens of our people To reproach me with enmity to the military is a deliberate misconstruction of my intentions, which aim no less at the greatness of the German Empire and at bringing about an honorable, lasting peace which will secure Germany's

¹ Ibid., I, 826-827.

² Ibid., I, 826.

³ Ibid., I, 827.

⁴ For Erzberger's "offensive" against the Supreme Command eastern policy see Ibid., pp. 852-858.

cultural, political and economic future than do those of any one of my open and secret adversaries.¹

Erzberger might deny his opposition but nevertheless the opposition rallied behind his stubby awkward figure. The period which Stresemann dubbed "the Erzberger era" was dawning. Already the campaign of hate against him was growing among the extreme right in the Fatherland Party. In a speech on February 27, 1918, he related the common rumors circulating about his opposition activities.

In Vaterlands-Partei leaflets it is asserted that the Ministry of War put 28 million marks at my disposal to do what I liked with. I had only to fill out the check. And that sort of thing was believed! It was asserted that in May, 1917, I went to Rome dressed as a monk, had a conversation with the Holy Father, and traveled back to Berlin via Vienna and Munich -- that was how the humiliating Peace Resolution came about²

In the same speech he opposed the rabid annexationists of the Fatherland Party who desired to annex Belgium following Brest-Litovsk. He also explained the Center's new alliance with the Socialists.

We know the contrasting world views on both sides. We have no illusions about that He would be a bad statesman who was willing to let slip the opportunity presented to him of incorporating in the state organism the millions of the working class who have put themselves outside the state Anyone who in these days sacrifices his own views and cooperates with the Social-Democrats is pursuing a conservative policy in the best sense of the word. Anyone who wants to alienate the Socialist working masses is pursuing the most radical-anarchistic policy imaginable³

The Prussian franchise question had been used through three and

¹ Ibid., p. 858.

² Ibid., II, 347-348.

³ Ibid., p. 349.

one-half years of the war as a convenient medium for socialists, liberals and reactionaries to air their professions of good will to the electorate in varying degrees. Center conservatives such as Peter Spahn and von Hertling had made eloquent addresses in favor of reform of the franchise, but Erzberger's words probed the well of discontent and echoed the sentiments of the people.

Our soldiers no longer ask for words; they want rights. They marched out under the three-class franchise, and they do not want to return under a six-class franchise If peace does not come now, our people will have to endure much. We cannot give them more food than there is, but we can give them freedom for their political views and in the exercise of their religious duties.¹

By November, 1917, it was apparent that Michaelis was incapable of the task of the chancellorship even as a figure head. The candidate finally approved by the Supreme Command and the Kaiser was the Bavarian Premier, Baron von Hertling, an experienced Center politician, but aged and ailing.² Although von Hertling first consulted the party leaders before accepting the office³ he viewed the chancellorship in the Bismarckian tradition. In lieu of the Emperor he considered himself responsible to the Supreme Command. His appointment was not a sop to the Reichstag majority but entirely in line with the desires of Ludendorff and Hindenburg. His candidacy

¹ Ibid.,

² von Bülow, Memoirs, pp. 302-305.

³ Herbert Kraus, The Crisis of German Democracy, A Study of the Spirit of the Constitution of Weimar (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1932, trans. by Marguerite Wolff), pp. 38-39.

was also pressed by the Minister of the Household, Count Eulenberg, with the hope that he would succeed in breaking up the unnatural alliance between the Socialists and the Center.¹ Neither the Center nor the Social Democrats approved his choice, and the Progressives were noticeably cool to his appointment. Hausmann, a Progressive leader, considered his candidacy disastrous. He regarded Hertling as an aged clerical-conservative, and a parliamentarian rather than a statesman.² The Socialists agreed to him finally on the condition that two Progressives should be included in the cabinet.

Hertling's great prestige within the party and the traditional support the Center gave its leaders in high position threatened the newly won ascendancy of the left wing. The threat materialized in the moderating influence Hertling exercised within the Center and between the Reichstag and the Supreme Command. He was a believer in a limited monarchy -- but not a parliamentary democracy. His ideal in government was the pre-war government of Bavaria. He believed that such a form of government would transform the Socialist movement into a "National Labor Party," and therefore he welcomed the dissensions in the ranks of the Socialists. He was an advocate of the Prussian franchise reform and also protected the Reichstag from complete domination by the Supreme Command by guarding what external features of parliamentarianism remained to that body. He is also credited with preventing the military from suppressing the

¹ Prince Max, Memoirs, I, p. 161.

² See Ibid., p. 162.

working classes with military force during the strikes of January 1918. Aside from minor considerations, however, Hertling was the submissive tool of the Supreme Command in foreign affairs, and in the prosecution of the war.

His cabinet did include party men, but the resemblance to a parliamentary government ends there. Von Payer, the Progressive Party leader who represented the Reichstag majority in the cabinet failed to oppose Ludendorff on the January Strike issue, the peace negotiations at Brest-Litovsk, or the overthrow of the Foreign Minister, von Kühlmann. "The Hertling-Payer government was, in truth, no more than a constitutional cloak thrown over Ludendorff's dictatorship."¹

On June 30, 1918, the Center Party issued a new platform, a Richtlinien für die Parteilarbeit (Guiding Lines for Party Work), which distinguished itself from previous and future programs only in length.² The Social Democratic Party's Berlin organ, Vorwärts reviewed the Center's "guiding lines" in a caustic article:

Vagueness remains trump. Again appears an intended vagueness, which permits everything to the feudal landlord, does not hurt the exploiting industrialist, makes graceful bows to the middle classes, embraces the farmer, assures the worker of unchanged benevolence.³

¹ Rosenberg, Birth of the German Republic, p. 293.

² Karl Bachem, "Vorgeschichte, Geschichte und Politik der deutschen Zentrumsparlei." (Cologne: Bachem Verlag, 1932), VIII, 261-266. Hereafter cited as Bachem, Geschichte der deutschen Zentrumsparlei.

³ Lutz, Fall of the German Empire, II, 358-360.

The program of the Center was replete with such phrases as these: "Democratization and liberalization of the Constitution," "judicious distribution of the tax burden," "free road for advancement of the efficient one," "satisfactory encouragement of agriculture, trades, industry, commerce and intercourse," "the making and maintaining of a strong middle class," "the retaining of private property as an important basis of the social and economic structure." The Center avoided specific issues of suffrage and taxes, but firmly rejected the separation of Church and State. It demanded freedom of the Church, strict divorce laws and denominational schools. It also asserted that the Monarchy in union with the Reichstag was the only form of government which guaranteed popular liberty.¹

The program evaded specific post-war questions to disseminate commonplace generalities. It called for freedom of the seas, extension of the courts of arbitration, reform of the diplomatic service and other demands of this type, but nothing was said about disarmament which the Catholic Church and the Catholic Congresses had demanded. Nothing was said about the type of peace the Center desired, and no mention was made of an international body for world peace which the Center demanded after Germany's defeat. As late as June 1918, the Center was still completely loyal to the monarchy and to the German political system in its existing form. The Center was still "German and National" until it was apparent that the Empire was doomed and

¹ Six months later the Center was just as enthusiastic for democratic republic. See the party platform for December 30, 1918, *Infra.*, p. 40.

that the Center must steer a course to the left to retain its political position.

The multitude of disasters which struck Germany in the late summer of 1918 failed to arouse the Reichstag majority to overthrow the dictatorship of Ludendorff which had been staggered under the relentless combination of attack from without and collapse from within. A middle class democratic revolution might well have occurred in August rather than in October, but the majority represented by von Payer was content only to bring up the "peace with understanding" question which implied the unconditional restoration of Belgium. The Supreme Command made its decision August 27, 1918. With the collapse of the Central Powers near, Ludendorff still hedged on the Flemish question, refusing to concede any power to the Reichstag.¹

One month later, on September 27, the Reichstag was notified of the collapse of Bulgaria. This meant the loss of Rumania and Germany's petroleum supply. Ludendorff realized that Austria would soon follow Bulgaria and Rumania, and began to prepare the German government for the armistice. He decided to relinquish his dictatorship and hand over his command to the only existing authority left in Germany, the Reichstag. When he notified von Hertling of his desire for "an alteration in the Government or its reconstitution on a broader basis" von Hertling promptly resigned rather than join this volte face.² This "revolution from above" required

¹ Rosenberg, Birth of the German Republic, p. 240.

² Ibid.

a chancellor who desired a true parliamentary government but the conservative Center politician from Bavaria was unwilling to be a partner in any sort of revolt.

The next chancellor, Prince Max of Baden, formed his cabinet from the majority in the Reichstag. The three parties which comprised this majority were the Social Democrats, the Progressives and the Center. The Center was represented by Trimborn as Secretary of State for the Interior and by Groeber and Erzberger, both without portfolio. Parliamentary government had finally been obtained through the wishes of General Ludendorff.

The month of October 1918 found the Reichstag hurriedly carrying out the middle class "revolution." The Bismarckian constitution was repealed in certain necessary respects, the principle of parliamentary responsibility was established, and major changes were undertaken in the control of the armed forces and in foreign affairs. The lawyers of the Center who had always been concerned about external features of the sham parliament of the Empire were in the forefront of the attack against the system which they recently acclaimed as the "only form of Government which guaranteed popular liberty"¹ On October 26, the Reichstag completed the revision of the Constitution despite the intransigence of the Conservative Party. The groundwork had been established for the armistice by the assumption of governmental power by a people's government.

On October 24, Erzberger sided with the Socialist program and

¹ Supra, p. 34.

announced to the Reichstag that the Center Party "had unanimously declared against national defense."¹ Although Prince Max would have preferred to continue resistance, he yielded to the wishes of the majority parties. Among his ministers only Hausmann sided with him. Erzberger again emerged as the strong man of German politics, supported as he was by the sentiment of the masses. Prince Max had tried avoiding including Erzberger in the cabinet. He asked Hausmann, "Can one not do without Erzberger?" Hausmann's reply illustrates Erzberger's strength: "Only at the price of his opposition."²

Count Bernstorff confessed in his Memoirs his ignorance as to why Erzberger was chosen to "undertake the melancholy journey to Compiègne."³ It has been said he alone had courage enough to make the trip; while others have blamed his ambition or his lack of judgment. The story is related of an interview which Hindenburg had with Erzberger in which the old Marshal had begged Erzberger to make the trip. But probably it was Erzberger's enormous capacity for work and his ambition to dominate any task in which he participated which determined his leadership in the ill-fated journey to sign the armistice.

The mutiny which broke out on November 4 at Kiel had spread

¹ Rosenberg, Birth of the German Republic, p. 252.

² Anonymous, "Matthias Erzberger," Contemporary Review, CXX (1921), 460.

³ Count Johann Bernstorff, Memoirs of Count Bernstorff (New York: Random House, 1936), p. 252. Hereafter cited as Bernstorff, Memoirs.

rapidly through Germany. By November 7, the day Erzberger left at the head of the Armistice Commission for Compiègne, the revolution had swept through northwestern Germany and by November 9, it reached Berlin. While Erzberger and the Armistice Commission were attempting to resist the terms of the Allies at Compiègne, the Kaiser abdicated, Prince Max resigned and the government was entrusted to Ebert and Scheidemann had proclaimed the Republic. Under such conditions the stubborn defense shown by Erzberger and the official protest he made hardly merited the welcome he received upon his return to Germany. The abuse and insults which met his return were only the preface to the attacks which followed during the next three years. By signing the terms of Armistice, he had signed his own death warrant. A word from von Hindenburg might have absolved Erzberger, but the word was never spoken.

The Center weathered the Revolution in surprisingly good order. It was represented in the revolutionary government by Erzberger, whose willingness to cooperate with the forces of revolution profoundly influenced the destinies of the Center. But it was the menace of anti-clericalism which saved the party from disintegration. Adolf Hoffman, an Independent Socialist and Prussian Minister of Public Worship, ranks alongside Bismarck in Center literature as the arch enemy of German Catholicism. Still his fanatical outbursts were enough to solidify a party divided economically, socially and for a time geographically.

The party now assumed the name of the Christian People's Party,

in an attempt by the Center's Cologne strategists¹ to win Protestants to the Center's program. The Center avoided the issues of "monarchy or republic" until conditions settled sufficiently to see which form of government was going to prevail. The Center was indifferent to the form of government as long as Catholic rights were secured and protected,² but it clearly sided with the forces of counter revolution.³ It vigorously denounced attacks on private property and the nationalization of the means of production. It made a bid for the workingman's vote by advocating housing reform and the improvement of working conditions for laborers and peasants. Finally the Center reiterated its traditional demands for religious freedom and religious instruction in the schools.

On November 15, the leaders of the Center issued a manifesto denouncing class rule. They demanded the immediate convocation of a National Assembly. On November 30, the Center endorsed the electoral regulations for the coming election of a constitutional convention which was issued by the revolutionary government. A month later, on December 30, the Center published a statement of party

¹ The Cologne leaders of the Center, such as Julius Bachem, had initiated the entrance of Protestants into the Christian Trade Unions, and attempted to make the Center an interdenominational political party before the war.

² See A. Röder, Der Weg des Zentrums (Berlin: Germania Verlag, 1925), p. 55 and 63. Also see Friedrich Dessauer, Das Zentrum (Berlin: Pan Verlagsges, 1931), p. 11.

³ For the Communist viewpoint see Peter Maslowski, Was ist die deutsche Zentrumspartei? Klerikalismus und Proletariat (Berlin: Vereinigung Internationaler Verlags-Anstalten, 1925), p. 64.

principles¹ designed to rally the fragments of the organization which had been scattered by the Socialist government in Bavaria and the occupation of the Catholic Rhineland by the Allies. The program was also fashioned to rally new adherents to a Christian conservative policy solidly based on the protection of property, opposition to class rule, universal suffrage, and the maintenance of denominational schools. It hoped to attract the conservative Protestant vote by its religious and cultural program, the middle class vote by its respect for property and its opposition to class barriers in diplomatic and governmental positions, and the working class vote by its program of universal suffrage, civil liberties, and its plan for a league of nations and international guarantees for world peace. The program was customarily vague and non-committal, but it held out a promise for everyone who had something to gain from a non-Socialistic government.

As a political measure this pronouncement was of tremendous importance, for it served as a rallying point not only for those Catholics who opposed the excesses of the revolution, but also for other groups interested in the fight for Christian ideals of life.

The Center rapidly regained its former position in southern and western Germany. The reaction in Bavaria from Kurt Eisner's brief revolution entrenched Catholic conservatism more solidly than it had been before and the influence of the occupation armies in

¹ Bachem, Geschichte der deutschen Zentrumspartei, III, 365-369.

² Ralph Haswell Lutz, The German Revolution, 1918-1919 (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1922), p. 100. Hereafter cited as R. H. Lutz, The German Revolution.

the Rhineland actually improved the status of the Center in those areas. Christianity and Conservatism proved to be an effective appeal to a nation faced with the threat of atheism and anarchy.

CHAPTER III

THE CENTER PARTY'S INTERESTS IN THE CONSTRUCTION

OF THE WEIMAR CONSTITUTION

The Center's role in the formulation of the Weimar Constitution is significant because it illustrates the clerical, not the political character of the party. The basic interest of the Center was on questions which both the State and the Church claimed pre-eminence -- education, and the relations of Church and State. The Center was also concerned with the type of state the Reich should become, whether it should be a federal state similar to the Imperial Reich or a centralized state resembling France. The Center was the traditional defender of "state's rights" as well as the protector of religious minorities in Germany. As the second largest party in the National Assembly which met at Weimar,¹ the Center Party actively participated in all phases of the construction of the Weimar Constitution, but there was never any doubt that its primary concern was to embody in the Constitution the Kultur demands of the German Catholic Church.

The group which met at Weimar in February 1919 had as its fore-

	Seats	% Total Vote
Social Democratic Party	163	38
Center Party	89*	20
Democratic Party	74	18

* Includes 18 members of the Bavarian People's Party which were generally listed with the Center Party until January 1920. These statistics are found in S. William Halperin, Germany Tried Democracy (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1946), pp. 129-130.

most tasks to conclude the peace and to create a new constitution for Germany. The political complexion of the Weimar Assembly was nearly the same as the last Imperial Reichstag which had adjourned in October. The four months between the adjournment and the elections for the National Assembly had been consumed in a struggle between the forces of revolutionary and evolutionary socialism. The victory of evolutionary socialism -- the Social Democratic Party -- in the bloody street fighting of January 1919 guaranteed the return to political normalcy. While the German Revolution was being dissipated by the moderate politicians of the Social Democratic Party, the Center Party confined its activities to calling for a National Assembly. The Social Democratic Party agreed with the bourgeois parties that a National Assembly must be elected to insure the desires of the German people, but the motives of each party at Weimar varied considerably. The façade of republicanism and democracy could not hide the traces of monarchy and autocracy at Weimar any more than the Center's post-war program could obscure its repugnance for the Revolution and its indifference toward the creation of a Democratic republic.

The political antagonisms were apparent at once. On February 11 Ebert, the leader of the Social Democrats, was elected Provisional President of the Assembly, and on February 12 another prominent Social Democrat, Scheidemann, was appointed President of the Reichs Cabinet.¹

¹Scheidemann's Cabinet included Erzberger as Minister Without Portfolio and two other Centrists, Johannes Bell, Minister for Colonies, and Giesberts, Minister of Posts. For the Center's reaction and its motives for entering a coalition with Social Democrats see Bachem, Geschichte der deutschen Zentrumspartei, VIII, 278; Josef Joos, Die politische Ideenwelt des Zentrums (Karlsruhe: G. Braun Verlag, 1928), pp. 40-45. An edition of the Center's official party periodical, Das Zentrum, was devoted to a review of the Center's relations with the Social Democratic Party from 1918 to 1932. See Das Zentrum, 3 Jahrgang (1932), Nummer 4.

The Social Democrats then obtained the third major position when David was elected the President of the Assembly. The Center Party objected to this improper division of the "spoils," "You cannot claim all three Presidents."¹ The Social Democrats then withdrew David and Konstantin Fehrenbach, the former President of the Imperial Reichstag, was chosen as the presiding officer of the National Assembly.

The parliamentary designations of "right," "center," and "left" were clearly defined in the meeting at Weimar. The former Conservative Party was now known as the German Nationalist Party, but it was still the party of big landed proprietors, large manufacturers and the protector of Protestant clerical interests. The Nationalists were in favor of the restoration of the monarchy but they had announced that they would accept a parliamentary monarchy. Economically the Nationalists saw no need to alter the system which had existed under the Empire and they were vehemently opposed to the slightest concession to socialism. The purpose of the Nationalists Party at Weimar was to preserve the old regime, to maintain the dominance of Prussia in the Empire and to combat the leftist trends of the Assembly at every opportunity.

The National Liberal Party had changed its name to the German People's Party in the hope of attracting a wider following to its businessman's program. It likewise favored the monarchy, but its primary concern was not the form of government to be established

¹ Philipp Scheidemann, The Making of New Germany; the Memoirs of Philipp Scheidemann (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1929, trans. by J. E. Michell), II, 293-296.

but the guarantee of conditions that were conducive to business development and profit. The German People's Party contained strong nationalistic sentiments and refused to accept a peace which would not secure the economic prosperity of Germany. It was more realistic than the Nationalists, however, and saw that it was necessary to placate and pacify the German workingman. It was democratic only in the sense that it opposed social barriers against the middle class, and liberal only in terms of laissez-faire liberalism.

To the left of center, the old Progressive Party had changed its name to the Democratic Party. It had received recruits from the left wing of the National Liberals, but it still stood for its former program. It represented classic liberalism and possessed all the virtues and weaknesses of doctrinaire liberalism. It was a party of great men, but with little true popular following. It contained men trained in political science and able to construct a liberal constitution; therefore, its role during the Assembly was very important. It was nationalistic and capitalistic, but sincerely republican.

The Social Democratic Party was the largest group in the National Assembly. It was accustomed to an opposition role and was not prepared by talent nor temperament to lead the Assembly although it contributed the first three chancellors of the Republic, the president and a majority of the cabinet ministers. It was evolutionary not revolutionary, although it claimed to follow the Marxian doctrine. It declared its faith in democracy, opposed all dictatorships of any class and counted on universal suffrage and a parliamentary regime

to effect its socialistic reforms. It had a genuine sympathy for the working man and an idealistic program to alleviate his plight. The hopes of most Germans rested on the incapable shoulders of the sincere but inept Social Democratic Party. The Socialists were divided in the Weimar Assembly, for the Independent Socialists represented by twenty-two followers had their own "Fraktion" at the National Assembly. Its program was likewise vague and idealistic, but unlike the program of the Social Democrats it was revolutionary. The program called for the immediate socialization of all the means of production.

The two other major parties represented at Weimar were the Catholic parties: the Center Party¹ and the Bavarian People's Party.² Until January 1920 the two Catholic parties maintained a Reichstag working agreement, but at Weimar the BPP had a distinct delegation of eighteen members pledged to support the peculiar program of Bavarian particularism as well as Catholic clericalism. The Center still occupied the center position in the German party alignment. Its professed goal continued to be the betterment of all classes. It claimed to represent no special interest other than the Christian religion. It sought to moderate the class struggle, to secure pros-

¹ The temporary designation, the Christian People's Party, adopted by the Center Party after the Revolution, was dropped the day before the Weimar Assembly met. New York Times, February 5, 1919.

² The Bavarian People's Party consisted of former members of the Center Party for the most part. The Bavarian Centrists had organized a party during the revolutionary period and were elected to the National Assembly not under the Center's banner, but as members of the Bavarian People's Party. Henceforth the Party's name will be abbreviated to BPP.

perity for all within the framework of a capitalistic state. The Center had a genuine social reform program based upon many years of practical experience, and an energetic left wing to force its labor program into realization. Its traditional clerical program was continued. Denominational schools were safeguarded, a union was maintained between Church and State; yet the Church was at the same time free of the State. On economic and political questions the Center presented a program of ambiguous terminology designed to please the proletariat as well as the peasant, the industrialist and the large land owner. But on religious, educational and cultural questions the Center had an unqualified clerical program. The Center was anti-socialistic, anti-capitalistic (in the sense of perverted individualism and laissez-faire liberalism), a friend of labor, and a friend of capitalism. The Center was still predominantly monarchist,¹ it frankly abhorred the Revolution which it viewed as the work of an atheistic, materialistic rabble,² and it accepted the Republic with mixed feelings. It openly allied with the bourgeois parties in the defense of private property and in opposition to the nationalization of industries.³ But within the Center Party there were deep divisions. The left wing welcomed the advent of a new era.

¹ Ritter, Der Weg des politischen Katholizismus in Deutschland, pp. 172-173. "Das Zentrum wird sich in der Frage Monarchie oder Republik immer nach der Decke strecken." Peter Maslowski, Was ist die deutsche Zentrumspartei?, p. 64.

² Joos, Die politische Ideenwelt des Zentrums, p. 27.

³ See the Center's program of December 30, 1918, Supra, pp. 40-41; Joos, Die politische Ideenwelt des Zentrums, pp. 28-29.

for Germany under a democratic republic, but the right wing renounced the innovations brought about by the Revolution. The leaders of the Center Party, Karl Trimborn, who proclaimed the Center Party as the "defender of the Constitution" at Weimar, admitted in 1921 that the Center had denounced the Revolution while it only passively accepted the Republic.¹ In 1922 Cardinal Michael Faulhaber, perhaps the most outstanding Catholic dignitary in Germany, expressed the opinion of more reactionary Catholics when he said, "The Revolution was perjury and high treason, and will go down in history branded for ever with the mark of Cain."²

The Center Party condemned the Revolution which made the Republic possible; yet it extolled the virtues of the Weimar Constitution because the constitution guaranteed religious privileges which the Catholic Church had not enjoyed in Germany since before the Reformation.³ The Republic brought social equality to German Catholics. No longer could the German Catholic bemoan his role of "second-class citizen";⁴

¹ Ritter, Der Weg des politischen Katholizismus in Deutschland, p. 200; see Joos, Die politische Ideenwelt des Zentrums, for a speech of Trimborn's delivered January 19, 1920 which affirmed the loyalty of the Center to the Republic and its complete departure from the Monarchy.

² Karl Spiecker, a member of the Center's left wing, and the head of the Foreign Office press department under the chancellorship of Wilhelm Marx, says, that this "ugly and unjust phrase . . . unhappily kept many Catholics . . . from identifying themselves too closely . . ." with the Republic. Karl Spiecker, Germany from Defeat to Defeat (London: MacDonal and Company, Ltd., 1935), p. 62.

³ For a glowing rhetorical tribute to the Weimar Constitution see Joos, Die politische Ideenwelt des Zentrums, pp. 28-29.

⁴ . . . the Catholics, suspected of 'ultramontane tendencies,' were often regarded as second-class citizens. Moreover, since the higher officialdom was recruited almost entirely from the Students' Corps, whereas the Catholic Church rejected the compulsory fighting of duels which membership in a Corps demanded, convinced Catholics on these grounds, too, that the road to the higher ranks of Civil Service was practically barred." Spiecker, Germany from Defeat to Defeat, pp. 56-57; also see Bachem, Geschichte der deutschen Zentrumspartei, IX, xx-xl.

nor could the Church claim that it was discriminated against by Protestant Prussia.

After 1918, there came about what the historian Philipp Funk has described as a 'monastic springtide,' namely, the establishment of new branches of the religious orders, the foundation of numerous convents, and the opening of schools staffed by priests and nuns -- all of which things appeared to many Protestant bodies as an autumnal wind presaging another Counter-Revolution.¹

This was the time when the Rhineland philosopher, Peter Wust, issued his manifesto Return from Exile, in which he proclaimed the end of a long night of humiliation and inferiority, the escape from the Ghetto -- the word is his own -- in which for long years Lutheran Germany had imprisoned Catholic Germany.²

The Center and the Church profited from the Revolution -- materially and spiritually. The Center admitted that the Republic had improved the status of Germany's Catholics, but it was reluctant to praise the form of the Republic. The form of government was incidental as long as the religious and cultural demands of the Catholic Church were guaranteed. A benevolent monarchy, which protected the Church and the Christian individual, provided for social reform espoused by the Catholic Church, and allowed religious minorities a share in the government would have been just as welcomed to the Center Party as a republic. The politicians of the Center and the jurists of the Catholic Church contend with historical and philosophical precedent that the Center was not hypocritical nor opportunist in

¹ Gurian, Hitler and the Christians, p. 27.

² Robert d'Harcourt, The German Catholics (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, Ltd., 1939, trans. by Reginald J. Dingle), p. 3.

executing its chameleonic tactics.¹ The Centrist politician and author, Friedrich Dessauer, on the contrary states that ". . . there is no party which is so little opportunist as the Center."² The basis for the Center's viewpoint was illustrated in the policies of the Catholic Church. The modern flexible policy of the Vatican supported the policy of the Center also. The principle of "acceptance of the civil power in which it exists," was enunciated by Pope Leo XIII. The Church, though it may have preferences, has no final objection to any particular regime.³

The other great Catholic Party, the Bavarian People's Party, had a somewhat different program than the Center Party. On religious, educational and other social questions it worked shoulder to shoulder with the Center Party to force concessions from the Weimar Assembly, but it differed from the Center Party on several major issues. Traditionally the Center Party supported the federalist principle as opposed to centralization, and the Center Party continued to give federalism lip service at Weimar. But the Center's left wing, led by Erzberger, was willing to agree to the Social Democratic Party's insistence upon a centralized Reich if the Kultur objectives, and the social enactments demanded by the Christian Trade Unions were

¹ Gurian, Hitler and the Christians, p. 29; Joos, Die politische Ideenwelt des Zentrums, p. 27. Joos quotes a speech of Adolf Groeber, a Centrist leader, which rationalized the Center's conversion to Republicanism by appealing to natural law.

² Dessauer, Das Zentrum, p. 12.

³ See the Encyclical Letter Immortale Dei, November 1, 1885.

guaranteed in the constitution. The BPP was the standard-bearer of states rights, and it refused to relinquish its traditional privileges to the leadership of an atheistic and socialistic republic. The BPP was openly monarchist, and an unbridled, vehement enemy of socialism and liberalism. The BPP was Catholic and Conservative and it never thought to use one term without the other. It was frankly reactionary and refused to sugar-coat its program with the glittering generalities employed by the Center to maintain its electorate.

The two great questions with which the Center Party was concerned at Weimar -- the Kultur questions and the federalism versus centralization issue -- were bitterly contested with the Social Democratic Party. The Social Democrats were as insistent upon secularization as the Center Party was upon clericalism, and the Social Democrats were equally insistent upon centralization. To achieve cooperation in the peace negotiations it was necessary for each party to compromise. The compromises which resulted on the educational statutes, and on the political structure of the Reich were the causes of bitter disputes throughout the course of the Republic. In general, the Center Party achieved a compromise on the Kultur questions which approached its position rather than that of the Social Democratic Party, but it is conceded by a majority of German jurists that the political system reached at Weimar was that of a " . . . single centralized state."¹

¹ Rene Brunet, The New German Constitution (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1922, trans. by Joseph Gollomb), p. 70.

The Center wanted to guarantee to the Church a privileged and preponderant situation with the state,¹ while the Social Democrats said that religion was purely a private matter and refused all subsidies levied on public resources in behalf of ecclesiastical needs. The solution which was finally reached after lengthy and laborious negotiations was as follows:

There is neither complete nor any close union of the Churches and the State. There is no State Church. Each religious denomination administers and conducts its affairs freely, provided that it observes the laws that apply to all.²

Although the Center Party had demanded a State Church,³ the compromise reached at Weimar was actually a boon to the Catholic Church in comparison to the pre-war situation when the other great sect, the Lutheran Church, had enjoyed a profitable position as the Prussian State Church. The Protestants looked upon the gains of the Catholic Church with alarm. Simultaneously with the gains of the Catholic Church occurred the subversive attacks of atheistic propaganda supported by the secular sympathies of Social Democratic politicians, and secularism is said to have harmed the Protestant denominations more than it injured the Catholic Church.⁴ The Protestant's secular right arm, the Conservative Party, had declined

¹ Bächem, Geschichte der deutschen Zentrumspartei, VIII, 348-349, 361.

² Brunet, The New German Constitution, pp. 223-224.

³ See the Center's program for June 30, 1918, Supra, pp. 33-34.

⁴ Sigmund Neumann, Die deutschen Parteien: Wesen und Wandel nach dem Kriege (Berlin: Junker and Dunnhaupt, 1932), p. 40.

greatly after the War, and the Protestants found themselves in the peculiar position of having to support the Catholic Church in its efforts to seek common clerical objectives. It was ". . . most galling of all . . ." for the Protestants ". . . to be dependent on the goodwill of the Center Party . . ." to achieve their Kultur aims.¹ The agreement which was reached at Weimar stated that Churches in existence at the time of the adoption of the Constitution were permitted privileges similar to those given public corporations. As public corporations they were allowed the right to levy taxes based upon the civil tax roll. The taxes were collected by civil tax collectors and each church received a proportion of the revenue based upon the percentage of church members within the district. Virtually all citizens contributed to the support of the churches regardless of the regularity of their church attendance, and few bothered to renounce their membership in the church they were taxed to support as the procedure was involved and time-consuming. The Church was thus guaranteed a stable income from the State while maintaining its freedom and its privileges. No wonder the Church sprang to the defense of the constitution.²

The fight over the educational provisions was extremely bitter. The Center broke with the Social Democrats and the Democratic Party

¹ Gurian, Hitler and the Christians, pp. 34-35.

² For an account of the financial relations between Church and State in Germany during the Weimar Republic see Roger H. Wells, "The Financial Relations between Church and State in Germany, 1919-1937," Political Science Quarterly, LIII (1938), 36-45.

to ally with the Protestant Right to attain its objectives. The Center favored the state supported denominational school, and it rejected the "Godless" secular school demanded by the Social Democrats. The compromise which resulted stated that denominational schools and secular schools would constitute exceptions and could not be established except when demanded by heads of families and conditioned by the requirements of well-ordered scholarship. This arrangement allowed schools of one denomination in predominantly Catholic or Lutheran areas, and it permitted secular schools in a few instances when there were enough parents who disapproved of denomination schools. Generally, the three large religious groups in urban Germany -- Catholic, Lutheran, Jewish -- shared a school building, and religious training was offered by each denomination to the students of its faith. But there was constant friction over the educational question which frequently caused ill-feelings and several times precipitated governmental crises. The compromise tended to divide communities on religious rather than on social or political issues. It led to irritating complications which the Catholics felt could only be ironed out by a new school law. The Catholics through a propaganda agency, the Catholic School Organization, waged an unceasing attack against the educational provisions in the constitution. Despite the dissatisfaction of the Catholic Church, however, the educational provisions were considered to be a victory for the Center Party, and a defeat for the proponents of secular education.

It has been claimed that the educational compromise agreed upon at Weimar was won by the Center Party only after an odious barter.

It is known . . . that the Social Democrats secured the signature of the Center to the Treaty of Versailles only in exchange for Social Democratic consent to the compromise clauses on education.¹

There is no evidence to support this contention although it is a familiar charge against the Center. Whether the accusation was true or false the Center's enemies continued to doubt its political motives and sealed the label "clerical" as a prefix before its name.²

The other great question with which the Center Party was concerned at Weimar was the defense of the federal type of government. Although there was division within the ranks of the Center Party upon the degree of federalism, the Center's defense of the federal type of government was a political necessity. The particularist

¹ Brunet, The New German Constitution, p. 290; also see Malbone W. Graham, New Governments of Central Europe (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1924), pp. 96-97.

² The Center, despite its acceptance of Christianity as its party Weltanschauung and its historical intimate relations with the Catholic Church, denounced the charge that it was a clerical party. It argued by document, proclamation and historical illustration that the Center was primarily a political not a clerical party. The Center insisted that to label the Center "clerical" was not only a great lie, but a malicious lie designed to destroy a political party devoted to Christian principles, and to the promotion of the Volkgemeinschaft as its social goal. See Matthias Erzberger, The German Center Party, pp. 25-40; also see Joos, Die politische Ideenwelt des Zentrums, pp. 17-21.

sentiments of Catholic Germany were deeply-rooted in history.¹ Bavaria, Baden and Württemberg were rich in traditions of self-government and cultural distinction. The Rhineland and the Ruhr had jealously fought for their special interests within Prussia. Under the Bismarckian constitution federalism had meant preferential treatment and a degree of autonomy, and those regions which had enjoyed special privileges under the Empire were not willing to give up those rights. During the Revolution Catholic Germany had feared the spread of communism, and under the urging of the French occupation forces separatist movements flared up in Bavaria and in the Rhineland. This did not necessarily mean that the Rhineland and Bavaria wished to separate from the Reich, but there was a real fear of ceding local privileges to a government dominated by atheists and socialists. It was the Center Party and the Bavarian People's Party which represented the fears and the aspirations of the predominantly Catholic areas, and the concessions made to federalism were primarily as a result of the pressure exerted by the Catholic parties. The gesture extended to federalism by the Weimar Assembly failed to obscure the fundamental spirit of centralism which prevailed in the

¹"The particularist endeavors to realize the specific aims of his individual state without regard for the supreme principle of a unitary German community of culture; the federalist recognizes the National State as the superior state formation and merely gives it a federal structure Federalism is a cement, particularism is an explosive." W. D. Dittmar, The Government of the Free State of Bavaria (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934), p. 113; for a discussion of the Center's attitude toward federalism see A. Roder, Der Weg des Zentrums, p. 70.

constitution, but Bavaria especially was never willing to regard the recognition of federalism as a gesture. Throughout the fourteen years of the Republic, Bavaria not only insisted on adherence to the strict interpretation of the federalist provisions in the constitution but attempted to increase and strengthen the powers of the Lander as a check upon the Reich.¹

The desire of some Rhineland Center politicians to create a Rhineland state was considerably distorted by the enemies of the Center. The Center never desired to separate the Rhineland from the Reich, but it did want to weaken the disproportionate power of Prussia by creating a new Land in Catholic West Prussia. This was primarily a Catholic movement designed to remove the Rhineland from the control of a socialist government.² The anti-clerical sentiments of the Social Democrats and particularly the attacks of the Prussian Minister of Education, Adolf Hoffmann, upon denominational schools disturbed the Catholic Church, and the possibility of attacks upon private property caused terror among the Burgers of the wealthy Rhineland cities. Despite the abundant proof available to refute the charges the Center was continually linked by its enemies, including Communists as well as Nationalists and National Socialists, to the Rhenish Republic which was fostered by France and promoted by a group of nonentities without political

¹ Dittmar, The Government of the Free State of Bavaria, pp. 17-37.

² G. B. Gedye, The Revolver Republic (London: Arrowsmith, 1930), pp. 23-25.

affiliation.¹ As late as 1932, the Center's official periodical, Das Zentrum, in an issue devoted solely to repudiating current "lies" about the Center, employed four pages of documented proof to blast the "evidence" presented in the National Socialist press which sought to connect the Center with the separatist movement of 1919 to 1923.² The fact that the Center's Rhineland delegates led by Trimborn proclaimed their hatred of Prussian control did not imply that the Center desired to separate from the Reich. Trimborn contended that a new Rhenish Land would actually strengthen the Reich by weakening the disproportionate strength of Prussia, and there was much justification for his argument.³

The demand of Rhinelanders in 1918 and 1919 to dismember Prussia was only one of many attempts to whittle down the predominance of Prussia, but because it manifested itself during the initial attempts of the French to encourage a separatist movement from the Reich, the Center has been unjustly accused of festering a Catholic Rhineland state. Actually it is ridiculous to assume the Center desired to sever from the Reich, the region where it had its greatest strength. The Rhineland was the heart of the Christian Trade Unions which contributed greatly to the support of the Center, and the Rhineland was also the seat of its great educational and propaganda

¹
Ibid.

²
Das Zentrum, 3 Jahrgang, Nummer 2.

³
Arnold Brecht, Federalism and Regionalism in Germany (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), pp. 22, 77-82.

center at Mönich-Gladbach. The Kölnische Volkszeitung, the most powerful Catholic organ in the Rhineland, was a promoter of a Rhineland Land within the Reich, but a prominent opponent of the French movement. It was among the first newspapers in the Rhineland to present evidence of French intrigue and to denounce it in its columns.¹ Dr. Adenauer, Bürgermeister of Cologne, was a leader in the attempt to dismember Prussia, but he was contemptuous of the French movement. Erzberger, without a doubt the most influential leader of the Center in 1919, was a vehement opponent of French intrigue in the Rhineland.² The Center had nothing to gain by separating the Rhineland from the Reich and it had a great deal to lose. The Center was a clerical party, but it was also a German national party. It expressed its ambitions in terms of the unification of all Catholics throughout the Reich, not in terms of the strength of its representation in the Länder. But despite the Center's frequent denials of its connection with the separatist movement the lie persisted and continued to demand a rebuttal from the Center long after the question had any importance save for malicious and provocative propaganda.

¹ Gedye, The Revolver Republic, p. 24.

² Alma Luckau, The German Delegation at the Paris Peace Conference (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), pp. 410-411. Hereafter cited as Luckau, The German Delegation.

CHAPTER IV

THE CENTER PARTY'S INFLUENCE IN THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE

TREATY OF VERSAILLES

At the same time that the National Assembly was constructing the "perfect constitution" at Weimar the Allies were meeting at Versailles to decide Germany's fate. While the Center Party and the Social Democratic Party were bickering over domestic issues a document was being written which they would be forced to sign for the sake of the German people. In April 1919 the German Government formulated a number of instructions which were to be used by its representatives at the Paris Peace Conference when it was called to Versailles to discuss the terms of the treaty. The instructions showed a blissful ignorance of the position assigned to a defeated power after a modern war. According to the instructions Germany could only accept a peace based upon the Fourteen Points outlined by Wilson. In addition, there must be a free plebiscite in Alsace-Lorraine. The Saar Valley must not be separated from the Reich, nor must the Saar's coal mines be relinquished. The Left Bank of the Rhine must remain German. On the Eastern frontier Posen was the only region in which the German Government thought a plebiscite necessary. Germany refused to consider the loss of Upper Silesia or the formation of a Danzig corridor, but the right of self-determination was generously conceded Northern Schleswig. Upon the con-

clusion of peace occupation armies were to vacate German soil and the blockade was to end immediately. Germany conceded that reparations must be paid to civilians for war damage. Disarmament must be conducted on an international scale and on a reciprocity basis. The League of Nations idea was endorsed as well as the principle of arbitration in matters of international disputes. Germany demanded immediate admission to the League of Nations on a basis of equality. Finally, she completely repudiated the charge that Germany alone was guilty for the outbreak of the War.¹

The German delegation arrived in Paris on April 29, but it was virtually ignored in its hotel until it threatened to send two of its chief delegates, Giesberts and Landsberg, back to Berlin unless a definite date for the meeting with the Allies was set. On May 5, the credentials of the German delegation were allowed to be presented and it received the shocking news that the German Government was to be given only fifteen days to prepare written observations upon the treaty, and that no oral discussion of the treaty would be allowed. The disclosure by the Allies that the Germans would be prohibited from sitting across a council table and discussing the terms of the treaty placed the delegation on the defensive. It was headed by Count Brockdorff-Rantzau, an experienced diplomat without party affiliations but with bourgeois sympathies, and included a Centrist politician, Johann Giesberts, a trade union

¹ Luckau, The German Delegation, p. 64.

leader with a proletarian background. On May 7, 1919, at the Trianon Palace Hotel in Versailles the text of the treaty was handed Brockdorff-Rantzau by Clemenceau. The German delegation was prepared for the worst and the speech that Brockdorff-Rantzau gave in reply to the treaty was probably a compilation of the ideas of all the chief delegates.¹ Brockdorff-Rantzau's reply was highly objectionable to the Allies² and the fact that he refused the Allies the courtesy of rising while he delivered it irritated them and also caused misgivings among his colleagues of the delegation.³ But the speech of the chief of the German delegation was subdued in comparison with the outery of rage and indignation which occurred after the terms of the treaty were announced to the German people. Nothing had been done to prepare them for the role the Treaty of Versailles assigned to Germany, and their immediate reaction was naturally violent and spontaneous.

The German delegation was unanimous in its demand that the treaty must be substantially revised before it could be considered. The Centrist Gieberts was one of the strongest critics of the treaty. The cabinet, composed of Social Democrats, Centrists and Democrats, sent a telegram to Versailles which requested that the delegation send a note to the allies declaring the conditions of peace "unfulfillable, unbearable and ruinous for Germany." Brockdorff-Rantzau

¹ Ibid., p. 64.

² For the text of the speech see Ibid., pp. 220-223.

³ For an illuminating description of the scene see Dr. Walter Simon's letter of May 10, 1919, in Ibid., pp. 117-121.

wisely ignored the demand of the cabinet that "unfulfillable" and "unbearable" be used verbatim and countered the Allied demands with the statement that in the opinion of the German delegation it would be de facto impossible to put certain provisions of the treaty into effect. The delegation also objected that "... the treaty in decisive points lacked the legal basis which Germany, as well as the Allies, had agreed upon before and during the armistice." The Allies quickly limited the German demands to "practical suggestions," refusing to accept criticism upon "... the chief provisions of the treaty as they had drafted it." The Allies rejected the assertion that the treaty contravened the Fourteen Points, thus rejecting any fundamental criticism on basic principles.¹

While the German plenipotentiaries and the experts of the delegation labored over the counterproposals, the government of the Republic echoed the demands for revision expressed by the delegates and likewise offered counterproposals and criticisms. The doctrinaire German parties characteristically presented the "official party line" on the treaty.

On May 12, Adolf Groeber, the leader of the Center "Fraktion" at Weimar, presented the policy of the Center toward the treaty. He began his remarks by announcing the complete rejection of the treaty by the party he represented. He then elaborated on the reasons for the Center's rejection. His chief argument was that

¹ Ibid., pp. 70-72.

the treaty violated the legally binding promises made in the Pre-Armistice agreement. He pointed out how the Allies had failed to apply the promises made with respect to self-determination, colonies and disarmament. He protested against the "injustice and cruelty" of the economic and financial clauses, and gave warning that the "enslavement" of seventy million Germans would inevitably lead to dire consequences for the world.¹

The Center officially appeared to present a united front in opposing the treaty.² Even Erzberger had cried, "Never," when he heard the terms but he soon changed his mind.³ He has generally been credited with leading the retreat away from opposition although the Independent Socialists previously had raised dissenting voices against the uncompromising attitude of the cabinet and the Assembly. Erzberger's influence had increased steadily following the Armistice, despite the bitter and relentless opposition of the extreme nationalists. As Minister without Portfolio in the Scheidemann Cabinet and Vice-Chancellor and Minister of Finance in the Bauer Ministry he had great freedom of action both at Weimar and at Versailles. His meddling in the affairs of the delegation led to a serious disagreement with Brockdorff-Rantzau which served to aggravate the

¹ Ibid., p. 98.

² For an example of the Center's nationalism see an account of Fehrenbach's impassioned extemporaneous speech in opposition to acceptance, a speech which Stresemann called the "best of the day" in Ibid., p. 98.

³ Scheidemann, Memoirs, II, 307-308.

toughly situation the German delegation faced.¹ Erzberger had tried to change the attitude of the Center Party's representative in the German delegation, Giesberts, but he was unalterably opposed to appeasement. When Erzberger failed to sway the delegation at Versailles he then arranged meetings between members of the delegation and the cabinet at Spa on May 13 and on May 22. He strenuously objected to the delegation's method of presenting its objections to the treaty. Instead of the delegation's method of dispatching single notes upon each complaint he proposed a memorandum which would summarize Germany's objections. A portion of Erzberger's proposed memorandum was eventually incorporated in the German counterproposals, but following the meetings at Spa the cabinet was henceforth sidetracked in the peace negotiations.² Only after the final Allied decision was tendered the German government did the cabinet play a role in the peacemaking.

On June 3 and June 4 at Erzberger's suggestion the cabinet met to discuss the results of nonacceptance. Ebert was present and so were other important political figures. Erzberger presented an extremely pessimistic memorandum which gave no alternative except the acceptance of Allied terms. He stressed German unity above all. He believed that by accepting the treaty separatist movements would cease, the danger of bolshevism would dissipate and the Reich would

¹ Bernstorff, Memoirs, pp. 214-216.

² Luckau, The German Delegation, p. 103.

avoid political chaos and economic disaster. He was convinced that if Germany rejected the Allied terms a ruthless invasion by powerful Allied armies would drive a wedge between southern Germany and the northern states. He pictured a ravaged Germany, economically ruined and starved by the blockade which would grow tighter after the invasion. Finally, after Germany was devastated, the Allies would impose a peace treaty upon Germany which would make the Versailles Treaty seem lenient.¹ By June 4 two members of the Cabinet had been won over to the viewpoint of Erzberger, but twelve members still remained opposed to the policy of appeasement advocated by the Centrist leader. Scheidemann admitted his faith in the "absolute firmness" of his cabinet was shaken when he noticed that " . . . Erzberger's behavior had altered, and that he was now button-holing Ebert every day . . ." ² The Democrats were still united in their opposition to acceptance, and they threatened to resign if the government altered its stand of May 12 when the answer to the Allied terms had repudiated the treaty as "unbearable, unrealizable and unacceptable."³ It appeared very improbable on June 4 that Erzberger would gain his objective. He admitted that " . . . not only the delegation at Versailles, but also the cabinet in Berlin was unanimously against signing the treaty, until he threatened to resign from the cabinet if the government insisted

¹ Ibid., pp. 104-105.

² Scheidemann, Memoirs, II, 313.

³ Luckau, The German Delegation, p. 105.

upon not signing."¹ Erzberger was virtually alone in the retreat from opposition. Scheidemann's diary entry for June 4 reveals the fundamental break among the parties and within the parties which the proposals of Erzberger had invoked.

. . . . I am aching in every limb. Can I not envisage the frightfulness of the crisis which our people may experience if we say no? Are Erzberger, Noske and David politically so very much cleverer than I, and more far-sighted? the leader in this retreat was Erzberger, who will not hear any argument against it. No one else spoke in favor of acceptance. The Democrats were for refusing; Giesberts was very downright and could not reconcile acceptance with various points of honor.²

The personality of Giesberts as well as his views upon acceptance of the treaty contrasted sharply with Erzberger. Both were from lower-class families and both were physically short and stout, but there the resemblance between them ends. Giesberts did not have Erzberger's flair for intrigue, nor driving ambition for political power, but he did have a strong desire to better the lot of the German workingman. He began work in a brewery, but soon afterward became a member of the great Metal Trades Union which was affiliated with the CTU. He had been in politics since 1892; first, as a city council member in Munich-Gladbach, then, as a member of the Prussian House of Representatives, and finally, as a Reichstag representative. Giesberts was a sincere patriot and a stubborn fighter. He instinctively rejected "fulfillment" as defeatism.

¹ Ibid., p. 104.

² Scheidemann, Memoirs, II, 314.

He was shocked by the harshness of the treaty, but his reaction was not appeasement but defiance.¹ He lacked the elasticity of Erzberger and perhaps the reckless courage of Erzberger to fight for unpopular causes. Giesberts was a type much like the Social Democrat, Hermann Müller. He was unimaginative, conservative and a strong German nationalist.²

Giesberts and Erzberger represented the poles of opinion within the Center Party on the question of the acceptance of the treaty. It was difficult in a party without political principles to unite upon great political questions. Soul searching became more evident in the Center upon such occasions than in the other parties. In Bismarck's time the Center had a true political

¹ An interesting incident was pictured by Dr. Walter Simon which involved Giesberts. The incident took place on the evening of May 7, after the Allied terms had first been revealed to the delegation. The scene is the room of the German delegation. Giesberts enters the room. "Gentlemen, I am drunk. That may be proletarian, but with me there was nothing else for it. This shameful treaty has broken me, for I had believed in Wilson until today. When I talked to him in America, that Puritan said to me that the parochial schools in the United States were the best. From that day I believed him to be an honest man, and now that scoundrel sends us such a treaty. Right now if I had those fellows here, who this afternoon were sitting opposite me -- Wilson, Lloyd George, and Clemenceau -- they would hit the ceiling so hard that they'd stick to it. But I am telling you this, gentlemen (and with that he jumped up and banged his fist on the table so hard that it spilled my glass of cognac) if those fellows think that the German laborers are going to work for that capitalist gang, they're wrong, and when they march into the mining district, the few hand grenades that'll be needed to flood every mine, will be on hand." Dr. Simon's letter is quoted in Luckau, The German Delegation, pp. 124-125.

² For a brief biographical sketch of Giesberts see Cuno Herkenbach, Das deutsche Reich von 1918 bis Heute (Berlin: Verlag für Presse, Wirtschaft und Politik, 1930), I, 690.

program as an opposition party, but the Center Party of 1919 was an artificial entity politically. It had a political program but no one could find a clear statement of its position on any phase of political activity other than its concern for religious, educational and cultural questions. In such a grave crisis as was presented by the Versailles Treaty the Centrist politicians acted for or against acceptance as a matter of temperament or political philosophy.

Erzberger's role in the acceptance of the Versailles Treaty has been denounced by two generations of Germans. His love of the Fatherland was not questioned by his own party, but his tendency to intrigue, his close connections with the Vatican, the role he played in the 1917 Peace Resolution, and the unfortunate position he earned as a result of the Armistice negotiations left room in the minds of enemies to doubt his patriotism. Erzberger sincerely believed that Germany's fate rested upon her willingness to yield to the Allied demands. Fulfillment was not necessarily treason as Josef Wirth and Gustav Stresemann later proved. Fulfillment was actually Realpolitik. Erzberger was unwilling to sacrifice Germany for a show of foolish pride. He was essentially a realist, tempered by pessimism and motivated by a conviction that submission was the only course open to Germany.

The debate within the cabinet continued on June 5 and June 6, but only two Social Democrats, Dr. David and Noske, were willing to accept Erzberger's point of view. When the cabinet finally

realized that it would be unable to reach a decision it announced that the decision for acceptance or rejection would henceforth rest with the National Assembly. Thus the question was to be treated as a partisan issue.

The Center tried to formulate a policy that would unify the party. The compromise plan agreed upon by the Center later became the official offer of the Bauer government. The majority of the Center decided to accept the treaty if the "points of honor," Articles 227-231, were deleted, but a strong minority was opposed to acceptance even on those terms.¹ It was then decided that the usual bloc system of voting would be withdrawn and that each member would be allowed to vote on the treaty to be answerable only "before God, his conscience, and the German people." The Democrats and Social Democrats were not ready to accept the treaty unless there were considerable revisions.

The Allied answer to Germany's counterproposals was received by the German delegation at Versailles on June 16. The German delegation and the parties at Weimar were less prepared for the Allied

¹Article 227 served notice that the Allies would ask the Dutch government to surrender the former emperor for trial; Articles 228-230 dealt with the trials of German war criminals "accused of having committed acts in violation of the laws and customs of war." Not only was the German government to deliver the "criminals" to Allied tribunals, but it was also to gather the evidence needed to insure the guilt of the "criminals." Article 231 was the famous "war guilt" clause which stated that ". . . Germany accepts the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the loss and damage to which the Allied and Associated Governments and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her allies."

decision on June 16 than they were on May 7, when the first draft of the treaty was handed Brockdorff-Rantzau. The revisions were so few that the same copy of the treaty was used with the exception of brief notations in red ink. The Center reiterated its previous stand: the war guilt charge and the articles dealing with the delivery of war criminals to Allied tribunals must be eliminated. In addition, a majority of the Center insisted that the economic clauses in the treaty be modified. Sixteen Center representatives still refused to sign the treaty on any condition, however. The Social Democrats then stampeded toward acceptance. They demanded the elimination of the articles on war criminals, but they were prepared to accept the treaty even if the Allies refused to make this concession. Scheidemann, the Social Democratic chancellor, was opposed to the stand his party had taken, and he attempted to resign, but he was prevailed upon to attempt once more to bring the parties together in support of a common program. He failed completely, however, and immediately resigned. Ebert then tried to resign the presidency, but he was persuaded to remain in office.

The cabinet of Gustav Bauer was then formed. The Democrats refused to take part in a government which was willing to accept the treaty; therefore, it contained only Social Democrats and Centerists. Erzberger was Minister of Finance and Noske continued as Minister of War while Hermann Müller, a leading Social Democrat, became Minister of Foreign Affairs. Bauer immediately announced that the formation of the new cabinet had been made possible by the

desire of the Social Democrats and the Centrists to spare the country the horrors of internal chaos. The government according to Bauer had no choice but to accept this "peace of injustice." He then asked the Assembly to vote on a resolution declaring Germany's readiness to sign but explicitly rejecting Articles 227-231. Erzberger assured Bauer that the Allies would delete the "points of honor" upon a show of resistance by the German government. He informed Bauer that "authoritative French and Italian diplomats" with whom he had negotiated before the session of June 22 had led him to believe that the Allies would rescind Articles 227-231.¹ He apparently convinced the majority of the Assembly because the resolution was adopted 237 to 138. The wishful thinking which had characterized the Weimar Assembly's attitude toward the peacemaking was evident in the resolution. The Allies promptly extinguished any hope that the "points of honor" would be withdrawn. Clemenceau brutally halted any further stalling by the German government. "You have only twenty-four hours to decide. The time allowed for discussion is past. Either yes or no."² Bauer then requested an

¹ Other "important confidants" of Erzberger's were Professors Haguenin and Hognard, French professors of German philology, who had arrived in Berlin two weeks after the signing of the armistice as "observers" of Poincaré and Clemenceau, "... Erzberger was their particular confidant, and in his memoirs he admits that during the cabinet crisis over the question of signing the treaty these gentlemen gave him reason to hope that there would be some consideration shown in the matter of the honor clauses. In Weimar young professor Hognard told Erzberger that he 'and the political parties must not think that the Kaiser and his generals would actually be treated quite as badly as they imagined.'" Karl Friedrich Nowak, Versailles (London: V. Gallanz Ltd., 1928), p. 241.

² Scheidemann, Memoirs, II, 317; for the text of the Allied note see Luckau, The German Delegation, p. 481.

extension of forty-eight hours but again the answer was a categorical no.

The generals of the Republican Reichswehr announced their opposition to acceptance, and Noske, who had once advocated acceptance, threw in his lot with them, announcing that he would rather see Germany overrun by foreign armies than accept Articles 227-231. Erzberger was likewise opposed to acceptance upon the Allied terms, and the Center Party voted 64 to 14 to refuse to sign the treaty unconditionally. It appeared that the Center Party was preparing to follow the lead of the Democratic Party and withdraw from the government when Ebert turned to the Military for support. He asked the Quartermaster General Groener for his opinion upon the advisability of resistance and he in turn asked Hindenburg. "You know as well as I do that armed resistance is impossible," said Hindenburg. Groener then informed the Assembly that ". . . if fighting were resumed, the prospects of a successful issue were hopeless, adding his firm conviction that in the end even the army would approve the acceptance of the conditions."¹ Noske then reversed his stand once again and appealed to the army for support. It is probable that the Center also reversed its stand after the decision of the Military was received, although it has been alleged that the Center, as was pointed out above, bargained the educational provisions in the constitution for its signature upon the treaty.²

¹ John W. Wheeler-Bennett, Wooden Tital (New York: W. Morrow and Company, 1936), pp. 220-221.

² Supra., p. 54.

Three hours before the deadline another plenary session of the Assembly met. To avoid a possible parliamentary deadlock it was agreed that the vote of the previous day, which had applied to the acceptance of the treaty with reservations, would be used to empower the cabinet with unconditional rights to sign the treaty.¹ The Center in an attempt to "save face" requested that the parties who voted against acceptance must pass a resolution which would absolve the parties and individuals who voted for acceptance from any lack of patriotism.² After the Assembly had agreed to accept the vote of the previous day as its acceptance of the treaty, the parties of the opposition duly passed the resolution requested by the Center. The Center's attempt to "save something" had a strange parallel fourteen years later when it voted for Hitler's Enabling Act. In 1919 the Center realized that its action would be condemned by German nationalists, but it acted on the assumption that the resolution of the opposition parties would absolve it from sin. The Center Party in 1919 as well as in 1933 showed a curious naivety which belied its reputation for Realpolitik.

The decision of the Bauer Government for acceptance without

¹ A member of the German National Party raised a question of parliamentary procedure which threatened to deadlock the move for acceptance. A member of the German People's Party averted any delaying action by the Nationalists, however, by quickly asking that the vote of the previous day be allowed to stand. Luckau, The German Delegation, p. 112; see Prince Hubertus Loewenstein, The Tragedy of a Nation; Germany 1918-1934 (New York: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1934), p. 29.

² Luckau, The German Delegation, p. 112.

conditions or reservations was telegraphed to Versailles only two hours before the Allied ultimatum expired.¹ The government then addressed an appeal to the German people to "guard and preserve the peace."² The appeal for forgiveness began with the following words:

The government of the Reich, with the consent of the National Assembly, has decided to sign the treaty of peace. We do so with heavy hearts, under the pressure of the most unrelenting power, and with only one thought: to save our defenseless people from having to make further sacrifices and endure added pains of hunger.

The first demand was to fulfill the conditions of peace, the second demand was to work, the third demand was to faithfulness to the call of duty even in

... this worst day of all. If full support isn't given to the government, not merely hundreds,³ but millions of our compatriots will be delivered over to terror, to armed occupation, to annexation.

The final sentence carried a plea for work and unity for the preservation of the Reich and the people. The appeal to the German people was signed by the members of the Bauer Cabinet, including Erberger, Dr. Bell and Giesberts of the Center.

The reversal of the Center's policy from rejection to acceptance of the Allied demands occurred between noon and four-thirty. At ten o'clock in the morning the Center had voted against acceptance of

¹ For the text of the German note see Ibid., p. 482.

² For the text of the appeal see Ibid., pp. 496-497.

³ The reference alluded to the surrender of war criminals to Allied tribunals.

a treaty which included the "points of honor." The Cabinet met at noon and the Center was still opposed to acceptance. The Chancellor then adjourned the meeting until four-thirty. Ebert appealed to the Military after the failure of the midday meeting and received Groener's reply which counseled acceptance. According to Hindenburg's biographer, Wheeler-Bennett, "What finally decided the matter was a trunk-call from General Groener to President Ebert, in which the former stated that, if fighting were resumed, the prospects of a successful issue were hopeless. . . ."¹ The decision of the Military was most likely the cause of the Center's reversal to unconditional acceptance, but it is difficult to accept this as the sole cause. The large percentage of the Center Party had followed Erzberger who believed at least two weeks before the Military announced its decision that resistance to Allied invasion was hopeless. Scheidemann deplored the Social Democrats' obsequiousness to the Center, but he does not reveal any nefarious deal.² The Center claimed that it acted only with the people's welfare in mind; ". . . to save the defenseless people . . . from further sacrifices."³ Regardless of the Center's reason for accept-

¹ Wheeler-Bennett, Wooden Titan, p. 221.

² Scheidemann had resigned on June 19. Soon afterwards he left for Switzerland, arriving there probably on June 23. His comment concerning the educational compromise was not written until after June 28, the day the Peace Treaty was signed. "I quickly recovered in Switzerland, and soon could write letters to Weimar The Committee sitting on the Constitution was meanwhile hard at work. Was its obsequiousness to the Center right? Wasn't its giving away in the Education question a mistake? I informed them in Weimar of my misgivings, but to no purpose." Scheidemann, Memoirs, II, 322.

³ Luokau, The German Delegation, p. 196.

ance, a curious feature of the Center's reversal was its strange plea for forgiveness from the opposition parties. The Center's motive was undoubtedly to escape nationalistic censure; to defend the Center's reputation for being "German and National." It was a policy which was indicative of the Center's deference to conservatism and nationalism throughout the course of the Republic. It was not only indicative of the Center's character, however, but of all the German parties. The grave risk in German politics was to offend German nationalism, and the Center which claimed to be guided only by Christian principles, bowed to the dictates of party politics. The Center was not willing to accept martyrdom to save the German people without the tacit support of the Right.

CHAPTER V

THE PERIOD OF CATHOLIC DEMOCRACY,

1919 - 1921

The first two years of the Weimar Republic marked the greatest period of influence for the Center's left wing. First, under the leadership of Erzberger, then, under Josef Wirth, the Center Party appeared as a true partner of the Social Democrats and the Democrats in their attempts to create a democratic republic. Although the economic crisis which faced the Reich often obscured the internal development of the parties and the Republican government, that phase of the Republic's history can only be treated in skeletal fashion in order to illustrate the Center's foreign policy. The confusing, often illogical and frequent changes of Reich cabinets in the early years of the Republic were usually caused by the economic problems which accompanied the war and its aftermath, but there were basic ideological conflicts within the Weimar Coalition as well as in the Reichstag which were also contributing causes to the instability which characterized the Republic in its infancy. The Center Party was a microcosm of the emotions and ideas of all the German parties. Within the Center there were such men as Wirth, a sincere Republican, a believer in fulfillment as a foreign policy of realism, yet a strong German nationalist, and Heinrich Brauns,

Minister of Labor under Wirth and every other chancellor until Müller in 1928, who was classified ideologically in the clerical right wing of the Party, and Martin Spahn, an extreme nationalist and reactionary, who finally transferred his allegiance to the Nationalist Party during Wirth's chancellorship in 1921. There were transitional figures within the party such as Konstantin Fehrenbach and Wilhelm Marx who could represent the Republican elements within the party without antagonizing the extreme clericals, the agrarian conservatives, or the Catholic industrialists. The most difficult leader to classify in the Center Party during these years was the greatest politician in the party, Matthias Erzberger. His assassination in the summer of 1921 was undoubtedly a contributing cause to the transition of the Center's left wing from a fighting partner of Social Democracy to an impotent spokesman for Catholic social ideas.

To understand the role of the Center Party it is necessary to underscore the Social Catholic Movement as a barrier which prevented Christian and socialist Labor from uniting upon common problems in the interest of all German Labor. The Social Catholic Movement by virtue of ideological steadfastness to the Papal Encyclicals prevented the spirit of liberalism, which was supposedly the spirit of the constitution, from infiltrating to the ranks of the Catholic laborers. The Catholic Church, a professed opponent of socialism and liberalism, through the Social Catholic Movement did not allow the faithful Catholic to cooperate with the materialists of Social

Democracy or to espouse the individualistic liberalism which was implicit in the Weimar Constitution. Social Catholicism provided a unique approach to twentieth century social reform and to politics, and it provided an ideal-- the appeasement of the class struggle through Arbeitsgemeinschaft -- but it was nevertheless a cleaver which split Germany into three competing suspicious entities: Catholic, Protestant and Socialist. The Center Party appropriated the ideas of Social Catholicism and sought to create a labor wing which would support the politicians of the Center, but that labor wing, because of the ideals of the Social Catholic Movement, was neither republican nor liberal. Erzberger had readily recognized the ideological differences between socialism and Social Catholicism, but he was realistic enough to compromise with Social Democracy to achieve common political and social objectives. After his murder Wirth continued the strain of political democracy and social improvement through legislation, but he lacked the courage and dynamicism of Erzberger. Erzberger was the only Centrist politician with the ability and courage to transform the Center Party into a truly political party which would have attracted a mass following. His death erased any possibility of the Center Party becoming anything more than it had been under the Empire: a party of Catholics, a clerical party, and a national party.

The economic and political confusion that consumed the Reich in the first years of the Republic was a direct result of the effect of the war. Germany's defeat was only nominally signaled by the

signatures of the Social Democrat, Hermann Müller, and the Centrist, Johannes Bell, upon the Treaty of Versailles, for no German considered acceptance of the treaty as an admission of defeat but only as an expediency to halt the blockade to call off the possible invasion of the Allied armies. Few Germans accepted the treaty as a binding agreement. It was expected that with the German acceptance the "grievous errors" embodied in the treaty would soon be rectified. The foreign policy of each government which followed was directed at reducing the treaty to impotence. Every provision of the treaty was disputed. A continuous, violent and obstinate campaign of resistance was waged against it, and the success of each government depended upon its ability to strike a blow at the shackles which bound Germany.

The Bauer Ministry which had been formed to accept the treaty, initiated the policy of resistance by refusing to comply with the Allied requests to indict and punish German war criminals. The few cases which were brought to court only served to humiliate the Allies. The prestige derived from this show of resistance was soon shattered, however, in January 1920, by a scandal which involved Matthias Erzberger, the strongest member of the Bauer Cabinet as Vice-Chancellor and Minister of Finance.

The baiting of Erzberger had mounted after the unconditional acceptance of the treaty by the "November criminals."¹ Erzberger

¹For a detailed account of the attacks against Erzberger see Bachem, Geschichte der deutschen Zentrumspartei, IX, 400-501.

was assigned the leading role in the theory of betrayal which became known as the "stab-in-the-back." The enmity between Erzberger and the Protestant right was long-standing. As far back as 1906, in the colonial dispute, Erzberger had locked horns with the Conservatives. The war had only intensified the Conservatives' hatred of Erzberger. His role in every step of the disaster which dogged the path of the Reich to defeat singled him out for special condemnation in the months that followed the acceptance of the treaty. Karl Helfferich, an old and bitter opponent of Erzberger, planned the campaign of hate against him with great thoroughness.

The immediate issue which prompted the slander of Erzberger by Helfferich was the tax program which Erzberger had formulated to begin fulfillment of the first payment of the reparations total which was due in May 1921.¹ It was a "soak the rich" tax although it called for sacrifices from all classes.² It was also a basic departure from the tax theories of the Empire.³ It took taxation

¹ Infra, p. 91.

² The income tax took 10 per cent from the workers, 15-20 per cent from the official, and 50 per cent from everyone with an income over 30,000 M.

³ "The financial constitution of October 1, 1919 (which was largely Erzberger's work), . . . took away . . . finally whatever had remained of . . . states rights, and all financial powers of the states passed into the hands of the Reich." Brunet, The New German Constitution, p. 70; When Erzberger was asked what tax powers had been left to the state and local governments, he is said to have replied, "The almost unlimited right to find new taxes." Mabel Newcomer, "Fiscal Relations of Central and Local Government in Germany under the Weimar Constitution," Political Science Quarterly, LI (1936), 188.

out of the hands of the Lander and centralized the collection of all direct taxes under the Reich. Erzberger's program was also heatedly denounced by the BPP as an invasion of "states rights." During the debate upon the tax proposals of Erzberger, Erzberger charged that Helfferich's financial policies during the first part of the war were the cause of the disastrous condition of Germany's financial structure in 1919. Following this charge the veiled attacks and insinuations against Erzberger which had been printed in the Nationalist press became open accusations of treason, graft and war profiteering.

The upshot of the Nationalists' attack against Erzberger was the trial of Helfferich for slander. The trial quickly deteriorated into a sounding board for anti-Republican sentiment, however. The judge and the prosecuting attorney appeared to the New York Times correspondent to be on the legal staff of the accused.¹ Every rumor, lie, half-truth and insinuation which could be mustered was hurled at Erzberger. Helfferich harangued the courtroom daily with speeches which were published and sold on the streets. Upon one occasion the Nationalist press published a speech three days before Helfferich delivered it "in his defense" in the courtroom.² One of the charges sought to link Erzberger with the annexation of the Briny iron district. Erzberger freely admitted his

¹ New York Times, January 27, 1921.

² Ibid., January 25, 1921.

connection with the Thyssen industries, but he denied that he had worked for the annexation of Briey, and the testimony of August and Fritz Thyssen confirmed Erzberger's statements.¹ Erzberger was charged with using his political office for private financial gain, but no positive evidence was submitted to prove this allegation. He was charged with taking money to Switzerland to avoid paying income taxes on it, but even the Attorney General, who had spent much time during the trial trying to implicate Erzberger, was forced to admit that his transfer of the money was legal and above suspicion.² No conclusive charges were ever proved against Erzberger, but the judge on the concluding day of the trial summed up the four main charges which he considered still valid: mixing politics with business, untruthfulness, impropriety, and political activity to Germany's disadvantage.³ Helfferich was ordered to pay 300 M. because he had failed to prove one trifling charge against Erzberger.

The Helfferich trial, which had begun as a trial of Helfferich for slander concluded as an indictment of Erzberger for treason to the German people. His political career seemed ruined, his party disgraced and the Republic had received a severe blow. The trial had been allowed to drag for two and one-half months. The decision was handed down one day before the Kapp Putsch struck Berlin on March 13, 1920.

¹ Ibid., January 27, 1921.

² Ibid., March 5, 1921.

³ Ibid., March 14, 1921.

The Bauer Cabinet was driven from Berlin by the Putsch. It fled to Dresden, then to Stuttgart before it could mobilize resistance to drive the insurgents from Berlin. Erzberger was forced to flee Berlin for his life. He had been wounded by a Rightist assassin in January soon after the trial began, and he narrowly missed death after the Kapp Putsch before he escaped the city. He was at first reported captured, but later he was reported safe in Amsterdam.

The Kapp Putsch relegated the "downfall of Erzberger" to the back pages of the German Press. The Putsch came about as a result of the revival of disgruntled military organizations after the armistice and the maintenance of illegal military groups such as the Ehrhardt group. They posed a threat to the Republic, but ironically, the government of the Republic dared not attack the threat from the extreme Right for fear of an attack from the extreme Left. The close ties of the Reichswehr with the illegal Right organizations combined with the sympathies of all the bourgeois parties as well as the Social Democrats doomed to failure any punitive step to limit them. The Kapp Putsch of March 1920, which fed on those irresponsible elements of the Right was an ill-timed venture in revolt which failed when the Reichswehr under General von Seeckt was unwilling to commit its support without insurance of success. The Kapp Putsch did fail to overthrow the Republic, but it showed its weakness. The general strike of socialists as well as Christian trade unionists was conceded at the time by the

government as well as by the Reichswehr to be the victor of the Kapp Putsch. It was a contributing factor but the main cause for the failure of the abortive revolt was the hesitancy of the responsible Right to play long odds in a gamble for the overthrow of the Republic. The Kapp Putsch had many repercussions. It served to drive the Independent Socialists and the Communists to support the Republic, but they quickly became disillusioned when their demands for reform were not met and when their strikes in protest were brutally suppressed. The Center Party was clearly one of the staunch supporters of the Republic during the revolt, but even the parties of the Right failed to support Kapp. In Bavaria the Kapp Putsch had greater importance than it did in the rest of the Reich. The Putsch in Berlin gave the Bavarian conservatives an excuse to force out the Social Democratic government and impose a reactionary government headed by von Kahr and strongly supported by the Bavarian People's Party.

The complete break between the Bavarian People's Party and the Center Party had occurred previous to the Kapp Putsch in January 1920. The Bamberg Program which was formulated at that time became the "guiding lines" for the political and Kultur aims of the BPP.¹ It reaffirmed the program of the BPP at Weimar.² On educational and religious questions and in most questions of foreign policy the

¹ Dittmar, The Government of the Free State of Bavaria, p. 113.

² Supra, pp. 50-51.

Center and the BPP continued to cooperate, but without any formal working agreement. On domestic issues other than Kultur questions and upon economic programs the BPP pursued its own course. There were several reasons for the split. The strong federalistic tendencies of the BPP opposed the growing unitary sentiments among the Center's left wing which had been clearly demonstrated in Erzberger's sponsorship of the centralized tax program. Another reason was the strong monarchical and traditionalist sympathies of the Bavarians. The particularism of Bavaria was encouraged by the Catholic Bishops of Bavaria who exercised a tremendous influence over that predominantly Catholic Land.¹ In addition, unlike the Center in the rest of the Reich, the BPP was not forced to coalesce with the Social Democrats, and it preferred to cooperate with the Nationalist Party in coalitions of the Right.² Its resemblance to the German People's Party was so striking that it was often called the Bavarian branch of the GPP.³

The separation of the BPP from the Center weakened the latter considerably. Other attempts were made by Catholic particularist groups to break away from the Center also, but they were mainly "splinter parties" and had little if any representation in the

¹ Spiecker, Germany from Defeat to Defeat, p. 84n.

² Dittmar, The Government of the Free State of Bavaria, p. 145.

³ Ibid., p. 144.

Reichstag.¹ In 1919 the Center received 19.7 per cent of all the votes cast in the Reich, but by the June election of 1920, the percentage of votes cast for the Center had shrunk to 13.1 per cent of the total electorate. The Center had lost more than 1,000,000 voters; more than 36 per cent of its electorate in 1919. On the other hand, the combined Center and BPP vote for the 1920 elections was only 2.4 per cent less than in 1919.²

The elections of June 1920 were disastrous for the Weimar Coalition. The damage to the Center was great, but the Center fared well in comparison to the Social Democratic Party and the Democratic Party which lost more than half of its electorate and 29 representatives in the Reichstag. The Social Democratic Party's popular vote sank from nearly eleven and one-half million to slightly more than five and one-half million, and it lost 51 representatives although its total of 112 was still the largest of any one party. The winners in the 1920 election were the Nationalists, the GPP and the Independent Socialists. The first two, the parties of the extreme Right, captured the discontented "liberal" vote which had

¹ Bachem, Geschichte der deutschen Zentrumspartei, VIII, 328; "The dissension in the Catholic Camp in regards to the Republic was not confined to Bavaria. There were everywhere Catholic circles which had formerly adhered to the Center without hesitation, but were now prepared to keep their distance from the "red" Republicans to join the right-wing parties. Others again, who like von Papen, remained in the Center Party, showed themselves inimical to any coalition with the Social Democrats." Spiecker, Germany from Defeat to Defeat, pp. 83-84.

² The statistics are found in Schauff, Die deutschen Katholiken und die Zentrumspartei, p. 112 and passim.

forsaken the Democratic Party, and a majority of the Independent Socialist vote -- more than double its previous total -- came from workmen who were not satisfied with the slow strides the Social Democratic Party was taking toward socialization of the Reich. Extremists on both wings thus topped the election of 1920, and the Republic was the loser in both instances.

As a result of the election the Weimar Coalition controlled only 225 seats out of a total of 446. Müller had no choice but to resign the chancellorship, but Ebert asked him to form a new cabinet. Müller attempted to include the Independent Socialists in the cabinet but they rejected the invitation to secure the Republic against the surging Right. They refused to lend support to a program of counterrevolution espoused by the coalition. Ebert now attempted to bring the German People's Party into the coalition, but the Social Democrats refused to enter into coalition with the party which was the epitome of ruthless capitalism. The result of the impasse was the appointment of a Centrist leader, Konstantin Fehrenbach, as chancellor and the construction of a purely bourgeois cabinet based upon the Center, the Democrats and the German People's Party. The results of the election had clearly indicated a desire to include the Right in the cabinet so the Fehrenbach cabinet did not represent an evil design upon the party of the Center to turn away from the democratic republic, but only reflected the wishes of the electorate.

Fehrenbach was generally classified as a member of the left

wing of the Center, but his republicanism was lukewarm and his contacts with the masses of the people remote. He was a functionary, a political hack if you will, but a distinguished hack. Fehrenbach was the former President of the Reichstag under the Empire as well as the presiding President of the Weimar Assembly. He was a learned jurist from Baden with a hoary record in the Center Party's Reichstag "Fraktion," but he was aged and ill when he became chancellor. He lacked the courage to resist and the ability to unite and organize Germany. Fehrenbach faced the realization of an insolvable solution to an impossible obligation, and like most German political leaders he was too concerned with the impossibility to repay reparations to produce positive measures of relief either at home or in the field of foreign relations. D'Abernon's description of Fehrenbach after the German failure at the Spa Conference is a revealing estimate of his character as well as his limitations as a vigorous statesman.

Fehrenbach's failure at Spa has largely diminished his influence and position Notwithstanding this loss of face he is an benevolent and benign as ever. I believe he is a thoroughly honest old fellow who would always exercise such influence as he may possess in the right direction in any grave emergency. For my own part, whenever I see him I understand the official who said: "He ought to sit as a model for the father of the Prodigal Son -- he is so welcoming, benevolent and paternal."¹

Fehrenbach assumed office pledged to forward the foreign policies of the Social Democrats, to enforce the existing laws on

¹ D'Abernon, The Diary of an Ambassador, I, 85.

socialization and to formulate new laws to continue socialization. He pledged to democratize the Reichswehr, and to govern with and not against the working classes. His promises were entirely unfulfilled. Although some flagrant examples of anti-Republicanism were purged from the Reichswehr, it was never democratized. Fehrenbach's Ministry delayed action towards further socialization or unemployment insurance. His pledge to set up a permanent Economic Council was never carried out. But worse than the negative aspects of the Fehrenbach government toward betterment of the German worker's condition was the formation of giant industrial combines which progressed rapidly during this period. It was during the Fehrenbach's administration that Hugo Stinnes emerged as the most powerful man in Germany. Stinnes was a millionaire with tremendous industrial holdings who exerted much pressure upon German politics owing to his wealth, and to his various newspapers and press agencies. He was a powerful voice in the GPP, and a bitter enemy of the policy of fulfillment and stabilization. It was Fehrenbach's Government which had to apologize for the Stinnes' ill-advised remarks at the economic conference at Spa, although it felt obligated to include him with the German delegation as an "unofficial expert."¹ The

¹ Stinnes' address at the Spa conference served to once more place the Allies on guard. He began in the following manner: "I rise because I want to look everybody in the face. M. Millerand announced yesterday that we Germans were accorded the right to speak as a matter of courtesy. I claim to speak as a matter of right. Whoever is not afflicted with the disease of victory" At this point Dr. Simons, the leader of the German delegation, interfered to announce that Stinnes had no official position, but this did not deter Stinnes and he continued in the same vein. D'Abernon, The Diary of an Ambassador, I, 68-69.

Fehrenbach Ministry also did nothing about the progress of inflation at the advice of the financial experts of the GPP and the Nationalist Party.

It is not surprising that reaction in Germany was dated from the Fehrenbach Cabinet. The inclusion of the GPP in the ministry, despite its professions of loyalty to the Republic, necessarily resulted in economic reaction. The Democratic Party, leaderless and in political decline, was no opposition to the GPP, nor was the Center which was woefully lacking in experts to cope with the financial, economic and diplomatic problems which beset Germany. The rash of conferences, in which the Allies hoped to settle the reparations questions and Germany tried to divide the Allies and emasculate the treaty, convinced most Germans that "experts" regardless of political viewpoint should dictate the political policies of the Reich. The Fehrenbach Ministry showed the willingness of the Center to work with the Right to insure a government, even if that government represented an economic and social reaction from its predecessors.

A study of the Center Party during the Weimar Republic is inseparably connected to the reparations questions which resulted from the war. The treaty had left a reparations blank check and a great division of opinion as to how it should be filled out, who should endorse it, when it could be cashed, whether there were sufficient funds to cover it, and what should be the policy of the Allies if the check "bounced." An initial amount of \$1,750,000,000

was to be paid by May 1, 1921, but no total reparations sum was mentioned in the treaty. In the twelve months which followed the signing of the Treaty of Versailles the Allies met four times in an effort to reach an agreement upon the terms of reparations. The total was first set at \$64,000,000,000. The payments were to be spread over a period of 42 years. In July 1920, during the Fehrenbach Ministry, the German government was invited to send a delegation to a conference at Spa. The Fehrenbach Ministry gained little for Germany, and it signed protocols on disarmament as well as coal deliveries. The Allies took the opportunity to agree upon the division of the reparations proceeds. In January 1921 the Allied Supreme Council met in Paris and presented Germany with the so-called Paris Resolutions which demanded a total reparations payment of \$54,000,000,000. In addition an annual tax equivalent of 12 per cent of Germany's export trade was to be collected. The German customs were to become security for these sums. The Paris Resolutions were the first public pronouncement of reparations figures and the announcement created a terrific uproar in Germany where all parties vehemently denounced the Allies. Fehrenbach's Foreign Minister, Walter Simons, was so impolitic as to make a repudiation of Germany's war guilt, and when he was invited to London in March 1921, Simons made a German counterproposal to the Allied demands which would have reduced Germany's liability to \$7,000,000,000. The Allies then stiffened and imposed sanctions on March 8. They occupied Düsseldorf, Duisberg and Ruhrort in the Ruhr Valley. In

May 1921 the Allied Supreme Council, meeting in London, issued a schedule of payments whereby the \$32,000,000,000 the Allies had finally decided on as the total reparations assessment still due would be met by certain annuities, bonds and taxes in Germany. The London Schedule,¹ as it was called, was duly dispatched to Berlin. The Allies also took the opportunity to point out certain shortcomings in which the German government was guilty in respect to disarmament and the trial of war criminals.

The inability of the Fehrenbach Ministry to cope with the London Schedule brought its resignation although there were other contributing factors. The agitation over the plebescite in Upper Silesia, a serious coal strike and the continued downward curve in the value of the mark were other elements in the fall of the Fehrenbach Cabinet. During May 1921 the mark dropped from 100 to 300 to the American dollar. On May 10, Josef Wirth, Fehrenbach's Minister of Finance and the leader of the Center's left wing, was chosen to succeed Fehrenbach.

The elevation of the comparatively unknown Wirth to the chancellorship was an indication of the strength of the Center's left wing where Wirth had succeeded Erzberger. Wirth's appointment showed that party government was functioning as it was designed to perform, and that the Republic was to be entrusted to the hands of a sincere democrat who believed that the form of the Republic was

¹The London Schedule is generally referred to as the London Ultimatum particularly in German sources.

essential to the success of German democracy. Wirth reinforced the vague liberal reputation he had won by immediately basing his cabinet upon the Weimar Coalition. He invited the Social Democrats into the cabinet and dropped the GPP. The Wirth Ministry's first task was to accept the despised London Ultimatum. Within the Center the division still existed between the advocates of fulfillment and the die-hards who dared the Allies to attempt an invasion of the Reich. That the Center's left wing which favored fulfillment was still dominant, was shown by the support given Wirth on the acceptance of the Ultimatum. Wirth had no more intention to comply with the London Ultimatum than the Nationalist Party, but he was convinced that the Allies could be appeased, divided and weakened by a good-natured campaign of submission coupled with a counterattack of sympathy and realism. He was determined not to antagonize the Allies into a unified action which would attempt to collect the reparations by force.

Wirth was particularly adaptable for a role of "front man" for the struggling Republic. He was a young bachelor who was fresh to the political scene and absurdly optimistic. His sympathy with the labor movement brought him support from both Christian and socialist Labor, but he was a constant opponent of the reactionary chairman of the CTU, Adam Stegerwald. He was too "Red" for Stegerwald and for much of the right wing of the Center, but his supporters from the left wing idolized him. He was so confident and pleasant in his contacts with both German and foreign officials that the

veteran German politician, Gustav Stresemann, doubted his sincerity. " He found something crafty about such complete and childlike innocence."¹ Wirth's appointment was particularly pleasing to the Allies. He seemed to Lord D'Abernon, the British Ambassador, to represent the "good Germans."

Nothing petty or snarling -- nothing of even the bureaucrat or the pedant with his ingenuous frankness he is one of the foremost men of his time -- a man on whom patriotic hope will continue to center.²

D'Abernon's early confidence in Wirth lessened throughout his term of office as it appeared that Wirth too was unwilling to deal boldly with the spiral of inflation, and as the gap widened between his frequent and optimistic promises and the results of his program of fulfillment, reform and recovery.

While Wirth continued to wax optimism and to promise reform and recovery the enfant terrible of German politics, Matthias Erzberger, began to be heard from the towns and villages of Württemberg and Westphalia where the peasants, laborers and lower middle class had remained faithful to him. Enthusiastic crowds greeted him in every place where he spoke. The rumor spread that he was advising Wirth, that his council was deciding the policies of the ministry. Stresemann watched his return to popularity with alarm, and began to attack the Wirth Ministry in order to weaken the influence of Erzberger. "By his (Stresemann's) attacks on Wirth he sought to

¹ Rudolf Olden, Stresemann, (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1930, trans. by R. T. Clark), p. 123.

² D'Abernon, The Diary of an Ambassador, II, 41-42.

keep Erzberger off the political stage; by warning the nation against Erzberger, he sought to undermine Wirth's position."¹ Lord D'Abernon, who later expressed the opinion that Erzberger's assassination was a blessing for the Wirth Ministry, reported that he had it "on good evidence" that Erzberger was engaged with Scheidemann and Breitscheid, the latter a leader of the Independent Socialists, in a maneuver to depose of Wirth and make Scheidemann chancellor and Breitscheid Foreign Minister.² The position Erzberger was to occupy was not revealed by D'Abernon. The old traditional leadership of the Center opposed his return, and advised him to remain in retirement. The idealists of the far left wing of the Center were probably repelled by his return also. But Erzberger still remained the only political figure in the Center Party who could wield group diplomacy to mold the divergent factions of the Center into a party of political action.

Erzberger's plans for a return to power were halted in August 1921 when he was assassinated while on vacation at Griesbach in the Black Forest. His death was met with varied feelings; the Right breathed a sigh of relief, the Center was inconsolable and the Left extolled his republican virtues. All condemned his assassination as a dastardly crime, but even his own party praised him with reservations. His career contained too many inconsistencies

¹ Olden, Stresemann, p. 120.

² D'Abernon, The Diary of an Ambassador, I, 215-216.

and ill-conceived plans to enable a contemporary to weigh his importance and to evaluate his contribution to Germany's history. Stresemann passed judgment upon his bitter enemy in a widely reprinted obituary in words unaffected by sentiment:

Erzberger had a quite unusual capacity for hard work and also a savage regardlessness which was peculiar to him and by which he carried through whatever he undertook to a triumph from which finer spirits would have shrunk . . . He acknowledged no leadership but his own and trod a lonely path¹

Erzberger was not a statesman, but he was a shrewd politician. The Center Party by necessity was the party of compromise. Erzberger carried the traditional skill of Center politicians in party caucuses and Reichstag committees a step farther to the field of diplomacy. That he failed was not his fault. It is doubtful whether any diplomat could have done better in the Armistice negotiations than Erzberger, and realism dictated the acceptance of the Treaty of Versailles. Erzberger was not a "mover of events" but he was the mirror of his age. His life reflected the aspirations of the average German. He was an annexationist, a peacemaker and an appeaser, but he always moved with the tide of opinion. He was an opportunist, but he always claimed to act with the interests of the people at heart and there is much justification for his claim.

Erzberger's enemies were the enemies of the democratic Republic: monarchists, reactionaries of every hue, extreme nationalists of the most vicious type. Socialists also feared him and with good

¹ Olden, Stresemann, pp. 44-45.

reason. A liberal Catholic movement under courageous leadership which stressed protection of private property, clericalism and social and political reform was a dangerous rival for the vote of the workmen of Germany. The Social Democrats were willing to accept Erzberger's conversion to republicanism -- they had no cause to question another's conversion, but they did not trust Erzberger, and they despised the clericalism he represented. The opposition of the Social Democrats, however, was aired on the floor of the Reichstag or in the press. The men who assassinated Erzberger were representatives of the extreme Right, defenders of monarchy and militarism.

Erzberger's assassination created little stir within the Center's organization. He had been absent from the party's councils for over a year when he was struck down. Wirth had ably taken over the direction of the left wing, but that left wing was a different group than Erzberger had controlled. Under the prompting of Adam Stegerwald and CTU reactionaries of his type what little enthusiasm the Catholic trades union men had once felt toward the Republic was blasted by the repeated failures of the Republic to solve any of the problems of the Reich. There were CTU leaders who were loyal to Wirth, and he had a popular following among the democratic idealists who formed an intellectual group on the fringes of the left wing, but the numerical strength which Erzberger had commanded was badly depleted under the leadership of Wirth.

Wirth has been classified as a Realpolitiker in the Center tradition of Windthorst and Erzberger, but his career belied this characterization.¹ He was a morale-builder for the Republic, and a pleasant "front man" for the policy of fulfillment, but his devotion to the Republic was sincere during his terms as chancellor. He did not stoop to opportunism or expediency to realize religious, party or private ambitions. Wirth was a strong German nationalist with a front-line soldiers' devotion to the Fatherland. He regarded fulfillment as a realistic approach to the liberation of the Reich from foreign control and to the recovery of Germany's pre-war international position.

In the field of foreign affairs Wirth's name was linked with Walther Rathenau who Wirth appointed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in his second cabinet in October 1921. The first Wirth Ministry had fallen over the League of Nation's decision on the Upper Silesia Question. The League's decision was a crippling blow to the policy of fulfillment which Wirth had tried to popularize as the policy of realism and revision but Wirth returned to office determined to continue fulfillment. Wirth and Rathenau were very close friends as well as partners in the execution of the fulfillment policy. The combination of the great Jewish industrialist and the young Catholic professor of mathematics was unusual, but they saw eye to eye on most political questions and shared common intellectual

¹ R. C. Long, "Wirth the Optimist," Fortnightly, CXVII (1922), 529.

interests which resulted in a warm personal friendship. The Wirth-Rathenau combination produced one "triumph," the Treaty of Rapallo. Rapallo was outwardly an innocent commercial treaty, but secret provisions provided for the use of Russian military training grounds in exchange for German heavy machinery and industrial equipment. The only "triumph" involved in the treaty was its defiance of the French and British governments who had invited the two despised nations, the Russians and the Germans, to an economic conference at Genoa. Karl Bergmann, the German historian of the Reparations question, pins the full responsibility for Rapallo upon the Centrist left wing leader.

That Dr. Rathenau was the moving spirit in the conclusion of the Treaty of Rapallo is a myth. On the contrary, he entertained serious doubts and was only induced to conclude the treaty with Russia when he realized that Dr. Wirth would, if necessary, sign it without him

Rapallo was a costly venture in Bismarckian diplomacy, for it not only alienated the Allies, but also the Social Democrats who placed the reparations question before any vainglorious attempt to recoup internal prestige, or to rebuild the Reichswehr on Russian training grounds. Rapallo illustrated Wirth's apparent willingness to abandon a goodwill policy for an impulsive and costly nationalistic triumph. All of the irresponsible elements in German politics which regarded the acceptance of the Treaty of Versailles as treachery and the Republic as an interloper regarded Rapallo as a victory over

¹ Karl Bergmann, The History of Reparations (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1927), p. 128.

the "enslavers of Germany," and the Center supported its chancellor in his bid for patriotic support. The Center had once more proved to be "German and National."

Three months after Repalleo Rathenau was assassinated by Right extremists. Wirth, during the days following Rathenau's murder rose to a position he never secured again. He seemed to stand as a defender of decency as well as republicanism in the crucial days that followed the assassination.

Ever since we first began to serve this new state under the flag of the Republic, millions have been spent in pouring a deadly poison into the body of our people. From Königsberg to Constance the campaign of murder has menaced this country of ours, to whose service we have devoted all our powers of body and mind. In return we are told that what we are doing is a crime against the German people, and that we deserve to be brought to justice; and then people are surprised when mere deluded boys resort to murder.¹

The following day he again spoke to the Reichstag.

When a statesman of the rank of Dr. Helfferich speaks here as he did, what must be the effect on the brains of youth who have combined in secret or semi-secret chauvinist, nationalist, anti-semitic and monarchist organizations? It is evident that the result is a sort of "Feme"
The real enemies of our country are those who instill this poison into our people. We know where we have to seek them. The enemy stands on the Right!,

he exclaimed, pointing to the empty benches of the Nationalists.

The effect was tremendous.²

«Dieser Feind steht rechts» was echoed and reechoed in the

¹
Count Harry Kessler, Walther Rathenau, His Life and Work (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1930), p. 358.

²
Ibid., p. 359.

demonstrations which followed Rathenau's murder. As after Erzberger's assassination the trade unions demonstrated in the streets, but the demands for reform were not met except by punitive measures. The Wirth Ministry immediately passed an emergency decree to protect the Republic. The Nationalists, the BPP and the Communist Party opposed the measure, but a substantial majority which included the GPP passed the decree by 303 to 102. The decree was heatedly resisted in Bavaria where the right wing elements virtually suspended the law of the Republic on judicial grounds. As a result of the "Law for the Protection of the Republic" the BPP moved even closer to the Nationalist Party in Bavaria and this combination forced the resignation of the Lerchenfeld Cabinet which had been willing to cooperate with Wirth, and elevated von Knilling, a stooge of the reactionary monarchist, von Kahr.¹ The result of the "Law for the Protection of the Republic" was not to destroy Right terrorism, but to drive reactionary groups together. A few communists were arrested as a result of the decree, but the "enemy on the Right" was not weakened and continued to loom as a threat to the Republic.

An opportunity to broaden the base of his government was presented to Wirth shortly after Rathenau's murder when a great majority of the Independent Socialists merged with the Social Demo-

¹ The BPP at this time formulated a new program which called for the transfer of the government's executive powers to an official who was to have the title of President of the State. See Johannes Mattern, Bavaria and the Reich; the Conflict over the Law for the Protection of the Republic (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1923), pp. 54-69.

crats. This merger was facilitated by the confidence which socialist Labor had in Wirth, despite his inability to better its situation. Wirth continued to reaffirm his sympathy with the proletariat, and he was careful to place bread before reparations in his addresses to them. The GPP under the prodding of Stresemann began to "feel out" their entrance into the cabinet, and on July 19, 1922, it announced that a working agreement with the Wirth Ministry had been reached. This event was portentous of trouble with the Social Democrats.

In the autumn of 1922 the Wirth Ministry split wide open over the issue of the admittance of the German People's Party into the cabinet. Wirth was unwilling to remain in office without the support of the Social Democrats, but he was also determined that the financial and economic experts of the GPP must be admitted to the ministry in order to combat the problems which faced the Reich. Stresemann had previously refused to enter a ministry headed by Wirth, but in November under his leadership the GPP was eager to assume a responsible share in the government. The Social Democrats balked at cooperating with the GPP as they had done when Fehrenbach attempted to create a greater coalition. The Social Democrats were particularly worried over the campaign waged by the industrialists to increase the eight-hour day to ten hours. The eight-hour day was the only remaining concrete benefit of the revolution and the Social Democrats were determined to defend it, but they chose to carry their opposition to the Reichstag rather

than in a cabinet dominated by bourgeois representatives.¹ Wirth still favored the eight-hour day despite the pressure brought upon him by his party and especially by the Catholic industrialist, Fritz Thyssen.² But the Social Democrats and Wirth were at odds on the proper plan for combating inflation. Wirth heeded the advice of the German as well as foreign experts to delay stabilization until the reparations total could be determined, but the Social Democrats insisted that inflation could only be halted by the immediate stabilization of the monetary system. The wide gap in social and economic policies between the Social Democrats and the GPP precluded any close cooperation, and as Wirth was not willing to continue as chancellor unless both parties were included in the ministry he resigned his position on November 14.

Wirth's fall was entirely needless. The previous day the same parties which refused to cooperate in a cabinet had agreed upon a reparations proposal of Wirth's to the Reparations Commission. A more astute or forceful chancellor might have effected a compromise, but Wirth was unable to reconcile the two parties and was not willing to unbend from his previous conditions for a government.

"Twenty-four hours after he fell most people realized that there

¹ For the attitude of the Center Party toward the eight-hour day see Infra, pp. 132-134; Maslowski, Was ist die deutsche Zentrums-partei?, pp. 88-92.

² See the letter of Fritz Thyssen which was written August 14, 1922 in an effort to induce Wirth to abandon the eight-hour day in Ibid., p. 90.

was no need for it at all. Cuno took over the same task, but with less ability."¹

Wirth's fall was generally regarded by foreign observers as a tragedy for the Republic, and it did represent the death blow to that peculiar brand of German liberalism characteristic of the early days of the Republic. But Wirth was certainly no less "national" than the GPP or the Nationalists, and by 1929 Wirth had clearly written off the "Weimar System" as a failure.² His entrance into the Brüning Cabinet in 1930 as Minister of Interior is often regarded as symbolic of his disillusionment with the "System," and his article in his periodical, Deutsche Republik, which is quoted by Emil Ritter is indicative of this mental attitude.³ But at least until Brüning's Cabinet, Wirth remained the hope of German republicans in many parties and the despair of the conservative elements

¹ D'Abernon, The Diary of an Ambassador, II, 142.

² Among the evidence presented at the Nürnberg War Criminal Trials was a letter of Josef Wirth's to the head of the House of Krupp. The letter was written from Lucerne, Switzerland in August 1940, after the fall of France. The letter was written to congratulate Gustav von Krupp for earning the German Merit Cross, First Class, for his service in rearming the German Army. Wirth added some interesting remarks which he implored Krupp to keep confidential. ". . . I recall with satisfaction the years of 1920 to 1923, when, together with Herr Direktor Doctor Wiedfeld, both of us were able to lay the foundations for the development of the German armament techniques through your great and most significant firm. Your great and most respected firm was assured of ten-year service for the government on account of my initiative as Reichs chancellor and as Reichsminister of Finance, by releasing considerable means of the Reich for the preservation of German armament techniques." New York Times, December 11, 1947.

³ Ritter, Der Weg des politischen Katholizismus in Deutschland, p. 135.

of his own party. He was certainly "too republican" and "too leftist" for the Bavarians, for the CTU leader, Stegerwald, as well as for Centrists such as Kaas and Brüning who came to dominate the Center's trend to the Right after 1927.

The "split personality" of Wirth and his reorientation to the Right during the course of the Republic personifies the plight of the Center Party, but in order to understand and appreciate the trend, the Social Catholic Movement must be considered, for in Social Catholicism partially lies the paradox which explains the Center's evolution. The difficulty in understanding the role of the Center Party is often largely as a result of the inability to appreciate its unique approach to politics. The Center never attempted to disguise its contempt for individualistic liberalism or socialism, but its critics attempt to fit Social Catholicism into the same mold with individualistic-republican-liberalism when the Center as a Catholic Party was convinced of the soundness of Catholic social ideas. Socialist and non-Catholic republicans generally viewed the Center's policies as simply opportunism, but there was a genuine and a sincere belief within the Center Party that the Catholic idea of a synthesis of classes and social reform, regardless of the form of government, was the essential problem. Wirth's leftist reputation stemmed from his early attempt to place the republic before the ideas of his party and Church. He was essentially a party rebel. In 1920 he resigned briefly from his cabinet position under Fehrenbach until economy in the administration was carried out.

During his administration he consistently opposed any attempts by party clericals to force the issue of a Reich school law upon the Reichstag. Wirth even went so far as to favor the interdenominational school in his home Land of Baden, and as a result he so infuriated the predominantly Catholic population of Baden that he was henceforth elected not on the local list of the Land, but on the Reich list where his name would draw enough votes to insure his election to the Reichstag.¹ Wirth also locked horns with the reactionary leadership of the OTU.² Adam Stegerwald, was one of the most stubborn opponents of cooperation with the socialist party and a bitter enemy of the "Weimar System." Wirth attempted to circumvent Stegerwald's opposition by forming a new trade union group in order to break down the ideological barriers that divided the German trade union movement. His unity group, the Einheitsgewerkschaft, never obtained a large following, however, as the old organizations were too firmly entrenched.³

The influence of the Social Catholic Movement upon the social policies of the Center Party was too dominant to be brushed over lightly in a study of the Center. Without Social Catholicism the Center would have had no left wing, no labor policy and virtually no popular following in ranks of Catholic workingmen. The Social

¹ Ibid., p. 234.

² Ibid., pp. 234-235.

³ Ibid., p. 234.

Catholic Movement was instrumental in the program of the Center almost from its inception, and after the World War it proved to be one of the greatest bulwarks against Marxian socialism. Social Catholicism proved to be one of the main "selling points" of the Center. It provided a program which would gather conservatives, middle class followers and workingmen into a Catholic Party dedicated to a synthesis of classes; a Volksstaat based upon Christian principles. Social Catholicism was not confined to Germany and the Center Party; it also appeared in other European countries as well as in the United States as an antidote to socialism as well as to ruthless capitalism.

Social Catholicism in the decade of the twenties essentially stemmed from the Encyclical Rerum Novarum although there were many previous manifestations of concern by the Catholic Church toward the conditions resulting from the industrial revolution. In France and England as well as in Germany the Social Catholic Movement antedated Rerum Novarum by many years. In Germany, Baron Wilhelm Emmanuel von Kettler (1811-1877), initiated the entrance of the Catholic Church into social problems, although there were other priests who also played a large role in alleviating the lot of the laboring classes. Bishop Kettler found the cure to social ills not in political forms or reforms but in Christianity.

The Christian philosophy must give new direction to men's strivings, and new form to their economic ideas. There must be a return to the love of the common people as that love was exemplified by the mendicant friars in the middle ages. There must be a return to the conception of property-rights set forth by the great medieval theologian, Saint Thomas Aquinas: namely, that men enjoyed not an absolute and

unconditional ownership of property, but only the right to use property in accordance with divine law.¹

Ketteler was realistic. "If we would understand the times in which we live, we must seek to fathom the social problems."² He studied the industrial revolution at close hand and wrote voluminously of his findings. He warned of the menace of the growing preponderance of capital and its tendency to make wage slaves out of workingmen. He bitterly opposed the excesses of the new bourgeois class as well as the political reforms of French liberalism. "This is the slave-market of our liberal Europe, fashioned according to the pattern of our humane, enlightened, anti-Christian liberalism and Free-Masonry."³ He regarded the bourgeoisie as selfish and materialistic; and the "freedom" which they professed was the freedom to exploit the lower economic classes, a freedom founded upon the absence of restraints imposed by church or state. To oppose the "enslavers of the workingmen" he supported cooperatives, labor unions and social legislation.

Rerum Novarum added little to the program of von Ketteler or other Catholic reformers, but it was tremendously significant in the development of the Social Catholic Movement. It supplied the limits of the movement and the authority which was so necessary to any Catholic movement. It opposed economic liberalism, repudiated

¹ Parker Thomas Moon, The Labor Problems and the Social Catholic Movement in France (New York: McMillan Company, 1921), p. 122.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., p. 123.

socialism as a false theory, encouraged Social Catholicism as a true remedy to the social problems of the world, and stated definite principles for a program of social reform. It rejected the class struggle, although it favored trade unions. It protected private property, but it deplored the excesses of ruthless capitalism. It called for cooperation between management and labor in the interest of society. It based its program solidly on Christian principles which left little room for French liberalism or Marxian materialism. Rerum Novarum legalized the activities of the Catholic trade unions in Germany as well as the social policies of the Center which were strongly marked by 1891. Since 1891 the ideas of Rerum Novarum have found continual restatement in the social programs of the Center Party and have formed the ideological limits which "good Catholics" observed.

Other Social Catholics continued the work of the Church in Germany. Canon Moufang and Canon Hitze were notable contributors to economic and social reform. Both were Centrist representatives in the Reichstag and important sponsors of social legislation. Hitze was prominent as a specialist on social legislation. He rejected state socialization, centralization in government and extreme centralization of the bureaucracy. He feared oppressive state control over the individual and social organization.

It is not state socialism that we want, but guild socialism . . . not a pure and simple return to the medieval guild, but the establishment of a modernized guild system . . . The guilds of today must rest upon a larger economic basis and must be more democratic than

those of the middle ages.¹

Hitze also anticipated the concept of "functional representation" in government which was later clearly brought out by Pius XI in his Quadragesimo Anno (1931). It was greatly as a result of the influence of these "Social Catholics" upon the Center Party that the Center became a party of social reform, as well as a clerical party and a party of political particularism.

The basic ideas of Social Catholicism were firmly instilled in the program of the Center by 1918. The CTU which was not necessarily composed of all Catholics or all Center members was particularly influenced by Catholic social policies. In November 1920, at a CTU Congress at Essen, the CTU proposed its program of social reform, and its leader, Adam Stegerwald, set forth his idea of a new Christian pressure group.² In explaining the type of state he desired, Stegerwald defined his concept of the "Christian State." "We demand a Christian State. A Christian State means to us" a fundamental rejection of all aspects of the rationalistic and mechanistic thought which grew out of the French enlight-

¹ Ibid., p.127.

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For a report on the Essen Congress of the CTU see International Labor Office, The Programme and Organization of the Christian Trade Unions of Germany (Geneva, 1921, n.p.). Hereafter cited as The Programme and Organization of the Christian Trade Unions of Germany.

enment of the eighteenth century."¹ Dr. Theodor Brauer, a prominent advocate of the Corporate State idea, explained the "Christian Doctrine of the CTU."

The Christian trade unions certainly reject and oppose all purely individualistic economic systems, but it does not therefore follow that we share the socialist theory. Individualism and socialism represent two different aspects of human evolution. Christianity alone can assign to each of these its appropriate part. In opposition to socialism the Christian movement is a vocational and corporate movement, not a class movement. . . .²

The Congress at Essen of the CTU was particularly significant for it signified the new unity of the interdenominational Christian Trade Unions and the purely Catholic Unions. The history of the former disunity is too involved to be presented, but it stemmed from organizational differences as well as religious disputes.³ The rapprochement was brought about by pressure of the annual German Bishops Conference at Fulda only a few weeks before the Congress opened. The merger was undertaken on the following basis: from the point of view of morality there was to be no objection in principle to the collective stoppage of work, but

¹ Emil Ritter, a member of the Center's "national-conservative" wing who welcomed the von Papen Government in 1932, and later attempted to induce former Centrists to abandon political Catholicism and accept the Hitler Government, describes Stegerwald's speech as of "great historical importance." Stegerwald in the course of his address labeled the Weimar Constitution as "foreign inspired" and centralism (as seen in the Weimar Constitution) as "French inspired." Ritter, Der Weg des politischen Katholizismus in Deutschland, p. 185; For a vivid account of Stegerwald's speech see The Programme and Organization of the Christian Trade Unions of Germany, pp. 11-12.

² Ibid., p. 19.

³ For a more detailed account of the controversy see Ibid., pp. 1-4.

"wild strikes" and the unjustified employment of force were condemned, a trade union organization must be of such a character as to allow to those who belong to it the liberty of judging trade union questions from the point of view of religion and morality, and of determining their own action accordingly;¹ conciliatory organs for the regulation of the conditions of labor must be maintained, and particularly industrial arbitration must be strengthened.

Adam Stegerwald, who dominated the Essen Congress, was a former carpenter, a Bavarian and a member of the famous Catholic association of journeymen, the Kolping Association, another pioneer Catholic social movement. He had been one of the original leaders of the OTU which took shape in 1899, and in 1902 he was appointed chairman of that group, a position he held for many years. He became a member of Prussian Herrenhaus, and in 1919 was a member of the National Assembly as well as the Prussian Landesversammlung, and in 1920 he was elected to the first Reichstag as a member of the Center Party. In 1919 he was appointed to the Ministry of Welfare in the Prussian Cabinet and in 1921 he was made Premier of Prussia for a short period of time.² In 1921 he founded a newspaper, Der Deutsche, which was one of Dr. Wirth's bitterest

¹ This point was included at the insistence of the Catholic trade unions.

² For an account of Stegerwald's term as Prussian Premier see Otto Braun, Von Weimar zu Hitler (New York: Europa Verlag, 1940), pp. 108-110

critics. Later, under Brüning, he became first, Minister of Communications, then, Minister of Labor. Stegerwald, as much as any one man, was responsible for weakening the left wing of the Center Party. His authoritarian control of the CTU coupled with his unrelenting hatred of socialism and liberalism allowed him to turn the Catholic workingman away from cooperation with the socialist Free Trade Unions and to weaken gravely the German trade union movement. In Otto Braun's Von Weimar zu Hitler Braun states that Stegerwald maintained in the Munich-Gladbach agitation school of the Center a tribunal opposed to the development of the Free Trade Unions and Social Democracy.¹ Stegerwald made no bones of his determination to subdue socialism. In 1922, on the annual Catholic Day in Munich, he declared his determination that the Christian portion of the German people would overcome the Social Democrats.² This statement was made at the same time Wirth was frantically attempting to maintain a coalition government in which the Social Democrats were the most powerful group. Stegerwald was an avowed reactionary politically, but at the same time a powerful advocate of social reforms in line with Rerum Novarum. Otto Braun claims that he regarded the former King of Prussia as the greatest champion of the working class.³ Certainly he was an enemy of the Republic,

¹ Ibid., p. 98.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

a believer in authoritarian government, an ardent German nationalist, as well as an influential member of the Center. Such an insidious and powerful force from within the mass following of "democratic wing" of the Center could only bring division and disaster to the party.

The futile struggles of the years 1920-1922 exhausted the democratic wing of the Center Party exactly as Social Democracy had been worn out in the years of 1919-1920. The Catholic peasantry of western and southern Germany lost interest in the democratic Republic, and were prepared to agree to Germany's being reconstituted as a conservative and authoritarian State. The conservative right wing began to gain the upper hand in the Center Party from 1923 onwards The democratic period of German Catholicism, which Erzberger had ushered in in 1917, was at an end In view of the consistent failures of the Weimar Republic and of Social Democracy the leaders of the Christian Trade Unions also made a fateful change. Men like Stegerwald were prepared to continue defending the vocational interests of the Catholic workers as zealously as ever. But they did not believe that the interests of the Catholic workers absolutely necessitated association with Social Democracy and the defense of the democratic Republic

Stegerwald and Centrists of his ilk believed that they might fare as well in a conservative Germany as a republican Germany, and without the obnoxious ties to Social Democracy and individualistic liberalism. The passage of the Christian Trade Unions into the "camp of their class enemy" as Arthur Rosenberg phrases it did represent a terrible blow to the hopes of Centrists like Wirth who sincerely believed in the democracy of Weimar. It is not difficult to point out the steady move toward authoritarianism in the Republic

¹ Arthur Rosenberg, A History of the German Republic (London: Methuen and Company, 1936), pp. 176-177.

until Hitler climaxed the trend, and the Christian Trade Unions must be labeled one significant force within the Center which compelled it to desert gradually the ranks of those parties which at least outwardly claimed to be republican. The CTU supplied the numerical force together with a lack of ideological scruple to effect the shift to the Right within the Center.

But the trend to the Right was only termed "reactionary" by socialists, liberals, party rebels (if they can thus be classified) such as Wirth, and Catholic intellectuals who scorned the "mechanistic Center" and the horny-handed Trade Union leaders who guided its social policies. Many Catholic intellectuals leaned to the left and adopted a mystic, idealistic Christian Socialism, or joined the followers of Artur Moeller van den Bruck who called himself a "revolutionary conservative." Van den Bruck, as well as Leo XIII, despised liberalism and attacked the class struggle because it divided the Volk. He saw in Germany's multiplicity of political parties the symbol of German decay. For government by coalition or compromise he had only contempt. But most "faithful Catholics" remained true to the Center because of its historic role as a defender of the Church, regardless of their feelings toward the Republic or the Center's alleged shift to conservatism.

The shift of the Center toward the Right was not at first perceptible after the fall of Wirth. Nor was the trend considered "conservative" or "reactionary" by Centrists who sincerely believed that the Social Catholic Movement offered a synthesis of society

designed to rid the world of socialism and the excesses of capitalism. The inability of the Center's critics to judge the character of the Center upon any other standard but the class struggle and individualistic liberalism has blackened the reputation of many individuals within the Center who were motivated by idealism and hope for a better Reich in a better world.

In January 1922 the Center Party published a significant program at its annual Parteitag.¹ The "Richtlinien" (guiding lines) of the Center Party, however, reflected little change in the Center's development. As most Center "programs" it was replete with generalities and designed to please every economic class in support of the Center. In order to understand the character of the program it is sufficient to paraphrase some of the sections and more significant statements contained in it. A preface expressed the Weltanschauung of the party. The Center Party was first of all the Christian people's party, a party strongly determined to realize the principles of Christianity in the state, in society, in economic problems, and in cultural life. The Weltanschauung was clearly elevated above party politics. Although no mention was made of the "Republic" by name, the Center claimed for itself

¹For the complete text of the January 1922 Program see Bachem, Geschichte der deutschen Zentrumspartei, VIII, 369-378; also see Wilhelm Mommsen and Guenther Franz, Die deutschen Parteiprogramme (Leipzig, 1931, n.p.), pp. 48-58.

the role of the "constitutional party."¹ The Center's goal, as well as that of the Catholic Church, was the ideal condition, the Volkstaat, which was to be determined by the will of the people through constitutional means. The Center repudiated the "class state" for the Volkstaat, where all classes would be represented in a harmonious synthesis of economic and social classes.² All

¹ The evasion of the Center Party toward the term "Republic" continued until 1925 when Wirth forced the issue in the annual Partei-tag over the opposition of Stegerwald and the right wing, and attained an official resolution which recognized the parliamentary-democratic Republic as that form of government which met the social-political aspirations of the Party. According to Emil Ritter not until 1925 was the Center officially committed in support of the Republican form of government. Ritter, Der Weg des politischen Katholizismus in Deutschland, p. 135.

² The social policy of the Center and the CTU, in general principles, was founded upon the idea of Arbeitsgemeinschaft which implied a solidarity of vocations and classes and more particularly of collaboration between employers and workers. Arbeitsgemeinschaft, in the sense of Labor-Capital cooperation, was one of the dominating ideas of Rerum Novarum. "The great mistake made in regard to the matter now under consideration is to take up with the nation that class is naturally hostile to class, and that the wealthy and the workmen are intended by nature to live in mutual conflict. So irrational and so false is this view, that the direct contrary is the truth. Just as the symmetry of the human frame is the resultant of the disposition of the bodily members, so in a State is it ordained by nature that these two classes should dwell in harmony and agreement, and should, as it were, groove into one another, so as to maintain the balance of the body politic. Each needs the other: Capital cannot do without Labor, nor Labor without Capital. . . ." Rerum Novarum (1891); Arbeitsgemeinschaft, as an appeaser of class warfare, achieved great prominence following the World War when industry initiated Labor-Management cooperation schemes as (from the socialist and communist point of view) counter-revolutionary movements to offset the plans for nationalization of industry. The Works Councils Program was an outgrowth of the united demands of Christian and socialist workmen for a share in the management of industry. Stegerwald at the Essen Congress of the CTU declared that the worker ought to share in the ownership and the product of the undertaking, but he qualified his statement by declaring that reorganization of industry must in no way limit individual initiative. "An economic system must be found which in no way excludes the free initiative of the leader of industry or of a single undertaking. Centralization set up by the state and beginning at the top instead of at the bottom would in no circumstances lead to the desired end." The Programme and Organization of the Christian Trade Unions of Germany, p. 17.

classes must bear the Staatsgewalt (executive power). A reminder of the Center's traditional defense of federalism was seen in the statement which denounced centralism as opposed to the German Volkscharakter. The Center visualized itself as the protector of religious freedom of conscience guaranteed under the constitution, and the Center vowed to fight any spiritual or moral decomposition in the Reich. It considered national morality as the symbol of national health and the fertile soil of all powers of cultural manifestations. As was customary in all Center programs a large section was reserved for the "youth question." The Center reiterated the rights of the Church and family toward the rearing of the child and it resented undue interference by the state although it recognized that the state must have a share in the education of the nation's youth. The denominational school was defended as a natural right of Christian parents.

Section one outlined the foreign policy of the Center. The German people must have equalization of rights in international affairs; the Treaty of Versailles must be revised, especially on border problems; the decision on Colonies made at Versailles must be abrogated; Germany's entrance into the League of Nations must depend upon its recognition as an equal with the major powers and disarmament must be likewise equitable.

¹In a letter to D'Abernon in July 1922, Josef Wirth expressed the viewpoint of the "Republican Center" on the League of Nations. Wirth personally favored the League idea despite the "Crime of Upper Silesia," but he was certain that German public opinion and the

Section two was concerned with internal affairs. The Center demanded a strong coalition type government which advocated a vigorous worker's program; the "security organ," the Reichswehr, must be securely controlled by the Reichstag; the Reichswehr must be insulated from political propaganda; the bureaucracy must be efficient and loyal to the government to provide national order and capable administration; a continued effort must be made to widen local self-government.

Section three dealt at length with financial and tax policies.¹ First of all, the budget must be balanced; there must be rigid economy in all phases of government: Reich, Länder and local government; taxes which hindered economic-technical development must be prohibited; tax dodgers and those who smuggled capital from the Reich must be sought out and prosecuted; large families and small investors should be spared from unreasonable tax burdens.

Section four, was concerned with economic and labor questions.²

Wilhelmstrasse officialdom would need further arguments before they would be convinced. The League, in Wirth's opinion, was too closely identified with Versailles. The great question was whether Germany would be admitted upon complete equality and within the "inner circle" of the great powers. In addition Germany must be guaranteed that the Allies would relinquish the "humiliating declaration" (war guilt) of Versailles. Wirth, in reply to D'Abernon's query about the slowness of German disarmament, said that German disarmament had been slow because the "League . . . had not been true . . . to its ideals." D'Abernon, The Diary of an Ambassador, II, 62-63.

¹ For a summary of the Center's financial policies see Bachem, Geschichte der deutschen Zentrumspartei, IX, 258-261.

² For a complete account of the social, economic and labor policies of the Center Party in the post-war period see Ibid., 132-162; also see Dessauer, Das Zentrum, pp. 28-32.

The government must have a social and economic policy which would alleviate the lot of the German people and solve the unemployment problem; the Center condemned the excesses of individualism as it was manifested in ruthless capitalism; the party reaffirmed its faith in private property, and the system of competitive business enterprise, but only when competition served the Gemeinwohl (general welfare); the syndicates, monopolies and all business enterprises which combined to fix prices above the natural level were condemned; the full development of agriculture was called for as well as protection of trade and commerce; the woman's economic role was defined as that of Mutter und Hausfrau, although the Center tactfully boasted of the German woman's great share in the national economy;¹ social security and laws for the protection of labor were to be extended and enlarged; harmful business speculation was condemned and a demand was made that it be halted.

¹The Center was often called a "woman's party" as a large percentage of its votes came from faithful Catholic women. Certainly without female suffrage the Center's strength would have suffered much more than it did after the war. Catholic men were gradually turning away from the Center, but the women balanced the withdrawal of the men. Slightly over 50 per cent of Catholic men voted for the Center Party, but the larger percentage of Catholic Center voters among the women raised the total Catholic average support of the Center to nearly 60 per cent. Schauff, Die deutschen Katholiken und die Zentrumsparlei, p. 76; Another interesting study of Johannes Schauff's which John B. Mason has utilized in an article in Commonweal compares the support of the Center by good faithful Catholics (bekennnistreu) and Catholics who only nominally supported their Church. Of those who took Easter Communion 69 per cent voted for the Center Party in the December elections of 1924; while the national average for all Catholics voting for the Center was 58.1 per cent. John B. Mason, "How the German Catholics Vote," Commonweal, XII (1930), 575.

Section five, reiterated the platitudes of the preface. It was concerned with the people's welfare and Kultur. It further defined the Center's attitude toward education and repeated the desires of the Center for state and religious cooperation upon Kultur questions.

The years 1920-1922 contain in part the clue as to why the Center was willing to enter coalitions with the GPP and later the Nationalists to remain in the government. It is impossible to record an evolution towards conservatism or to note a turning point which marked a new course for the Center Party away from social and political reform toward bourgeois economic and social policies. It is impossible, because there was no evolution, no turning point and no new course. The Center's support of the constitution was basically selfish in order to secure its peculiar clerical program. The Center refused as a party to recognize the Republic as that form of government under which the Center could realize its program until 1925, although there were many individuals in the Party who professed republicanism, and the Center proved to be a defender of the gains of the Republic if not the form of the Republic. The Center continued to openly denounce liberalism and socialism while it professed to defend a "liberal constitution" and to ally with the Social Democrats as the protectors of the German workingmen. The Center Party was equal to every contradiction. A party which could reconcile the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk to a "peace of understanding without annexations" was equal to incongruities which

might have destroyed a party solely devoted to political principles.

The "Period of Catholic Democracy" was the period when the Center's left wing did exert its greatest influence. It was the conclusion of the brief period when the left wing spoke for the entire Center Party. Erzberger and Wirth held commanding positions in the government as representatives of "Catholic Democracy," but they never represented the bulk of the Center Party. The majority of the party yielded to expediency to support the faction of the party which appeared to represent the Zeitgeist. The CTU and the peasant groups proved to be the only mass support available within the electorate of the Center which might have supported a republic, but the peasants were by nature ultra conservatives, and the CTU was in the hands of enemies of the Republic, liberalism and vehement opponents of cooperation with Social Democracy. The ideological and religious barrier which prevented a united German labor movement prevented a labor movement in the Center's left wing based upon class aspirations in favor of cooperation with a capitalistic system intent upon rationalization of industry and the reduction of labor's share in production. The Center's labor support, which should have furnished the bulk of its "liberal" votes, passed out of the hands of republicans like Wirth and into the control of Stegerwald, Brüning and Prelate Kaas. Erzberger and Wirth attempted to prevent this trend, and they tried to urge closer cooperation with the Social Democrats, but neither could repudiate the dogma of the Catholic Social Movement or the German Bishops who

gave support to the right wing.

The essential conservatism of Social Catholicism and the opposition of the Catholic Church to individualistic liberalism were forces which undoubtedly weakened the Republic. The support the Center afforded to the Republic and the constitution was not based upon considerations of principle, faith or even desire. Stegerwald's charge that the constitution was "foreign inspired" expressed the opinion of the majority of the Center Party. The task of the Center Party was to reconcile the anti-liberal, anti-individualistic and anti-socialistic tenets of the Social Catholic Movement with a Republic whose constitution was charged with liberalism and individualism, and whose "most republican" party was a socialist party. By the fall of Wirth it was apparent that the Center had failed to achieve the task, and that the surge for power by the Center's left which Erzberger had initiated in 1917 had subsided into a trickle. The way was open for the entrance of the Center into a conservative government.

CHAPTER VI

THE CENTER'S ROLE IN THE RECOVERY OF THE REPUBLIC, 1922-1924

In the interim between the fall of the Wirth Cabinet and the appointment of the next Centrist chancellor, Wilhelm Marx in November 1923, the Center Party played a secondary role in the government. Germany was confronted with a series of crises -- the Ruhr Invasion, the revolt in Bavaria, the revolt in Saxony, and the complete failure of the German monetary system -- which prevented the normal operation of party government. What party principles and political ideas the German "moderate parties" possessed were sacrificed to save the Republic in the cause of "national interest."

The Center Party was more willing to depart from normal parliamentary procedures than the other members of the Weimar Coalition, but the Center still proved to be a loyal supporter of the republican constitution and a defender of the party system. It was a consistent supporter of the policy of fulfillment, a strong ally of the only great political leader to emerge during the Weimar Republic, Gustav Stresemann, and a stubborn opponent of the Nationalists and the right wing of the GPP who would have destroyed the constitution and the policy of fulfillment to serve "conservative-national" interests. The Center proved to be an

agreeable partner of the Democrats on social legislation and on such questions as hours of labor and unemployment insurance. It refused to support the Social Democrats in their intransigent opposition to any sacrifices from Labor. The Center Party program was a reflection of the balance of economic interests within the party. The mid-point was the bourgeois center; therefore, the Center Party presented a bourgeois social and economic program. It accepted the monetary theories of the extreme conservatives and hesitated to press for stabilization, but this did not mean that the Center had abandoned its labor support or because it accepted the counsel of conservative economic and financial experts that it had become a party of laissez-faire capitalism. The Center continued to press for the ideals implicit in the Social Catholic Movement. It refused to accept the program of the capitalist or the proletariat in its strivings for a state which would eliminate class warfare.

The importance of the Center Party remained in its parliamentary position. A cabinet could not be formed during the years 1922-1924 without the consent of the Center Party. The Center Party insisted that it exercised its pivotal position for the good of the Republic: to appease the class struggle, to provide for a continuity of policy no matter which parties composed the coalition, and to act as a vigilant defender of Christian principles in government regardless of the composition of the government. The enemies of the Center have charged that it exacted a

price for its entrance into every cabinet, but the accusation is unjustified in the years in question. The hallmark of the Center Party was moderation in all questions with the exception of clerical questions. Moderation was not a reflection of the benign character of the Center Party, but a political necessity which was forced upon the party by the incompatibility of its dissimilar factions.

The fall of the Wirth Ministry had created a vacuum in the party system. The Center announced that because its beloved Wirth had been crucified by the action of the other parties it would refuse to allow one of its members to assume the chancellorship. The other parties were passed over by Ebert, and a non-party chancellor and a representative of "big business" was appointed. Wilhelm Cuno, a shipping magnate and the head of the Hamburg-American Line, succeeded Wirth as chancellor. His appointment was heatedly criticized by the parties of the Weimar Coalition, but President Ebert was convinced that the crisis which the Reich faced called for a "strong government" which was the antithesis of a party government in Ebert's eyes. Among the "cabinet of experts" formed by Cuno were two Centrists: Heinrich Brauns, perennial Minister of Labor,¹ and Count Andreas Hermes, Minister of Finance. Brauns was a priest and an ardent advocate of Social Catholicism. He was a sincere friend of labor, a believer in extensive social

¹ Brauns was Minister of Labor from May 1921 until June 1928.

legislation and a long-time fighter for social reform. But Brauns was listed in the right wing of the Center Party, and to the Social Democrats and Communists who represented most of Germany's organized laborers, Brauns was a clerical reactionary. Hermes was a conservative, the leader of the Christian Landworkers' Movement and a well-known figure in the conservative agrarian wing of the Center. As Minister of Finance he followed the dictates of "big business" -- Stinnes, Thyssen and the industrialists of the GPP. The peculiar social composition of the Center Party provided ministers for any type of cabinet -- revolutionary, leftist, moderate, conservative, or reactionary. The discipline of the Center Party forced all wings of the party to unite in support of any government in which the Center was represented, and no rebels were permitted within its ranks.¹

The outstanding event which occurred during the period of the Cuno Ministry was the invasion of the Ruhr by the French and Belgian armies on January 11, 1923. The Allied Governments had refused to consider the German proposals for a reparations settlement submitted on November 13 by the Wirth Ministry. On December 27, the Reparations Commission, opposed by the British, declared Germany in default and opened the way for the invasion which

¹ There were exceptions to this statement. Von Papen, a representative of the Center Party in the Prussian Diet, was a notable rebel upon the Center's reactionary flank, and Josef Wirth deserted the Party for a time in September 1925 when he objected to the close cooperation of the Center with the Nationalists in the Luther Cabinet.

occurred two weeks later. Germany's counterattack to the "invasion" was "passive resistance." Passive resistance became the program of every political party -- even the Communists backed it for a time. The Center was particularly vehement in its protests as a large percentage of its electors lived in the affected areas, the so-called "occupied territories."¹ The working classes of the Ruhr, a large portion of them Catholic and members of the OTU, were extremely hostile to the French invasion, but the workers were given little chance to resist. The policy of Giesberts, the Center's chief delegate to the Paris Peace Conference, was never carried out.² The coal mines were not flooded, nor did the owners and workers unite to defy the French demands. There was a brief show of resistance, and the press continued to glorify the German "defense," but passive resistance was in reality a sham. The interpretation of passive resistance by Arthur Rosenberg is the generally accepted one.

The general strike with which the workers of the Ruhr district proposed to meet the invasion of the French and Belgian troops did not take place. It was prevented by the mine-owners The so-called passive resistance of Germany in the year 1923 is really a fable The German workers were at that time ready to make any sacrifice, but the great industrialists were unwilling to forgo their profits . . . passive resistance was from the very outset a pathetic and half-hearted proceeding³

¹ D'Abernon, The Diary of an Ambassador, II, 120.

² Supra, p. 67.

³ Rosenberg, The German Republic, pp. 181-182.

But the problems which accompanied the invasion of the Ruhr were real and ominous to the security of the Reich. Inflation reached impossible proportions. The attacks of Right and Left extremists in Bavaria and Saxony split the nation on ideological grounds and poised a threat to the unity of the Reich which was far more serious than the danger during the revolution. Between January and August, however, no political party spoke of submission.¹ The German government submitted offers to the French but they were rejected.² By June daily riots accompanied the growing discontent with the Cuno "do nothing" policy. The Center's official newspaper, Germania, began the discussion for a new government. It represented the Cuno government as politically bankrupt and called for a new and stronger government. Germania was often a harbinger of the Center's policies, but in this instance the Center Party officially denied that the article was inspired by the party.³ It does not seem reasonable that the Center would have desired to inherit the difficulties which faced Cuno. The Center frequently capitalized on religious martyrdom in its history, but it never sought political martyrdom. The excitement stirred up by Germania continued, but no party was willing to press for a new government.

¹ Eric Sutton, ed. and trans., Gustav Stresemann; His Diaries, Letters, and Papers (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1935), I, 66. Hereafter cited as Sutton, Gustav Stresemann.

² See Bergmann, The History of Reparations, pp. 191-203.

³ Sutton, Gustav Stresemann, I, 74.

On August 9, Cuno, in the face of sustained attacks against his ministry, demanded a vote of confidence. In the debate which followed the Center's Reichstag spokesman, Wilhelm Marx, stressed the need for cooperation in the work of rescuing Germany from the perils which surrounded her. In the name of the Center Party, Marx proposed the following program: the immediate establishment of a gold fund large enough to finance the acquisition of necessary foodstuffs and to stabilize the currency, the creation of new opportunities for sound investment, and the attainment of budgetary equilibrium by means of economy measures and heavier taxation. The Center, Marx concluded, favored giving the government full authorization to put such a program into effect.¹

Cuno's Ministry was unwilling to take the bold steps which were necessary to stabilize the currency and to place the German economy upon a sound footing. On August 12 the Cuno government fell from office. The cause of its fall was not passive resistance, but the weakness of Cuno's resistance policy. Stresemann stressed the inept policies of the Cuno Ministry. He called for leadership which would be willing to face unpopularity to bring order out of chaos. In the weeks of debate before Cuno's fall, Stresemann emerged as the strongest man in the Reichstag, and it was he who was appointed chancellor.²

¹ Halperin, Germany Tried Democracy, p. 257; also see Sutton, Gustav Stresemann, I, 76-79.

² Ibid.

For the first time in the brief history of the Republic the frequently discussed "Great Coalition" was formed by Stresemann.¹ The Social Democrats, who had refused to coalesce under Centrist leadership during the Fehrenbach and Wirth Ministries, entered the government under Stresemann, the leader of a party which represented the huge industrial combinations in Germany. There were three Centrists in the cabinet: Brauns, Minister of Labor, Johannes Fuchs, who undertook the direction of a new ministry created by Stresemann, the Ministry of Occupied Territories; Anton Hoefle, Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, who gained notoriety in 1925 when he was accused of the misuse of Post Office funds and was dismissed from office and prosecuted. Fuchs was an expert, as was Dr. Luther, the new non-partisan Minister of Food and Agriculture, who later became Minister of Finance in the second cabinet of Stresemann and chancellor in January 1925. The Right bitterly attacked the "liberal" composition of the cabinet, but Stresemann, who at this time was convinced of the necessity for the inclusion of the Social Democrats, vigorously defended his cabinet.

The character of the new cabinet is fixed by circumstances of its origin; it was built up on a parliamentary basis, and came into existence at an exceptional time that calls for much exercise of responsibility Great crises and great decisions . . . demand the concentration of all those forces that lie behind the constitutional idea of the state.²

¹ The Great Coalition included the Social Democrats, the Democrats, the Centrists, and the GPP; see Sutton, Gustav Stresemann, I, 83-85.

² Ibid., p. 89.

On September 6, at a meeting of the foreign press, Stresemann delivered a speech which prepared the way for the abandonment of passive resistance. "The great man knows when to yield compliance in all material things, but uncompliance in the defense of German soil, of which not one stone must be sacrificed"

¹ The Center Party recognized the realities of the policy of passive resistance and likewise prepared to yield. In the first week of September the Center's Rhineland organ, the Kölnische Volkszeitung, had insisted upon continuing resistance, but after Stresemann's speech on September 6 it began to retreat. The Center Party had begun a policy which it continued as long as Stresemann lived, support of the foreign policy advocated by Stresemann as the policy of practical politics. On September 25, the Premiers of the German Länder, the Reich cabinet and influential party leaders met to discuss abandoning passive resistance. Von Knilling, the representative of the Bavarian People's Party and the Bavarian Premier, recognized that resistance must be abandoned or the German economic and financial structure would disintegrate.

. . . . But that the outrage to justice and the breach of the treaty involved in the Ruhr invasion and recognized by England still stood, and that the treaty, which had been invalidated by the invasion, could no longer be regarded as binding.²

The following day the Foreign Committee of the Reichstag met to discuss the situation. The Center Party was a strong supporter

¹ Ibid., p. 103.

² Ibid.; p. 132-133.

of Stresemann's decision to yield. The Committee overrode the protests of the Nationalist Party and worded an appeal to the German people explaining the actions of the government.¹

After passive resistance was abandoned Stresemann turned to the other grave problems which confronted the Reich. In an endeavor to gain support to his call for unity, Stresemann wrote Cardinal Faulhaber of Munich.² Cardinal Faulhaber, the greatest Catholic personage in the Reich, replied to Stresemann's plea for law and order in Bavaria with a statement which was a notable expression of the attitude of the Church toward the Republic.

I have never concealed the fact that I regard the federalistic bias of the Weimar Constitution as a statesmanlike necessity, to put an end to the creeping pest of civil war I have never concealed my conviction that all the educational legislation of the Reich affecting elementary schools was calculated to threaten the hitherto recognized Catholic schools, and thus interfere with the parents' freedom of conscience and destroy confidence in the Reich among wide circles of the population
 . . . But all this should only be brought about by constitutional and bloodless methods, not by revolt³

In order to circumvent the possibility of a deadlock in the Reichstag Stresemann resorted to the first extensive use of Article 48, the so-called "dictator clause," but to combat the armed revolts in Bavaria and in Saxony he felt the need for an authority with

¹For the text of the appeal see Ibid., p. 133.

²For the text of Stresemann's letter see Ibid., p. 127-128.

³Ibid., p. 129.

sweeping powers.¹ Before the desired Enabling Act was forced through the Reichstag he empowered the Reichswehr Minister, Gessler, to declare a state of siege and to resort to the use of armed force to restore law and order. The suppression of Leftists revolts, largely in Saxony, was carried out with ruthless dispatch, but the defiance of the Rightists elements in Bavaria was treated with great care, as if the Reich were negotiating with a sovereign power rather than a subordinate member. Within the Reichstag the parties split over the manner in which the revolts should be handled. The Nationalists blamed the Leftists elements for the disturbances, and the Social Democrats placed the greatest emphasis upon the defiance of the Right in Bavaria. The Center condemned extremists of both wings, but it was careful to refrain from criticizing the mutiny of Bavaria. As a defender of federalism the Center hesitated to attack the legal defense of the Bavarians, but even more significant, as a Catholic party the Center was not willing to alienate one-third of the Catholic electorate in Germany. The Center always regarded the defection of the BPP from the Center Party as a temporary condition. The Center admitted that the only condition which prevented a rapprochement was the particularist tendencies

¹ Article 48 gave the President great emergency powers. "Should the public order and safety be seriously disturbed or threatened, the President may take the necessary measures to restore public order and safety; in case of need he may use armed force . . . and he may for the time being declare the fundamental rights of the citizen (liberty of person, liberty of speech, of assembly, and inviolability of private property) wholly or partly in abeyance."

of the BPP.¹ While the Center Party condemned the reactionary social and political policies of the Nationalist Party, it continued to court the affections of its Bavarian -- but Catholic -- counterpart, the BPP. The Center did not join the Social Democrats and the Democrats in condemning the contempt of the Bavarians for the republican constitution, a document which the Center Party on other occasions defended with almost religious zeal. The Center thus found itself in an incongruous situation which would have injured a party motivated solely by political principles, but the Center Party which was often ridiculed as an absurdity was equal to incongruities. It maintained a discreet silence, and turned its attention to less provocative matters.

In addition to the Bavarian question, and the formulation of the Enabling Act, the other great question faced by the Stresemann Ministry was the eight-hour day. The attitude of the Center Party on the eight-hour day was determined by the Christian Trade Unions, and it was a determining factor in the orientation of the Center to the Right under Cuno and Stresemann. The clash between Christian and Socialist labor policies has been previously discussed, but it must be constantly reiterated in order to understand the inability of two great labor parties to see eye to eye on basic labor policies. The ideal of the CTU was Arbeitsgemeinschaft which implied cooperation with capitalism; while the socialist goal was

¹ Bachem, Geschichte der deutschen Zentrumspartei, VIII, 328.

the overthrow of capitalism and the nationalization of the means of production. The CTU soon after the revolution had advocated nationalization of the coal mines, but it soon withdrew the proposal.¹ The CTU asserted that national interests and industrial prosperity have priority over the selfish desires of any one class.

We all know that trade union life cannot develop and flourish unless industrial life revives. The two are closely bound together Today (November 1921) the worker must work such hours as will insure to Germany such a volume of production that she will be able to recover from her distress and attain a certain measure of prosperity.²

The CTU was willing to trust the industrialists, to accept the economic program of "big business," and to voluntarily relinquish the eight-hour day in the interest of greater German prosperity. It is a grave mistake to assume that an overwhelming majority of the "rank and file" favored the policies of Stegerwald and Heinrich Brauns, but there was no open revolt within the ranks of the CTU until the election of 1928, when the Center Party lost 175,000 voters largely as a result of its evolution towards conservatism.³ It is equally a mistake to assume that all the members of the CTU

¹ See International Labor Office, The Programme and Organization of the Christian Trade Unions of Germany, pp. 17-18.

² Ibid., p. 13.

³ That all was not unanimity within the ranks of the CTU was shown by the remarks of Imbusch, a Reichstag representative for the Center, who warned the Center after the entrance of the party into the Luther Cabinet in January 1925 that the Center must not neglect the interests of the Catholic laborer. See Infra, p. 167.

were loyal followers of the Center. There was a considerable number of CTU members who voted for the Social Democratic Party and even for the Communist Party.¹

The question of the eight-hour day was decided by a compromise at a meeting of "moderate party" leaders. The compromise undoubtedly met the complete agreement of the Center Party. It was decided that in industries which were not "heavy" or unhealthy the hours of labor would be lengthened, but in the mining industry (where the CTU was strongly entrenched) the eight-hour day was recognized as indispensable. Stresemann's diary shows his complete agreement with the Center's spokesman in the Reichstag, Wilhelm Marx.² Marx

¹ Figures vary as to what percentage of the Center's vote was derived from the Catholic workmen in the CTU, but it is generally accepted that about 17 per cent of its votes came from the Christian unions. It is also difficult to estimate what percentage of the Catholic CTU votes went to the Left. It is generally assumed that most of the Left vote from Catholic voters came from members of the CTU. Johannes Schauff has compiled statistics upon the December 1924 election which indicate the voting habits of the German Catholics.

Parties:	Percentage of Catholics who voted for the party:
Center and Bavarian People's Party	55.3
Nationalists	8.7
German People's Party	4.0
Democrats	3.1
Social Democrats	12.1
Communists	6.5
Economic Party and the Bavarian Peasants Party	5.5
National Socialists	1.6
Others	3.2

Schauff, Die Deutschen Katholiken und die Zentrumsparlei, p. 111.

² Sutton, Gustav Stresemann, I, 141.

is usually listed in the left wing of the party, but he was more properly a representative of the center group.¹

On October 3 the scope of the Enabling Act demanded by Stresemann to meet the crisis was debated. The Social Democrats insisted that the amendment must not be extended to "social-political matters," but the Center Party refused to support the Social Democrats and once again sided with the GPP. The Social Democrats rejected the compromise on the eight-hour day which the non-socialist parties had worked out, but it found itself isolated in a solid bourgeois government which was dedicated to the proposition that the cost of labor must be reduced before the recovery of the Reich was possible. The result of the cabinet deadlock was the resignation of the first Stresemann Cabinet.

A new cabinet was quickly formed from the same parties which had composed the previous cabinet under the chancellorship of Stresemann. A new compromise on the eight-hour day was effected to permit the reentry of the Social Democrats.² Two prominent absentees

¹An outspoken critic of the Center, Bernhard Menne, places Marx in the right wing of the Center Party. "Politically he was more or less a replica of the first leader of the Center Party, Windthorst, though he lacked Windthorst's calibre as a leader. Marx was a somewhat pedestrian representative of party politics, a perfect example of the right wing Center, the juste milieu of the German Republic. A careful balance between right and left wing was the inevitable policy to be expected from such a man." Menne, The Case of Dr. Brüning, p. 26.

²The compromise stated that ". . . While fully maintaining the principle of an eight-hour day as the normal working day, the readjustment of the labor laws was no longer avoidable. The extension, under due safeguards, of the present working day, would admit of the intensification and cheapening of production now so essential to the national interests." Sutton, Gustav Stresemann, I, 144-145.

from the second Stresemann Cabinet were Raumer and Hilferding. To replace this able and liberal combination Stresemann appointed Dr. Luther as Minister of Finance, and Dr. Koeth as Minister of Trade and Commerce. Both were non-partisan Fachmänner of conservative tendencies. Brauns, Fuchs and Hoefle represented the Center Party in the cabinet. Despite the conservative character of the cabinet the inclusion of the Social Democrats infuriated the Nationalists as well as the right wing of the GPP. Count Westarp led the Nationalist attack: "The only achievement of this coalition in foreign affairs is the abandonment of passive resistance. That is the achievement of a policy that believes that it cannot rule without Social Democracy."¹

The issue of the Enabling Act once again presented itself on October 11. The Reichstag was deadlocked on the question until the Nationalists deserted the floor of the Reichstag which enabled the government to obtain the necessary two-thirds majority. The opposition consisted of the BPP and two smaller "splinter parties." The Center loyally supported Stresemann and urged a strong policy to defeat the menace which threatened the Reich. The Social Democrats still stood alone in the cabinet; the Enabling Act had failed to solve the real ideological conflict which existed in the cabinet. The brutal suppression of the Leftist revolts and the hesitancy to act on the Bavarian question continued to irritate the Social

¹ Ibid., p. 149.

Democrats and the Social Democratic Party. The consequence of the basic dispute as to how the Enabling Act should be employed was the withdrawal of the Social Democrats from the cabinet.

In order to govern with a parliamentary majority it was necessary to extend the coalition to the Right, but there were several objectors to the inclusion of the Nationalist Party. Stresemann at this time opposed including the party of monarchy and social reaction; the Democrats opposed the Nationalists on the basis of political belief; the Center opposed them on the grounds of history, politics and religion.¹ While the discussion was in progress over the inclusion of the Nationalist Party into the cabinet the now famous Hitler Putsch occurred in Munich. The significance of the Putsch was generally overlooked at the time because it was just one attack among several which were directed at the Reich during Stresemann's administration.

The inability of the Stresemann Ministry to reach an agreement upon the composition of the cabinet culminated in the introduction by the government parties of a vote of confidence. The vote of confidence was defeated 231 to 156. The downfall of Strese-

¹ Historically the Center had been a bitter opponent of the old Conservatives under the Empire, during the war the Center had clashed with the Conservatives upon basic issues, and in the post-war period the hatred and distrust between Protestant Junkers and Catholics of all classes had not ceased. With the exception of clericalism the parties had nothing in common, but clericalism served to bring the two bitter enemies together in 1925 and again in 1927 in attempts to pass a Reich school law.

man was a heavy blow to the leadership of the Republic. He stood out alone as the only political figure in Germany with the courage to pursue a program of fulfillment and the ability to command the confidence of the majority of the Reichstag. The Nationalist Party began to urge national-conservative support for Admiral Tirpitz as the next chancellor, but the Center and the Democratic Party demanded that the Nationalists first make a statement to the effect that they accept the Weimar Constitution and the Stresemann foreign policy, whereupon the Nationalists refused.

On November 25, Lord D'Abernon pictured the political scene after Stresemann's fall as indescribably confused. Not only were the parties unable to unite upon a policy, but the parties themselves were divided into at least three wings which profoundly differed from each other. D'Abernon predicted that the tendency toward military dictatorship would probably be followed in Germany.¹ The figure who emerged from the indescribable confusion as President Ebert's fifth choice for the chancellorship, was the dour and colorless Centrist politician, Wilhelm Marx. Even Marx's candidacy had been held up for a time by the GPP until the composition of the cabinet was determined. The Center's demand for a "party man" as chancellor had caused the elimination of Jarres, a member of the GPP, not a Reichstag member, and Heinrich Albert, a former fiscal agent in the diplomatic corps. Both the Social Demo-

¹ D'Abernon, The Diary of an Ambassador, II, 291.

crats and the Center desired to avoid a dissolution of the Reichstag, and were willing to compromise with the GPP to insure a government.

The cabinet which Marx named was almost identical to Stresemann's last cabinet. The foreign policy which Marx was pledged to continue was also Stresemann's, and the method of governing -- by decree and by an Enabling Act -- was also taken over from Stresemann. Stresemann was named Foreign Minister, and because the primary emphasis in the years 1923-1924 was concentrated upon foreign affairs Stresemann emerged as the real leader of the government. The government was generally referred to as the Stresemann-Marx Government except by the Center Party. There was a decided contrast in the ability and personality of Stresemann and Marx, but they proved to be a very able team.

Marx was an einfacher Soldat (simple, humble soldier) of the Center Party, but a sincere and honest man. He lacked the ability and the adroitness of Stresemann, but he had considerable experience in politics and a distinguished record as a jurist. He was sixty years old at the time of his appointment with a long career as a representative of the Center Party in all levels of German politics. He had served as a member of the Prussian Supreme Court under the Empire. He had been a member of the Prussian Diet, and before his appointment to the chancellorship he had served in the Reichstag for twelve years. Marx was also very prominent in his Church. He was probably one of the most influential laymen in the German

Catholic Church. Since 1911 he had been the national leader of the Catholic School Organization in Germany, an organization devoted to the propagation as well as to the protection of Catholic ideas upon education.¹ In 1925, shortly after his defeat by von Hindenburg for the presidency of the Reich, Marx led the German pilgrims on the Holy Year pilgrimage to Rome. Most of the criticisms of Marx were directed at his timidity and irresoluteness, and at his clerical convictions. Stresemann thought Marx an "upright, learned judge" and a "very worthy man . . . of strong religious Catholic views" whose "interest in financial affairs was remote . . . his addiction being to things spiritual . . ." ² Count Bernstorff, the former German Ambassador to the United States and a prominent member of the Democratic Party, characterized Marx as ". . . an avowed clerical, especially in educational matters."³ Regardless of the personal ability of Marx, the task which he faced was extremely difficult.

¹ The Catholic School Organization, with headquarters at Dusseldorf, was created to fight for the religious character of German schools and teachers "in order to secure the heirloom of Catholic faith." It assisted municipalities in obtaining their religious rights under the constitution, and it sought to solve religious difficulties within the communities by "advice or practical proposals for solution of difficulties." It issued two "notable" educational periodicals and "spread the Catholic educational viewpoint constantly in places where it helped." Frances S. Betten, "The Catholic Church in Contemporary Germany," Catholic Historical Review, XVII (1931), 421.

² D'Abernon, The Diary of an Ambassador, II, 299.

³ Bernstorff, Memoirs, p. 291.

Marx's Cabinet was a minority one whose existence was maintained only by the shaky support afforded it by the Social Democrats and the Nationalists. In order to continue the recovery program initiated by Stresemann, Marx demanded another Enabling Act, as the previous one expired with the fall of Stresemann. Until another Enabling Act could be passed, Marx resorted to the use of Article 48.¹ During November he issued ten decrees by this method. Marx threatened that if another Enabling Act were not passed he would continue to resort to Article 48 to push the Stresemann-Marx program through in its entirety. The Social Democratic Party proved to be the deciding factor in the success of Marx's efforts for a new amendment. It was opposed in principle to the action of Marx in governing without the Reichstag, but it also feared the consequences of dissolution. It extracted the promise from Marx that he would order the end of the state of siege under which Stresemann had allowed Gessler, the Reichswehr Minister, to restore law and order. The Social Democrats announced that in view of the disastrous financial situation faced by the nation the Social Democratic Party would yield to the wishes of the government. The final vote on the Enabling Act on December 8 found the Communists and the Nationalists, who had everything to gain by a new election, opposing the Act, and the Social Democrats,

¹ For a complete list of the decrees issued by Marx under Article 48 see Lindsay Rogers and others, "Aspects of German Political Institutions," Political Science Quarterly, XLVII (1932), 587.

who considered their support of the Act a small price to pay for avoiding dissolution, voting for Marx's Enabling Act. The weakness of the Social Democrats has been criticized as well as their renunciation of political principles. The members of the Social Democratic Party, however, were not only motivated by idealistic principles, but by the realities of party politics, and the devotion to national interest.

The Enabling Act which was passed gave the Marx government sweeping powers in almost every branch of government. The Marx Act was not qualified by deference to the Social Democratic Party's demands upon social legislation. Marx was given the power to deal with wages, hours and working conditions. Unlike the Stresemann Enabling Act the Marx Act did not expire if Marx fell from office within the two month expiration date. "On the whole there can be no hesitation in saying that the Marx Enabling Act was the broadest basis for legislation by delegation ever established in Germany."¹ Marx immediately utilized the Enabling Act to issue emergency decrees covering a wide variety of problems.

During the two months which followed, the extraordinary powers granted were used more freely than ever before, rendering this the most spectacular period of emergency legislation in the history of the Republic. On the basis of this one enactment no less than seventy legislative decrees were issued . . . taxation, currency and finance² were dealt with, but also broader aspects of social policy.

¹ Frederick M. Watkins, The Failure of Constitutional Powers under the German Republic (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939), pp. 80-81.

² Ibid., p. 80.

One of the decrees repealed the eight-hour day, and many other decrees would have encountered opposition, but the Reichstag chose to recess until February 20 which gave Marx a free hand to carry out the drastic reforms of the Stresemann-Marx program. When the Reichstag convened Marx announced to it that he would not allow his program to be subjected to criticism except in its entirety. He insisted that all seventy decrees be accepted or rejected as a unit. Even the club of dissolution which Marx waved over the heads of the Reichstag was not enough to obtain agreement, however, and the Reichstag was dissolved. The dissolution worked in Marx's favor, for the two months between the dissolution of the Reichstag and the election allowed Marx time to place the program into operation.

Political purists, doctrinaire liberals and the evolutionary Marxists of the Social Democratic Party condemned the "dictatorial methods" of Marx as they later condemned another Centrist chancellor, Heinrich Brüning.¹ Many German and foreign liberals were ready to sound the death-knell of the Weimar Republic. Party government appeared to be a complete failure, the constitution had failed to prevent dictatorship and the lovingly wrought political institutions

¹ The Social Democrats were more worried about the employment of Article 48 than they were about the use of Enabling Acts which accounted in part for their willingness to give Marx a virtual free hand. Scheidemann sounded a warning which the Social Democrats reiterated time and time again during the Brüning Ministry. "The continual application of Article 48 would shake constitutional government in the Reich to its very foundations, impairing the position of popular representation more seriously than the Enabling Act could ever do." Ibid., p. 82.

had not functioned as they were designed to perform.¹ The Reichswehr in league with a government dominated by clericals and economic reactionaries seemed to the purists to have triumphed. Prussianism seemed to them to have triumphed over liberalism once more in Germany. But the harbingers of doom for the Weimar Republic were mistaken.

When the next spring came the state-martial law faded softly and silently away. The Enabling Act expired, the currency remained stable, and the democratic Republic suddenly reappeared without creating any particular sensation and without any dramatic struggle.²

It is difficult to criticize Marx and the Center for abandoning normal parliamentary means to gain recovery. The Center was convinced that drastic steps were needed if the Reich were to survive. The Center claimed that it governed in the interest of the Reich and its Volk, and it undoubtedly did. After yielding on the question of passive resistance, sacrifices in the Reich were necessary as window dressing to prove to the Allied governments that the German people were a good risk for the loans essential to German monetary stabilization and to economic recovery. Strong executive control was likewise essential in the face of the intransigent extremists of the Right and Left. The Center's defense for circumventing the Reichstag under Marx was the same defense that it later used to defend

¹"Of the hundred and thirty-odd legislative measures published between October 13, 1923 and February 15, 1924, no less than a hundred and ten were issued on the basis of enabling acts, while more than half of the remainder were executive decrees issued by authority of Article 48." Ibid., p. 85.

²Rosenburg, The German Republic, p. 218.

Brüning: the safety of the Republic depended upon drastic reforms, and sacrifices from all classes. The Center asserted that incidentals be sacrificed for essentials. It was willing to give up the eight-hour day, to pay more taxes and to lower its standard of living to "save something." What appeared to be holy principles to the Social Democrats or to the doctrinaire liberals of the Democratic Party were merely incidentals to the Center Party. Undoubtedly there were sharp divisions within the Center Party. Wirth and his followers placed great importance upon the political institutions of the Republic, and they were most likely repelled by the violation of the spirit of the constitution. But the heart of the Center was composed of Realpolitiker, men who accepted expediency as the motivating principle in politics.

The single great fact which prevented the Republic from succumbing to the methods later employed by Heinrich Brüning -- government by decree -- was the report of a group of economic and financial experts which took its name from the head of the commission, Charles G. Dawes. There were several important events which preceded and paved the way for the presentation of the report in April 1924: the death of Havenstein, the former Reichsbank head and a prominent inflationist, the death of Stinnes, the fatal accident to Helfferich, the arch-priest of inflation, the fall of Poincaré, whose pressure on Germany made inflation difficult to avoid.¹ The Dawes Report was concerned with the "means of balancing the (German) budget and

¹ D'Abernon, The Diary of an Ambassador, III, 110.

the measures to be taken to stabilize the (German) currency."¹ Germany was to receive sufficient gold to strengthen its gold and foreign currency reserves in the Reichsbank, and to abandon the Rentenmark in order to return to a legitimate and securely stabilized gold currency. The Dawes Report recommended that Germany's railroads be placed under the control of an independent company (controlled by the Allies), the Reichsbank was also to be placed under the control of Germany's creditors, and a foreigner was to be placed in Berlin as administrator of the Dawes Plan and the foreign loans. In the words of Arthur Rosenberg, "Germany had become a sort of colonial appanage of the New York Stock Exchange."²

The Dawes Report played a great part in the election of May 1924. All of the enemies of the Republic assaulted it. The Nationalists cried for all German patriots to reject it as a sinister scheme to take away Germany's independence. Stresemann and Marx tried to answer the criticism but their program of fulfillment and sacrifice was not an attractive one. The terrible inflation had created enemies out of former friends of the Republic and on election day they swarmed to the parties of the Right and Left extremists. The result was a stunning defeat for the moderate parties, except for the Center Party which actually gained 300,000 in popular votes, although its representation dropped to 65, a new low for the Center

¹ For a complete account of the negotiations necessitated by the Dawes Report, and an analysis of the Dawes Plan see Bergmann, The History of Reparations, pp. 219-311.

² Rosenberg, The German Republic, p. 218.

Party. It is difficult to assess the reason for the Center's gain in popular votes. Since 1920, the date of the last election, the Center's role in the government had not been outstanding, on the contrary the governments in which the Center participated had miserably failed. Perhaps the increase was due to the Center's consistent foreign policy; yet the other parties which had sponsored fulfillment had lost thousands of voters. It is doubtful that the new voters came as a result of the Center's shift to the Right, because the Center should have lost more voters from its left wing followers in proportion. Most likely the success of the Center was due to the superb organization of the party, to its propaganda agencies and to its subsidiary social organizations which encompassed a large share of the Catholic population of Germany.¹

¹ Among the social organizations which often gave active support to the Center's representatives was the Volkverein, a union of Catholics with a membership of 500,000 whose purpose was to impart "vigorous instruction to the Catholic population against the fallacies of socialism." Since 1890 it was estimated that the Volkverein had printed and distributed 200 million pamphlets, leaflets and books to propagate Catholic ideas. It also furnished speakers for various local groups. In the year 1930-31 4,500 speakers were furnished for discussion meetings, with "Papal utterances" forming the backbone of the discussions. Another important Catholic organization in Germany was the great union of charity organizations, the Caritas Verband which had 600,000 members. Another venerable organization was the Gesellenverein founded by Father Adolph Kolping in 1845. Its purpose was to "guard youths from dangers of youth and perils of travel, to give religious assistance, and to provide opportunity for them to better themselves in useful branches of knowledge." In 1930 it had 108,000 members and supported 130 "Journeyman's Homes" which furnished free lodging and free meals. In addition to the large "mass organizations" there were many other smaller and more select groups. Student charity organizations such as the Albertus Magnus Verein, the Hildegardes Verein, the Caritas für Akademiker and intellectual groups such as the Katholische Akademiker Verband which had 14,000 members and was formed to promote the Catholic Weltanschauung, and many other societies in

Following the election, the Nationalist Party, which had ten more seats than the Social Democrats demanded the resignation of the Marx Ministry. The Nationalists were supported by the GPP in this demand. The Nationalists then expressed their desire to enter the government, but they announced that they would not be bound by previous commitments in foreign affairs. The Center also joined with the GPP and the Democrats in a resolution to work for the acceptance of the Dawes Report. Marx was asked to form a new government which included the Nationalists, but the price of their entrance was a reshuffle of the Weimar Coalition in Prussia which the Center and the Democrats refused. The impasse finally came to an end on June 3 when Marx returned to office with the same cabinet.

A resolution was immediately introduced in the Reichstag favoring the cabinet's acceptance of the Dawes Report. The Social Democrats, although they were bitterly opposed to Marx and his colleagues, joined with the government to defeat the opposition of the Communists and the Nationalists. The consistency of the Center's policy toward the Stresemann foreign policy was a remarkable achievement, but not necessarily an idealistic policy or a republican policy. Robert Dell, a well-known British journalist, and a sharp critic

nearly every field of economic and social life formed and organized and aggressive Catholic electorate which served as a constant pressure group upon the Center, but repaid the Center Party with their consistent support. For further information upon German Catholic organizations see Frances S. Betten, "The Catholic Church in Contemporary Germany," Catholic Historical Review, XVII (1931), 421-443.

of the Center Party on previous occasions, was forced to laud the Center's role in the fight for the acceptance of the Dawes Reform.

It is just to say that the Center Party has played a significant and on the whole consistent part. It has never wavered on the essential point of the acceptance of the Dawes Report and has given far more loyal support to Stresemann than his own party¹

From July 16 until late in August 1924, the Allies met in London to work out the details of the Dawes Report. On August 1 the Allies issued an invitation to the German government to join the conference, and a delegation headed by Marx and Stresemann left immediately for London. The dignity and friendliness of Marx was favorably commented upon by the delegates and the press. His opening address announced his government's willingness to accept the Dawes Plan.

The German government has regarded the Experts' Plan as a suitable foundation for the solution of the reparations question I would add that . . . the German government agrees to the measures drafted by the Organization Committees on the basis of the Plan, and as soon as the conference is over, will at once approach the legislative bodies in Germany with a view to their being passed into law forthwith²

The fight to attain acceptance of the Dawes Plan in Germany also involved a barter with the Nationalists whereby the Marx Ministry in exchange for the Nationalists acceptance of the railroad provisions of the Dawes Plan would reopen the issue of the "War Guilt Question." The Nationalists first insisted that the protest be

¹ Robert Dell, "The German Deadlock," New Statesman and Nation, XXIII (1924), 247.

² Sutton, Gustav Stresemann, I, 371-372.

delivered at the London Conference, but Marx and Stresemann wisely withheld such a disastrous move.¹ Although they both believed in the injustice of the war guilt charge, they hoped that they might stall on the issue until after they returned from London, but the Nationalists refused to back down.² The Nationalists came to Marx the day before the vote was to be held on the Dawes Plan and told him that unless he resigned within a fortnight, they would vote against the Plan. At the end of the fortnight, according to the account of Lord D'Abernon, Marx was to hand over the reins of government to the Nationalist Party, and he was to agree to the inclusion of three Nationalists in the cabinet. Marx is reported to have replied that while he personally would be delighted to resign in favor of so competent a successor as the Nationalists might select, it depended upon the parties of the coalition. All he could do personally was to make the statement upon war guilt. Marx's reply is said to have infuriated the Nationalists, and they announced

¹ D'Abernon, The Diary of an Ambassador, III, 93.

² The realistic approach of Marx to the question of war guilt is well illustrated in a speech he delivered October 28, 1924, at the beginning of the election campaign after the dissolution of the Reichstag. "If we strive to have the Versailles self-confession of war guilt annuled we do so simply for moral reasons. It would be fatal self-delusion to believe that if we succeeded in having that self-confession annuled we should be liberated from the obligations of the Versailles Treaty, as many of our opponents in the reactionary camp seem to think." New York Times, October 28, 1924. For Marx's "historical approach" to the war guilt question see his article in Foreign Affairs in January 1926 which is based upon German documents. Wilhelm Marx, "The Responsibility for the War," Foreign Affairs, IV (1926), 177-194.

that they would oppose the Plan, but the threat of a Reichstag dissolution convinced them that they must vote with the government.¹

Following the debate upon August 26 and 27 in which the Center Party strongly supported the government, the vote was held upon the two large questions involved in the Dawes Plan. The Plan itself was passed by a simple majority, and the railroad provisions, which necessitated a constitutional amendment, passed with the help of the Nationalists by a two-thirds majority.² On the same day Marx presented Germany's case on

... the question of war guilt which, since 1919, has weighted so heavily on the soul of the German people . . .

... The Government of the Reich hereby states that it does not recognize this assertion So long . . .

... as a member of the community of nations is stamped as a criminal against humanity, a true understanding and reconciliation between the nations cannot be achieved.³

D'Abernon minimized the role of Marx in the presentation of the war guilt question, but that was not necessary.⁴ Undoubtedly Marx felt that the time was inopportune for the reopening of the issue, but he was convinced as were nearly all Germans that the charge was not only a historical falsehood, but also a moral barrier

¹ D'Abernon, The Diary of an Ambassador, III, 94.

² For a presentation of the German Dawes Laws which were passed in order to carry out the provisions of the Dawes Plan, agreed upon at the London Conference, see Bergmann, The History of Reparations, pp. 271-279.

³ For the text of the statement on war guilt see Sutton, Gustav Stresemann, I, 408-409.

⁴ D'Abernon, The Diary of an Ambassador, III, 93-94.

which prevented Germany from honorable intercourse with the Allies in plans for international cooperation.¹

The pressure for the admittance of the Nationalist Party continued throughout September and the first two weeks of October. Marx was reported to have yielded to the demands of the GPP for the inclusion of the Nationalists,² but the Democrats and the Center refused to admit the Nationalists unless they received guarantees to secure the Marx Cabinet's foreign policy, and promises that the Republic would be protected. The demands of the Center Party were based upon a compromise program which struck a midpoint between the extremes of Right and Left. The Center offered the plan as an inducement to both the Social Democrats and the Nationalists to enter the government. The Marx program was viewed by the press as an expedient to save the Center's reputation,³ but the Center used it as a powerful moral argument in the December elections to convince the electorate of the Center's goodwill and its patient attempts to form a government dedicated to the Volkgemeinschaft.

¹ The Center's attitude on the war guilt question approximated the remarks of its spokesman, Marx, but it was aimed at internal consumption rather than toward appeasing the Allies. See Georg Schreiber, Zentrum und deutsche Politik: Ein Handbuch zu den Dezemberwahlen 1921 (Berlin: Germania Verlag, 1921), pp. 48-49. Hereafter cited as Schreiber, Zentrum und deutsche Politik. The Center's Richtlinien of January 1922 placed the war guilt question as the fundamental obstruction to Germany's bid for equality. See Bachem, Geschichte der deutschen Zentrumspartei, VIII, 371.

² Halperin, Germany Tried Democracy, p. 306.

³ See Ibid.; Also see Sutton, Gustav Stresemann, I, 473.

The five point program formulated by the Center Party and presented by Marx on October 8 was as follows: (1) The recognition of the constitution on August 11, 1919, as the legal foundation for the activities of the State. (2) The further conduct of foreign policy on the basis of the London agreements, and an effort to be made to join the League in accordance with the principles laid down in the German Memorandum. (3) Distribution of the burdens involved by fulfillment of the Dawes Laws. (4) The adaptation of expenditure on social services to the financial position of the Reich. (5) Intensification to the utmost of production and labor-yield, the strengthening of home production and the encouragement of export trade on the basis of reciprocity and most favored nation clauses.¹

Each of the parties replied to the Marx policy for the construction of a new government. The Social Democrats were generally in favor of the program, but they gave little hope to the possibility of a government which included both Social Democrats and Nationalists.² The Nationalist Party virtually ignored the Marx program, and presented demands of its own which stressed its "Christian-Conservative" approach to politics.³ The upshot of the failure of Marx to con-

¹ The translation of the text is found in Ibid., p. 474. The German text is found in Schreiber, Zentrum und deutsche Politik, pp. 23-24.

² Ibid., pp. 24-26.

³ Ibid., pp. 26-27.

struct a new cabinet in tune with the demands of the GPP and Stresemann was a personal defeat for Marx and for the party he led. An article in the New Statesman and Nation blamed Marx for his inability to construct a strong republican government.

One of the most regrettable incidents of the last three weeks is the breakdown of Dr. Marx who has thrown away the reputation he had won. It is due, not to any lack of honesty, but to sheer timidity and weakness of character.¹

Undoubtedly Marx was partially at fault, and the irresolution of the Center was also a contributing cause of the halting policy shown by the Marx Ministry, but the task of directing a government which excluded the two largest parties in the Reichstag, and the opposition of Stresemann to any coalition which did not include the Nationalist Party posed problems which even the most astute parliamentarian would have found difficult to solve under the German parliamentary system.²

When it appeared clear that the broad government which the Center demanded was impossible and that the Center would not admit the Nationalists to the government, the Center Party asked Marx to enable the German people to decide the issue on the basis of the Republic and fulfillment, or of a political reaction and an unreal-

¹ Robert Dell, "The German Political Force," New Statesman and Nation, XXIV (1924), 70.

² For a revealing discussion of the parliamentary and party developments in the first eight years of the Republic see R. T. Clark, The Fall of the German Republic; A Political Study, (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1935), pp. 127-153; also see James K. Pollock Jr., "The German Party System," American Political Science Review, XXIII (1929), 534-542.

istic approach to revision of the treaty.¹ Marx then asked Ebert to dissolve the Reichstag. Dissolution was greeted by cheers from the Left, but by charges of betrayal from the Right. The Nationalists accused Marx of deceit in leading them to expect that he favored including them in the government.

The election of December 7, 1924, was preceded by a bitterly waged campaign on the issue of the Dawes Plan. Dr. Georg Schreiber, a clerical Reichstag representative and the chief propagandist for the Center, edited an election handbook which defended the Center's role during the year of 1924, and set forth the accomplishments of the party in all the fields of legislative endeavor. The handbook, Zentrum und deutsche Politik, stressed the Center's role in the fight for the Dawes Plan above all other achievements except the continual efforts of the Center Party in the sphere of Kultur questions. The Center modestly assumed credit for the achievements of the Stresemann-Marx Government and capitalized upon the initial success of the Dawes Plan as a victory for the Center. The Center stressed the effect which the Dawes Plan had had in the Rhineland and the Ruhr in relieving difficulties in those Catholic areas, and the party did not hesitate to speculate as to even greater benefits which would result from the Center's foreign policy. The role of

¹ For the Center's Reichstag "Fraktion" resolution on the dissolution see Schreiber, Zentrum und deutsche Politik, pp. 30-31. The Center called for the people to choose a government which would be willing and able: (1) To continue the conduct of foreign policy on the existing lines, (2) To carry on the tasks of social reconciliation and economic peace, (3) To safeguard and develop the achievements of Christian civilisation.

Gustav Stresemann, who is generally accorded the laurels for the recovery of German prosperity, is hardly mentioned. The Center's election handbook left the reader no doubt but that the Dawes Plan evolved as a logical outcome of the Center's efforts in the field of foreign policy.

The negotiations which the Center had conducted with the Social Democrats and the Nationalists during the first two weeks of October were treated in considerable detail. The idealistic yearning for the Volksgemeinschaft which the handbook described as the Center's goal was contrasted with the selfish policies of the Nationalists. The Nationalist Party was portrayed as the villain in the negotiations; yet the handbook lauds certain "national sources of strength" which the Nationalist Party represented. Schreiber quoted a speech of Marx which illustrated the attitude of the Center Party. All of the familiar charges against the Nationalists were reiterated; it had refused to accept the foreign policy of fulfillment, it had likewise refused to accept the Republic and to respect its constitution. In spite of the determined and consistent opposition of the Nationalists to basic policies which the Center claimed to represent, Marx felt that to secure a government which represented the Volksgemeinschaft, the Nationalists as well as the Social Democrats must be invited. The Nationalists, because of vaterlandischen interests and strong economic and national sources of strength, could not be ignored by a party which claimed to govern for the interests of all classes and for the service of the Reich and its

Volk. Only by the inclusion of both the Social Democrats and the Nationalists could Germany once again achieve greatness and freedom.¹

Schreiber presented evidence which clearly indicated the Center's determination to resist the GPP's demands for the inclusion of the Nationalists upon any other basis than the acceptance of the Center's five point program of October 6.² Not only Marx and the Reichstag "Fraktion" were pledged to this program, but the National Committee of the Center Party also adopted a resolution which affirmed the Center's determination to resist bowing to the Right.³

The election program upon which the Center based its campaign for the December election was a familiar bid to the divergent economic groups and the homogeneous religious support which comprised the electorate of the Center Party. The Center stressed the Dawes Plan successes, its role in the adoption of the plan and it called for the necessary reforms to insure the plan's execution. Taxes must be increased and improved, all classes must sacrifice to secure the success of the Dawes Plan, and the government must carry out a policy of retrenchment.⁴

The election which followed affirmed the Center's confidence in the effect that the Dawes Plan had had upon the German people.

¹ Ibid., pp. 20-21

² Ibid., pp. 22-23.

³ Ibid., p. 16.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 46-47.

The success of a republican policy which had brought actual economic benefits and which promised more caused the extremist parties to suffer heavily, and the moderate parties to increase substantially their representation. The Social Democrats won the greatest gains in the election, but the Nationalists also surprisingly gained representation. The Center Party increased its popular vote slightly over 200,000 and it gained four Reichstag representatives. Marx quickly resigned when the results of the election showed the predominant strength of the Social Democrats and the Nationalists. Ebert asked Marx to try to constitute another government with the Center as the pivotal party, but he was unsuccessful. The Democrats and the Center still refused to admit the Nationalists without guarantees of its conversion to the Republic and fulfillment. Marx announced that he could not assume the responsibility for seeking to form a government that included Nationalists. He stated that he did not believe that the Nationalist Party would continue the policies of his government if they were admitted, and he reiterated the continual refrain of the Center Party which was to support the Stresemann-Marx foreign policy.¹ Ebert tried to form a minority government of Democrats and Centrists, but it collapsed because of the opposition of the non-party Minister of Finance, Luther, who had become indispensable to the government because of the financial problems involved in the Dawes Plan. Because of the inability of the parties to present a coalition able to unite upon a program

¹New York Times, December 12, 1924.

of fulfillment and conservatism, Luther was appointed to the chancellorship.

The choice of Luther was not only frank recognition of the bankruptcy of the Weimar Coalition, but also recognition of the dependence of the Reich government upon financial and economic experts as executives of the reparations program. Stresemann insisted that the experts must be in positions of responsibility in the government, and the German people, who had never felt a close kinship to the party politicians, supported the non-partisan control of the Reich. The Center Party had previously opposed non-party Chancellor Cuno, and it had prevented the appointment of Jarres in November 1922, but it bowed to practical politics and accepted Luther. The Center, which had insured the formation of the government, exacted a price for its support. The Center insisted upon "picking" the cabinet. It especially insisted upon the retention of Dr. Brauns as Minister of Labor and Gessler as Minister of Defense. The Center required Luther to answer four questions in the affirmative: Would he continue the foreign policy of Stresemann and Marx? Would the Luther Cabinet respect the republican flag? Would the Nationalists support the Dawes Plan? Would the Luther Cabinet uphold the Weimar Constitution?¹ Even after the Center had received favorable replies to its queries from Luther and the Nationalist Party it announced that it would only "approve" the cabinet for a time. The Democratic

¹ Ibid., January 13, 1925.

Party likewise refused formal recognition. Germania said that the Center Party did not feel bound to the Luther Cabinet because of the participation of two of its members in it. Germania announced that the Center would await the government's declarations, and specially its deeds.¹

The decision of the Center to enter into a cabinet which included the Nationalists was disappointing to its doctrinaire republican followers, but it hardly warrants denunciation. The Center Party was composed of political realists, not republican idealists. The prestige and the political power which fell to a "government party" was tempting bait to any party. The Center also felt that it must continually remind the Catholic electorate of its role as vigilant and powerful defender of Catholic rights, and it could best insure the propagation of its role as a defender of Christian ideals in the state as a participating member of the government rather than in an opposition role. The abuses against which the Center Party had railed during the Empire had been removed. The Center's role in the Republic, aside from its continual demands for a Reich school law, was to preserve the constitutional guarantees of Catholic rights. The Center's role was realistic and defensive but not necessarily in opposition to any government which guaranteed the Center's Kultur demands. The Center's support of the policy of fulfillment was called by the Center's National Committee a policy of "living realities."² Perhaps the only "unrealistic" demand

¹ Ibid., January 17, 1925.

² Schreiber, Zentrum und deutsche Politik, p. 47.

asked by the Center Party of the Luther "government of experts" was the support of the republican flag. This request was undoubtedly made to appease the supporters of the Reichsbanner, the protective order of the Republic which was supported by the Social Democrats, the Democrats and half-heartedly by the Center Party.¹

The action of the Center Party was not condemned by the Soc-

¹The "Reichsbanner Black-Red-Gold" was created to protect all groups that honestly supported the Republic. It was formed on February 22, 1924. While the support of the Reichsbanner came from all three parties of the Weimar Coalition, the Social Democrats supplied the mass of the membership and the leaders. Although Wirth was a member of the Reichsbanner and Marx belonged for a time, there was little support from the Center Party. According to Karl Spiecker, "The Center was in part reluctant to join in an exclusive alliance at the expense of their contacts with conservative groups." Spiecker, a prominent left wing Centrist, also stated that another explanation for the Center's reluctance to join in the Reichsbanner was its hesitancy to mix with socialists. "The Church did not want Catholic workers to come into too close contact with the Social Democrats to protect them from the infection of materialistic and Marxist doctrines. This concern went so far that the Center Party even much disliked to see its followers join the Reichsbanner -- created for the protection of the Republic -- and it did its best to prevent their doing so In doing so the Center Party was in harmony with leading authorities of the Catholic Church who thought a too close contact with the Social Democrats perilous. Certain Catholic circles seemed never to have completely rid themselves of the notion that the November Revolution was the work of the Social Democrats, whereas any impartial observer must rather come to the conclusion that it was the Social Democrats that in November 1918 averted a genuine revolution, civil war and chaos." Spiecker, Germany from Defeat to Defeat, pp. 74n, 85, 86. A prominent Catholic youth leader and Reichsbannermann, Prince Hubertus Loewenstein, deplored the Centrist leaders' indifference to the protection of the Republic, and he was forced to admit that the Centrists within the Reichsbanner had become "sort of ornaments." Loewenstein, The Tragedy of a Nation, pp. 104-105.

ial Democrats, on the contrary they praised the fight of Marx for liberal government.¹ They accepted the Centrist viewpoint that the successful execution of the Dawes Plan must be insured as the first step in national recovery. The Social Democrats denounced the "cabinet of reaction" but they heeded the dictates of national interest. The restoration of the eight-hour day shortly after the organization of the Luther Ministry failed to appease the socialist or the Christian laborers. Imbusch, a Centrist representative in the Reichstag and a well-known spokesman for the Catholic workingmen in the Ruhr, said that unless the government conceded further demands of labor it would be necessary for the CTU to join with the socialists in opposition to the Luther Ministry.² The threat from the CTU failed to materialize in 1925, but it was portentous of a revolt from the Center's left if the party neglected the interests of the CTU. Thus even the hedging "approval" of the Center Party met disapproval from certain elements within the CTU which, unlike Stegerwald and his young secretary Heinrich Brüning, were willing to cooperate with socialism to fight for wages, hours and improved working conditions for organized labor.

This paper concludes upon the entrance of the Center into the Luther Ministry. There is some significance in the Center's willingness to participate in conservative governments, but it was cer-

¹New York Times, January 16, 1925.

²Robert Dell, "New Phase in Germany," New Statesman and Nation, XXIV (1925), 439.

tainly no radical departure from the Stresemann-Marx Cabinets which had been dominated by conservatives. The Center's decision to coalesce with the Nationalists was made only after weeks of negotiations to prevent the move, followed by apparently sincere "searching of souls" and guarantees which promised a realistic approach to foreign affairs, a guarantee for the continuance of republican institutions and a deference to the spirit of the Republic. The alternative to Center opposition to the Luther Ministry would possibly have been the tragic termination of two years of labor to place reparations upon a sound and reasonable basis. Stresemann, Schacht, Luther, and the other conservative experts drove a hard bargain for their service to the Reich. They insisted upon the inclusion of the Nationalists because of their great strength in the Reichstag, and because of the "great sources of national strength" which lay in the Weltanschauung of the Nationalist Party.¹ The Center might have adopted the tactics of the Social Democrats as an active opponent of the government, but there was actually no tremendous outcry within its ranks for greater reforms other than the Luther Ministry and the Dawes Plan appeared to promise. The Center could have gained nothing from "quiet opposition." The only realistic choice for the Center was to compromise its desires and enter the government of capitalism and protestantism, just as the Center had previously swallowed its anti-socialistic and anti-liberal bias and entered the Weimar Coalition. The alternative to participation was opposi-

¹Sutton, Gustav Stresemann, I, 479.

tion or mute support. The Center was organically and psychologically unprepared for either role. One cannot conclude, as so many have done, that the Center's vacillations were "simply opportunism." The variable factors in the heterogeneous composition of a Catholic party provided problems which could only be solved through compromise, and compromise often proved to be the realistic approach to German politics.

The Luther Ministry which the Center Party entered in January 1925 inaugurated a period of recovery in Germany and terminated a ten-year period of war, revolution and instability. The Luther Ministry was to reap the harvest which the Weimar Coalition and a portion of the German People's Party under the leadership of Stresemann had sown. The Dawes Plan opened the way for a flood of foreign capital to enter Germany and to foster the pseudo-prosperity which the 1929 depression destroyed. The Zeitgeist dictated the Center's entrance into the Luther Ministry as it had previously dictated the Center's cooperation with socialism and liberalism. The Center Party in January 1925 was essentially no different than the Center Party of 1914. The war and its aftermath had created exceptional conditions which the Center recognized and met realistically, but the Center was still essentially a Catholic party and as a Catholic party it could be neither liberal nor republican. The ideological gap between the Center and the other parties who supported the Republic had failed to divide the republican parties until the Luther Cabinet because of the press of foreign affairs

which dominated the policies of all parties. But the basically selfish reasons for the support which the Center gave the Republic was prophetic of a vacillating policy which would be flexible enough to allow the Center to support any coalition which would guarantee its clerical program.

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