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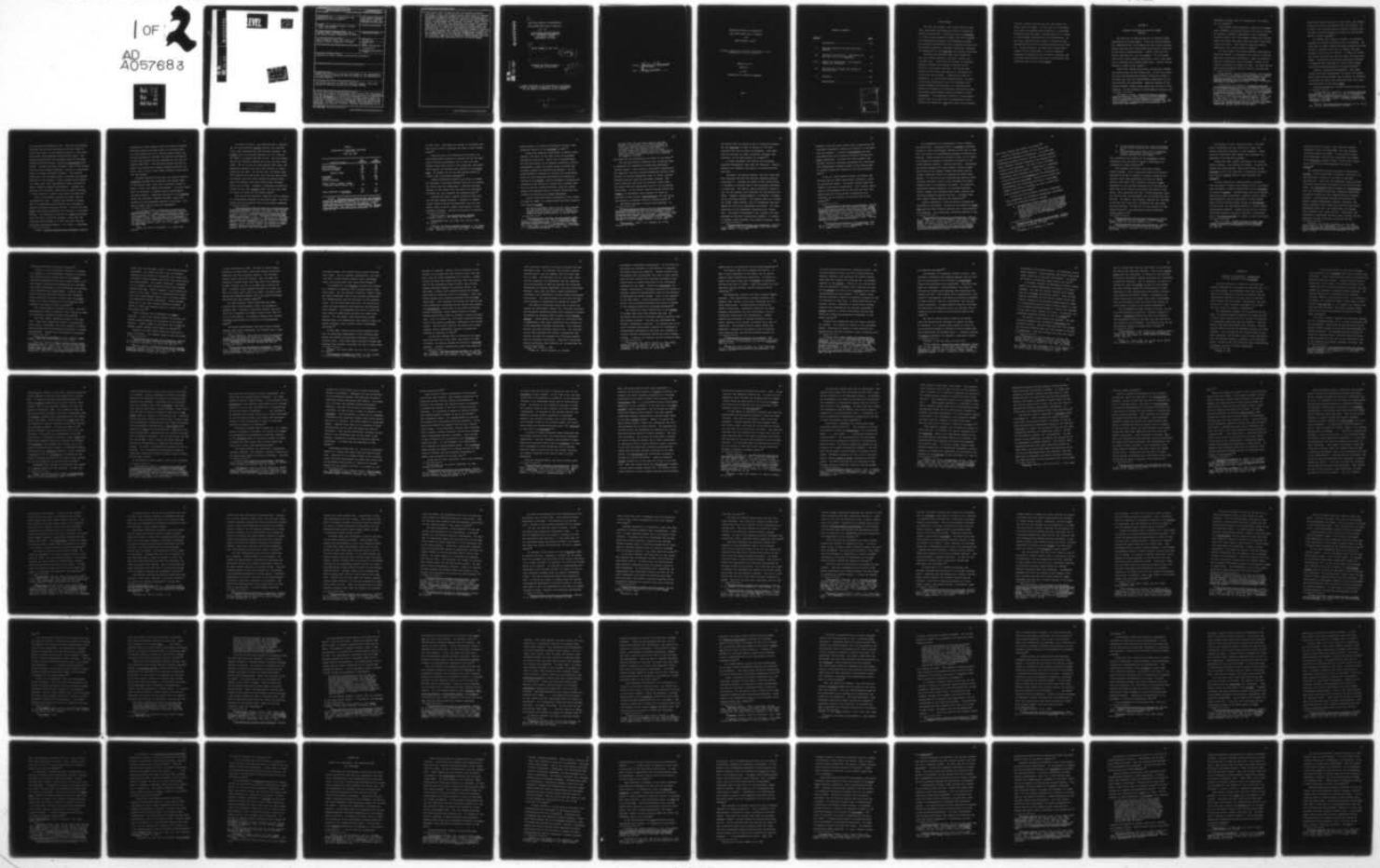

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For over nine months, from November 1892 to July 1893, the debates surrounding an army bill dominated German political life. Introduced into the Reichstag at a time of acute economic crisis, this bill proposed an unprecedented increase in the peacetime strength. The resulting deliberations led to widespread unrest and agricultural agitation, turbulent intra-party disputes, the dissolution of the Reichstag, and national elections. Military condiderations(con't)

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DATE May 25, 1978

POLITICAL PARTIES IN TRANSITION:

THE GERMAN ARMY BILL OF 1892-93

BY

JOHN THEODORE NELSEN

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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INTRODUCTION

For over nine months, from November 1892 to July 1893, the debates surrounding an army bill dominated German political life. Introduced into the Reichstag at a time of acute economic crisis, this bill proposed an unprecedented increase in the peacetime strength. The resulting deliberations led to widespread unrest and agricultural agitation, turbulent intra-party disputes, the dissolution of the Reichstag, and national elections.

Military considerations were soon eclipsed by more far-reaching economic, political, social, and religious ones. These arose in response to Germany's changing economic and political character and to Caprivi's "new course" policies. The period after Bismarck's fall from power was one of increasing insecurity for most parties. Germany was a state in transition. It was rapidly industrializing, its agriculture was diminishing in size and influence, and Social Democracy was spreading at an alarming rate. Suddenly the policies and political relationships that had existed under Bismarck seemed inadequate or disintegrating. The government's policy of conciliation, aimed in part at giving equal consideration to agricultural and industrial interests, found little support.

For many, Caprivi had gone too far; for others, he hadn't gone far enough. On the right, new approaches were sought to generate mass appeal and to revitalize declining political power; the objective was to retard, or even reverse, modernization and mechanization. On the left, approaches were sought to accelerate such advancement and to derive maximum political power from it. In many respects, the army bill struggle was a search for such approaches. It had an important formulative influence on the attitudes, policies, and political relationships that were to characterize the remaining years of the Second Reich.

CHAPTER I

MILITARY EXPANSION AND THE NEW COURSE 1890-92

The Army Bill of 1892-93 grew out of military plans formulated in the late 1880's. After the Franco-Prussian War, Chancellor Otto von Bismarck and most German military leaders believed that France would never become reconciled to the loss of Alsace-Lorraine. France, they were convinced, was bent on a "war of revenge." But the French would never attack Germany unilaterally; first, they would form an alliance with another great power, thereby forcing Germany to fight on two fronts.[1]

After 1879, German army leaders increasingly assumed that Russia would be this future ally. By the late 1880's, military calculations had acquired a fatalistic twist; a two-front war with the Franco-Russian combination was not only possible, but inevitable. Among the members of the Triple Alliance, Germany alone would bear the brunt of the fighting. In this conflict of unprecedented intensity and

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[1] William L. Langer, The Franco-Russian Alliance, 1890-94 (Cambridge, Mass., 1929), pp. 11-12; Gordon A. Craig, The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945 (Oxford, 1955), pp. 272-74; Theodore S. Hamerow, ed., The Age of Bismarck: Documents and Interpretations (New York, 1973), pp. 263-64.

magnitude, Germany would be struggling not for spoils but for survival.[2]

Both General Alfred Waldersee, Chief of the General Staff (1888-91), and General Julius von Verdy du Vernois, War Minister (1889-90), subscribed to this viewpoint. To survive such a war, they argued, Germany must swiftly attack and defeat one enemy before the other could fully deploy its forces. This required decisive military superiority over either France or Russia.[3]

For this reason, the dynamic measures undertaken by France and Russia to strengthen their armies in 1888 and 1889 were particularly distressing. Under War Minister Charles de Freycinet, France initiated a series of reforms to modernize and expand its army. The Army Bill of 1889 enacted universal military service, shortened the

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[2]Hajo Holborn, "Moltke and Schlieffen: The Prussian-German School," in Makers of Modern Strategy, ed. Edward Mead Earle (Princeton, 1941), p. 185; Adalbert Wahl, Deutsche Geschichte von der Reichsgründung bis zum Ausbruch des Weltkrieges, 1871-1914, 4 vols. (Stuttgart, 1926-1936), III, 454.

[3]Alfred Graf von Waldersee, Denkwürdigkeiten des General-Feldmarschalls Alfred von Waldersee, 3 vols., ed. H. O. Meissner (Stuttgart, 1923), II, 17; Choldwig Fürst zu Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, Memoirs of Prince Choldwig of Hohenlohe-Schillingsfuerst, 2 vols., ed. F. Curtius, trans. G. W. Chrystal (New York, 1906), II, 417-18; Friedrich von Holstein, The Holstein Papers, 4 vols., ed. N. Rich and M. H. Fisher (Cambridge, England, 1955-63), II, 366; Craig, pp. 268, 274-78; Holborn, pp. 185-86; Norman Rich, Friedrich von Holstein: Politics and Diplomacy in the Era of Bismarck and Wilhelm II, 2 vols. (Cambridge, England, 1965), I, 238, 249.

active duty period from five to three years, and greatly extended the service obligation with the reserves. As a result, more soldiers could be inducted annually, and the pool of trained manpower available for mobilization would be greatly expanded.[4]

The Russian army, Europe's largest, was moving to increase its already threatening rate of expansion. Between 1885 and 1888, Russian peacetime strength grew from 790,000 to 926,000, while that of Germany rose only slightly, from 427,274 to 468,409. In 1888, the active duty period was shortened and the reserve obligation extended. Furthermore, the Russian government allocated a staggering sum, equivalent to three billion Marks, for general military expansion and modernization.[5]

Germany's security was endangered. When these reforms were fully implemented, the French and Russian forces would each be larger, and as modern, as Germany's. A two-front war under such conditions could well sound the death knell of the German Reich.

Equally distressing to German military leaders was

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[4]Ludwig Rüdt von Collenberg, Die deutsche Armee von 1871 bis 1914 (Berlin, 1922), pp. 36, 39; Johannes Werdermann, Die Heeresreform unter Caprivi (Greifswald, 1928), p. 3; William L. Langer, European Alliances and Alignments, 1871-1890, 2d ed. (New York, 1950), p. 491; Waldersee, II, 17-19.

[5]Langer, The Franco-Russian Alliance, pp. 34, 40-42; Rüdt, pp. 29, 36-39; Hohenlohe, II, 418.

the increasing likelihood of war. These men scrutinized political and military developments for any signs, no matter how subtle, of the expected conflict. After 1887, they noted, German-Russian relations had cooled. The Russian nationalistic and pan-Slavic press vociferously denounced German policies, demanding rapprochement with France. In 1888 the French financed a loan of 500 million francs for the Russian government, leading to speculation about an imminent political alliance. Particularly ominous was the continuing clash of Austrian and Russian interests in the Balkans. Slowly pushing Russia toward the French camp, this confrontation seemed destined to spark a general European conflagration. Germany, its generals were convinced, would have to support Austria, a course certain to result in the fated two-front war.[6]

Verdy and Waldersee stressed the urgent need to strengthen the army. Together they drafted in August 1889 a reorganization and expansion plan, designed to implement universal military service. Article 59 of the Reich Constitution established the principle of universal service. But according to Article 60, Reich legislation fixed the army's peacetime strength. Since 1871 the population had expanded at a more rapid rate than the authorized peacetime strength. As a result, a dwindling

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[6]Langer, European Alliances and Alignments, pp. 491-92.

percentage of those eligible could be inducted annually. Universal military service existed in principle only. At an additional cost of 117 million Marks yearly, the new plan proposed to increase the peacetime strength by 115,000 men--greater than the aggregate of all such increases since 1871. The plan would enable the army to absorb all eligible men, making universal service a reality; this, in turn, would insure numerical superiority over the French.[7]

Bismarck approved of the plan, but advised caution. Reichstag elections were scheduled for February 1890. In the popular mind, there was no immediate threat to peace; in fact, war seemed very distant. It would, therefore, be difficult to justify such an unprecedented military increase. Submitting the plan to the Reichstag before the elections, Bismarck reasoned, would only handicap the pro-government parties at the polls. The Kaiser agreed, and the plan was postponed.[8]

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[7]A. Lawrence Lowell, Governments and Parties in Continental Europe, 2 vols. (New York, 1897), II, 372; Ernst R. Huber, ed., Dokumente zur deutschen Verfassungsgeschichte, 3 vols. (Stuttgart, 1961-66), II, 301-02; Ernst R. Huber, Heer und Staat in der deutschen Geschichte (Hamburg, 1938), pp. 269-70; Wahl, III, 454-55; Werdermann, pp. 3-4; Rüdt, pp. 122-23; Otto Hammann, Der neue Kurs (Berlin, 1918), pp. 42-43; Times (London), 26 August 1892.

[8]Rüdt, pp. 39-40; Werdermann, p. 4; Wahl, III, 455-56.

As shown in table 1, the elections were a disaster for the pro-government Kartell parties--the Conservatives, Free Conservatives, and National Liberals. The Kartell lost its absolute majority; out of a total of 397 seats, it dropped from 220 to 135. The Free Conservatives and National Liberals each lost over half their seats. Out of a total of seven million votes cast, the opposition received four and a half million, or about sixty-four per cent. On the far left, the Social Democrats polled 1,427,000 votes, more than any other party. The Center, with 106 seats, became the largest party, while the Radicals more than doubled their strength, from 32 to 66 seats. Suddenly a government majority depended not only upon Kartell votes, but also upon those of either the Center or the Radical party.[9]

Under these circumstances, there was little prospect for parliamentary approval of the army's plan. Both the Center and Radical parties were long-standing opponents

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[9] Stenographische Berichte über die Verhandlungen des deutschen Reichstages (Berlin, 1871-1938), 1890-91, 8th Legislative Period, I Session, Anlageband I, pp. 232-33 (Hereafter cited as Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages); Johannes Ziekursch, Politische Geschichte des neuen Kaiserreiches, 3 vols. (Frankfurt A.M., 1925-1930), II, 442-43; Ludwig Bergsträsser, Geschichte der politischen Parteien in Deutschland (Berlin, 1932), pp. 152-53; Koppel S. Pinson, Modern Germany, Its History and Civilization, 2d ed. (New York, 1966), pp. 601-02; J. Alden Nichols, Germany After Bismarck: The Caprivi Era, 1890-94 (New York, 1958), pp. 18-19.

TABLE 1

COMPARISON OF REICHSTAG ELECTIONS:

1887 and 1890

Political Party	1887 Deputies	1890 Deputies
Conservatives	80	73
Free Conservatives	41	20
National Liberals	99	42
Kartell Total	220	135
Centrists	98	106
Radicals	32	66
Social Democrats	11	35
Others (Poles, Guelfs, Danes, Alsatians, Anti-Semites, etc.)	36	55
TOTAL DEPUTIES IN REICHSTAG	397	397

SOURCE: Stenographische Berichte über die Verhandlungen des Reichstages, 1890-91, 8th Legislative Period, I Session, Anlageband I, pp. 232-33; Koppel S. Pinson, Modern Germany, Its History and Civilization, 2d ed. (New York, 1966), pp. 601-602; J. Alden Nichols, Germany After Bismarck: The Caprivi Era, 1890-1894 (New York, 1958), p. 37.

of army bills. Rejecting the concept of inevitable war, they saw in military expansion the seed of the military state.[10]

Realizing this, the Prussian State Ministry, in early March 1890, resolved to postpone all but the most urgent military improvements for at least one year. Perhaps within that period a more propitious atmosphere would develop for debating such measures in the Reichstag. The Kaiser, by now the most fervent patron of Verdy's plan, reluctantly assented.[11]

Shortly thereafter Bismarck was forced to resign. His successor, Lieutenant General Georg Leo von Caprivi, had little political experience. Like most military leaders, he was imbued with the idea of an inevitable two-front war, and supported the expansion plan.[12]

Working with Verdy, Caprivi drafted an army bill for the most urgent increases. Designed to counter recent French artillery augmentations, the bill proposed a hike of 18,574, mostly artillerymen, in the peacetime strength. Costing an additional 18 million

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[10]Heinz Goebel, Die Militärvorlage 1892/93 (Leipzig, 1935), p. 44; Pinson, pp. 169-70.

[11]Werdermann, pp. 4-5; Wahl, III, 456-57; Rüdt, pp. 40-42.

[12]Langer, The Franco-Russian Alliance, p. 69; Craig p. 243; Hammann, p. 43; Alfred von Tirpitz, My Memoirs, 2 vols. (New York, 1919), I, 37-38, 40.

Marks annually, it would be presented in May as a supplementary measure to the septennat of 1887.[13]

Without the support of the Center or Radical party, however, this bill, or any other piece of government legislation would fail. Partly out of consideration for this and partly out of personal conviction, Caprivi inaugurated a policy of reconciliation, directed particularly toward the Centrists and Radicals. He rejected Bismarck's methods of coercion and intimidation. While the Iron Chancellor had favored the narrow interests of the Kartell, Caprivi intended to champion the interests of the nation as a whole--as he defined them. Only in this way, Caprivi reasoned, could the nation achieve the necessary unity to counter effectively the threats of socialism and foreign aggression.

Caprivi first gave public expression to this policy on April 15, 1890, in a speech before the lower house of the Prussian Landtag:

> The state government will be at all times prepared to take up such suppressed ideas and wishes, to examine them anew, and, insofar as it becomes convinced of their practicability, to realize them.

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[13] Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1890-91, 8, I, Anlageband I, pp. 51-53; Schulthess' Europäischer Geschichtskalender (Munich, 1860-1938), 1890, pp. 75-78 (hereafter cited as Schulthess'); Ziekursch, III, 62-63; Rüdt, p. 42; Hammann, pp. 42-43; Werdermann, p. 7; Preussische Jahrbücher 65 (1890): 237.

> We shall take the good from wherever and from whomever it may come, and we shall implement it if we are convinced that such implementation is consistent with the welfare of the state . . . . We shall gladly work together with all those . . . who have a heart for Prussia and who are resolved to carry on and help promote the state as a monarchy, the Reich as a nation.

The speech was well-received by all sides of the house.[14]

The next day Caprivi reinforced this impression when he announced his intention of dismantling Bismarck's "reptile press." This practice, particularly detested by the opposition parties, involved channeling official funds secretly to certain newspapers; they, in return, printed whatever news and views the government desired. The secret subsidies came from the so-called "Guelf Fund," the income from the confiscated wealth of the Hanoverian royal house. In the future, Caprivi declared before the Landtag, the government would publish its views exclusively in the official Reichsanzeiger, the only exception being an occasional article on foreign policy.[15]

The Kaiser appeared to endorse this approach. In

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[14]Stenographische Berichte über die Verhandlungen des Preussischen Landtages, Haus der Abgeordneten (Berlin, 1848-1917), 1889-90, II, pp. 1048-49 (hereafter cited as Stenographische Berichte des Landtages); Schulthess', 1890, pp. 55-56; Karl Bachem, Vorgeschichte, Geschichte und Politik der deutschen Zentrumspartei, 9 vols. (Cologne, 1927-32), V, 123-24; Times (London), 18 April 1890.

[15]Schulthess', 1890, p. 57; Hammann, pp. 72-73; Nichols, pp. 45-46.

his speech from the throne on May 6, officially opening the new Reichstag, he made no mention of the anti-socialist law, due to expire in September. This omission was welcomed by Social Democrats, Radicals, and Centrists, all of whom opposed its renewal.[16]

To these overtures, the Radicals and Centrists responded ambiguously, with hope and suspicion. Caprivi, however, was confident and decided to proceed with his army bill.

Throughout the opening debates, the bill fared well. Most Centrists and half the Radicals appeared close to supporting it. Although the Center voiced reservations, it promised to overlook them if the government presented a strong case. Its leader, Ludwig Windthorst, vowed to vote for any measure truly essential for the nation's defense. "Against foreign enemies," he declared, "Germany has no political parties." The Radical party was divided. Its leader, Eugen Richter, and the Progressive wing condemned the bill as an unnecessary tax burden. For them, opposition to all government legislation was instinctive. The party's Secessionist wing, however, had been impressed by Caprivi's conciliatory remarks. It wanted to explore a more flexible, less negative program. With

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[16] Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1890-91, 8, I, Volume I, pp. 1-2; Schulthess', 1890, pp. 64-66; Times (London), 9 May 1890.

Bismarck, there had never really been an opportunity for reasonable compromise; perhaps with Caprivi, a new beginning was possible. A Radical rapprochement with the government would give liberals a positive influence on Reich legislation. In return for their support, the Radicals could win important concessions for liberalism. This Secessionist viewpoint seemed on the upswing when in mid-May Richter was stripped of the party chairmanship.[17]

On May 14, Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke, the military hero of German unification, delivered a brief but provocative speech. His solemn warning added profoundly to the bill's credibility: "the friendly assurances of our neighbors both in the east and west, tendered along with their warlike preparations, are valuable, but for security we can only look to ourselves."[18]

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[17] Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1890-91, 8, I, Volume 1, pp. 77-89, 115; Stanley Zucker, Ludwig Bamberger, German Liberal Politician and Social Critic, 1823-1899 (Pittsburgh, 1975), pp. 229-33; James F. Tent, "Eugen Richter: Manchester Liberal and German Statesman" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1973), pp. 334-35; Bergsträsser, p. 155; Oskar Klein-Hattingen, Geschichte des deutschen Liberalismus, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1911-12), II, 492.

[18] Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1890-91, 8, I, Volume 1, pp. 76-77; Schulthess', 1890, pp. 78-79; Times (London), 16 May 1890.

The ascendancy of the government's cause, however, was short-lived. Appearing before a Reichstag commission on May 21, Verdy incautiously referred to the bill as only the first stage in a comprehensive program of military expansion. Evasive about the program's scope, he did reveal its purpose--to implement Scharnhorst's concept of universal military service. Reaction was swift. Emphasizing the ominous ambiguity of these remarks, Richter raised such a hue and cry against rampant militarism that he quickly routed his rivals and regained the party chairmanship. In the past he had characterized Caprivi's conciliatory gestures as only a wily stratagem; the state remained just as militaristic as before. Now Richter's admonitions seemed justified, his prestige restored. Verdy's comment also alienated many Center deputies who had been inclined to support the bill. Gradually that party began sliding back into the opposition.[19]

Caprivi attempted to calm the storm by denying any knowledge of such plans. On June 24, he assured the Reichstag that the army's program involved only reorganization, not expansion. Not incorrectly, Waldersee remarked in his

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[19] Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1890-91, 8, I, Volume 1, p. 75 and Anlageband I, pp. 594-97; Schulthess', 1890, pp. 87-88, 101, 321-23; Werdermann, p. 8; Zucker, pp. 229-33; Bergsträsser, p. 155; Nichols, p. 81; Bachem, V, 141; Waldersee, II, 132-33; Rudolf Schmidt-Bückeburg, Das Militärkabinett der preussischen Könige und deutschen Kaiser, 1787-1918 (Berlin, 1933), p. 188.

diary that "Caprivi had uttered an untruth."[20]

Caprivi's assurance helped, but the credit for saving the bill belonged to Windthorst. His shrewd parliamentary maneuvers averted a serious political impasse. Under Richter's regained leadership, the Radicals had returned to the opposition. The bill's fate, therefore, rested solely with the Center. Supporting it, Windthorst calculated, would illustrate two points: the Center's pivotal position in the Reichstag and its willingness to cooperate with the government. Caprivi would realize the practicability of cultivating the Center's continuing support; this could be secured, but only in return for major religious concessions.[21]

To save face for his party, Windthorst formulated four resolutions, the Windthorst Resolutions, cautioning against any ambitious expansion program:

(1) The government should renounce the continuation of plans calling for universal military service by all able-bodied youth, as such a move would impose unbearable costs upon the German Reich.

(2) The government should move towards reducing the consent period of the Reichstag over peacetime strength from the current Septennat to the fiscal year.

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[20] Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1890-91, 8, I, Volume 1, p. 547 and Anlageband I, p. 597; Werdermann, pp. 9-10; Waldersee, II, 133.

[21] Nichols, p. 71; Bachem, V, 141-42.

(3) The government should begin a speedy reduction in the required service time within the active army.
(4) The government should move in all earnestness towards introducing a statutory two-year military service for foot troops.

The resolutions were adopted by the Reichstag's select commission, and the Center's support conditioned on a concession in their direction.[22]

After gaining the Kaiser's reluctant consent, Caprivi yielded. Over a three-year period he offered to increase by 18,000 the number of soldiers placed on indefinite leave after completing two years of active service; this meant that a number of soldiers roughly equivalent to the increase provided for in the army bill would have their service time reduced from three to two years. This concession was only a verbal agreement, without force of law; the government did not endorse the resolutions. The Center, nevertheless, accepted the offering; it was the first time such a concession had been wrung from the military. On June 28, the bill passed by a substantial majority, the Radicals and Social Democrats voting against it.[23]

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[22] Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1890-91, 8, I, Anlageband I, p. 598; Bachem, V, 141-42; Schulthess', 1890, pp. 105-106; Goebel, p. 47.

[23] Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1890-91, 8, I, Anlageband I, p. 598 and Volume 1, pp. 547-48; Bachem, V, 141-44; Waldersee, II, 130-31; Nichols, pp. 81-84.

For Caprivi, it was a Pyrrhic victory. The Windthorst Resolutions and the chancellor's denial had created additional obstacles to army expansion. These could be circumvented only through the development of a dependable pro-government majority.

Having this goal, Caprivi continued in his conciliatory policies. His strategy was simple: to court the Radical and Center parties, which held the key to the Reichstag, and to draw them into a cooperative relationship with the Kartell parties, which dominated the Landtag.[24]

In many respects the strategy began to succeed. From the summer of 1890 to the spring of 1891, the government introduced a series of major bills in the Reichstag and Prussian Landtag. Included among these were measures dealing with labor protection, industrial courts, rural self-government, and the restoration of funds sequestered from the Catholic Church during the Kulturkampf. In every case, the legislation passed by a large, almost unprecedented majority. Voting for all the major bills, the Center seemed on the way to becoming a "government party" [Regierungspartei]; in return, no bill was forced

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[24] J. C. G. Röhl, Germany Without Bismarck: The Crisis of Government in the Second Reich, 1890-1900 (London, 1967), p. 79; Waldersee, II, 121; Nichols, pp. 108-112.

through against its wishes. Many Radicals remained sympathetic toward the government, and even Richter's criticisms became less harsh. In the spring of 1891, the Secessionists voted for the compromise navy budget in the Reichstag, against Richter, and the entire party voted for the rural self-government bill in the Landtag.[25]

The government's policies, however, disturbed the Kartell. With an acute fear of socialist revolution, it was particularly alarmed by the lapse of the anti-Socialist law. There was also resentment toward Caprivi's increasing liaison with the Center, its traditional arch-enemy. Old Kulturkampf wounds lingered on; rapprochement with the Ultramontane party meant religious concessions, a repulsive thought for Free Conservatives and National Liberals. Many government actions were perceived as threats against conservative economic, political, and social interests; chief among these were the rural self-government reform bill, the negotiations for foreign trade treaties, and a sugar tax law. Furthermore, the government's indifferent attitude toward colonies and its promotion of labor protection conflicted with the

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[25]Nichols, pp. 88-101; Waldersee, II, 152, 161; Bergsträsser, p. 155; Schulthess', 1891, p. 312; Gustav Seeber, Zwischen Bebel und Bismarck: Zur Geschichte des Linksliberalismus in Deutschland, 1871-1893 (Berlin, 1965), p. 201.

industrial interests of National Liberals.[26]

There was also a question of political influence. Any increase in the parliamentary leverage of Radicals and Centrists would diminish that of the Kartell. Prussian Conservatives were used to having their way on most issues; compromise and concessions were anathema. They clung tenaciously to their privileges and prestige; their interests were nonnegotiable. In their view, Caprivi was bent more upon conceding than defending these interests; instead of treating with the Reich's enemies, he should concentrate on strengthening those elements truly loyal to state and crown.[27]

This dissatisfaction continued to grow. Caprivi's negotiation of several commercial trade treaties in 1891-93 particularly incensed agrarian conservatives.

There were cogent arguments in favor of the treaties. Since 1879 Germany had pursued a protectionist trade policy, benefiting the infant industry of middle-class liberals and the agricultural production of Junker conservatives. Bismarck had established an autonomous

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[26] Preussische Jahrbücher 67 (1891): 305-09; Schulthess', 1891, pp. 311-12; Nichols, pp. 110-11.

[27] Sarah R. Tirrell, German Agrarian Politics After Bismarck's Fall (New York, 1951), pp. 41, 51, 69, 141-42; Nichols, pp. 94-97, 110-12, 151; William H. Dawson, The German Empire, 1867-1914, 2 vols. (New York, 1919), II, 261-62, 270; Hans Booms, Die Deutsch-Konservative Partei (Düsseldorf, 1954), pp. 26-31; Röhl, p. 62.

tariff wall and concluded a host of most-favored-nation agreements. The result was that, with the European community still clinging to relatively free trade, protectionist Germany acquired low tariff rates abroad without reciprocating. Its economy flourished. Impressed by this example, other European nations began turning toward protection. Most of Germany's trade treaties expired in early 1892. Unless it established more equitable trade relationships before then, its exports could face prohibitive tariffs everywhere. Foreign markets would dry up just when industry expected to expand. In Caprivi's words, the outcome could be a tariff "war of all against all."[28]

Such a conflict could jeopardize the Reich's security. A tariff war between Germany and Austria, for example, might undermine the solidarity of the Triple Alliance. Caprivi sought to strengthen this alliance by forging durable economic bonds among its members.[29]

Moreover, the left would welcome any reduction in duties on produce. The economic slump of 1891 had become

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[28]Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1890-92, 8, I, Volume 5, p. 3302; Nichols, pp. 138-40; Tirrell, pp. 75-83, 93; Ziekursch, II, 342-43 and III, 57.

[29]Karl H. Kröger, Die Konservativen und die Politik Caprivis (Rostock, 1937), p. 37; Carl von Wedel, Zwischen Kaiser und Kanzler (Leipzig, 1943), pp. 83, 108; Ziekursch, III, 57; Nichols, pp. 139-40.

a severe depression by 1892. The cost of living soared especially in urban areas, where the Radicals and Social Democrats drew their greatest support. Poor harvests further fueled rising food prices. Rye, the basic ingredient in German bread, rose from 129.9 M per 1000 kg. in 1887 (Leipzig) to 179.7 M in 1890, and to 215.2 M in 1891. In Munich, wheat climbed from 190.1 M in 1887, to 213.3 M in 1890, and to 239.5 M in 1891. The high tariff duties were popularly blamed, for it was common knowledge that bread was much cheaper abroad.[30]

For these reasons, Caprivi concluded new trade treaties with Austria-Hungary, Italy, and Belgium in December 1891. Covering a twelve-year period, they provided for a reduction in Germany's grain tariff from 5 M to 3.5 M per 1000 kg. In exchange, Germany would receive favorable rates abroad for a host of its manufactured goods.[31]

For German manufacturers, who would secure foreign markets under stable conditions, the treaties were a boon.

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[30]Hans Rosenberg, "Political and Social Consequences of the Great Depression of 1873-1896 in Central Europe," Economic History Review 13 (1943): 61; Schulthess', 1890, p. 13; Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1890-91, 8, I, Anlageband I, pp. 232-33; Nichols, pp. 140-43; Tirrell, pp. 93-97.

[31]Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1890-92, 8, I, Anlageband V, pp. 3215-3425 and Volume 5, pp. 3301-3309; Schulthess', 1891, pp. 161-75; Tirrell, pp. 115-17; Nichols, pp. 143-44; Ziekursch, III, 57.

For urban workers, the treaties meant relief from high food prices. But for agrarian conservatives, the treaties were a direct assault against their livelihood; lower food prices meant less income from farming.[32]

On December 18, the Reichstag ratified the treaties by a substantial majority, which included members from every party: all the Radicals, Centrists, Guelfs, Poles, and Social Democrats; most of the National Liberals and Free Conservatives; and even one-third of the Conservatives. For the first time since 1879, the agrarian interest had been defeated, sacrificed for industrialization's benefit. The government had thereby cracked the solid front of middle-class industry and Junker agriculture. For the moment, while agricultural prices remained high, the Conservatives were alarmed; later, as prices plummeted, their reaction became increasingly vociferous.[33]

In late 1891, Caprivi and the army rejected as unwise the continuing postponement of the expansion plan. French and Russian military might continued to grow at alarming rates. Since 1890 French peacetime strength had increased from 489,000 to 519,000, and that of Russia from

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[32]Kröger, pp. 58-59; Röhl, pp. 62, 76-77; Nichols, pp. 149-51.

[33]Preussische Jahrbücher 69 (1892): 117-18; Bachem, V, 253-54; Nichols, p. 149; Kröger, pp. 31, 38.

926,000 to 1,020,000. France, with a population of 38 million, was training more new recruits yearly than Germany, with its larger population of 48 million. German-Russian relations had cooled even more after the expiration of the Reinsurance Treaty in 1890, while Franco-Russian relations followed the opposite course. In July 1891, a French naval squadron visited the Russian naval base at Cronstadt, near St. Petersburg. There the French sailors were jubilantly welcomed amid prolonged festivities. Tsar Alexander III visited the squadron and stood respectfully bareheaded as the Russian band played the Marseillaise, battle hymn of the French Revolution. Shortly thereafter, rumors reached Berlin of Franco-Russian negotiations aimed at securing a treaty relationship. Then, on October 15, the French guaranteed another loan for the Russian government, amounting to 500 million francs. With the worst fears of the German army moving steadily toward realization, failing to prepare was regarded as preparing to fail.[34]

It was this pressing need to reactivate the expansion plan that led to the School Bill debacle of 1892. As before, the crucial problem was securing a Reichstag majority. Caprivi's conciliatory efforts had failed to

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[34]Langer, The Franco-Russian Alliance, pp. 183-97, 210; Ziekursch, III, 35; Rüdt, pp. 36, 43-44; Wahl, III, 458; Hohenlohe, II, 441; Bachem, V, 268; Times (London),

draw either the Centrists or Radicals securely into the government camp. In principle, the Radicals remained antimilitarist; they had opposed even the modest army bill of 1890. The Centrists, on the other hand, had a greater propensity for compromise; they had supported the army increases in 1890 and regarded the Windthorst Resolutions as flexible guidelines, not rigid principles. Moreover, since 1890 the Center, under Windthorst's leadership, had established a strong working relationship with Caprivi. For these reasons, in late 1891 the chancellor decided to concentrate on winning the Center.[35]

The Center's traditional tactic was to barter its support for concessions, usually of a religious character. One concession especially sought after concerned religious instruction in Prussian public primary schools [Volksschule]. Traditionally each school was identified with a denomination, under whose supervision the students received compulsory religious instruction. This practice, however, was only partially based in law. The Constitution of 1850 confirmed the schools' confessional complexion, but gave the churches no prevailing authority over the religious instruction. Subsequent legislation neither established such authority nor circumscribed the

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1 August 1891; Craig, p. 243.

[35] Röhl, pp. 79-80; Nichols, pp. 158-159.

government's educational prerogatives. In all facets of education, the dominance of the Ministry of Education and Public Worship was complete. Staunch Catholics and Protestants were dissatisfied; the lack of legal guarantees for their chuches left religious influence in the schools open to gradual subversion by the irreligious tendencies of the times. During the Kulturkampf, for example, supervision of religious education was denied to Catholic priests by administrative order of the Minister of Education and Public Worship. Later it was restored in the same manner. Junker Protestants and Centrists wanted a more permanent guarantee than could be offered by the changing policies of succeeding ministers.[36]

The school bill which Caprivi sent to the Landtag in January 1892 would have achieved this end. It guaranteed local church officials complete authority over the religious classes. The bill also reaffirmed the schools' confessional character. All students had to receive religious instruction; children not belonging to denominations recognized by the state were required to receive whatever confessional instruction their schools offered. A school, its teachers, and its governing board

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[36]Ziekursch, III, 52-53; Tirrell, p. 146; Bergsträsser, pp.155-56; Bachem, V, 135-37, 239, 255; Waldersee, II, 229-30; Wahl, III, 535-38; Huber, Dokumente, I, 403; Nichols, pp. 97-98, 159.

members had to be identified with the same denomination.[37]

For Caprivi, the bill's purpose was twofold: to make a major concession to the Center, and to promote lasting Center-Conservative cooperation. In return, he hoped, the Center would join the Kartell in supporting the army bill soon to follow. Since the school bill only codified existing practice, Caprivi expected little opposition.[38]

The chancellor, however, had made a serious miscalculation. Free Conservatives, National Liberals, and Radicals were alarmed by the bill's religious and political implications. To anti-clerical liberals and liberal Protestants, confessional education was fundamentally unacceptable; any law reaffirming it was intrinsically reactionary and retrogressive. Richter accused the government of swinging radically to the right; liberals of all shades, he argued, must unite in opposition. The National Liberal leader, Rudolf von Bennigsen, responded by proposing a union of Radicals, Free Conservatives, and National Liberals against the

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[37] Stenographische Berichte des Landtages, 1892, Volume 1, p. 18 and Anlageband II, pp. 879-81; Wahl, III, 535-38; Bachem, V, 254; Nichols, pp. 160-63; Schulthess', 1892, pp. 8-11.

[38] Ziekursch, III, 53; Röhl, pp. 79-80; Waldersee, II, 237; Stenographische Berichte des Landtages, 1892, Volume 1, p. 18.

bill and the whole direction of government policy. The so-called middle parties, the Free Conservatives and National Liberals, were disturbed for another reason. Until now their support was essential for a government majority in the Landtag. Because of this, the government was compelled to promote their interests not only in the Landtag, but also in the Reichstag, where their representation was much smaller. As a result, these parties exercised a degree of political influence far out of proportion to their size. A Center-Conservative coalition, however, threatened to reduce this leverage. Together the Conservatives and Centrists commanded a Landtag majority; a closer relationship between them could only reduce the government's dependence on the middle parties.[39]

Despite this opposition, the bill seemed destined for passage. All attempts to dilute it with amendments failed. Requiring the support of only Centrists and Conservatives, the bill appeared to have circumvented all

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[39]Martin Spahn, Ernst Lieber als Parlamentarier (Gotha, 1906), pp. 30-31; Stenographische Berichte des Landtages, 1892, Volume I, pp. 35-36, 167-170; Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1890-92, Volume 6, p. 3822; Hermann Oncken, Rudolf von Bennigsen, ein liberaler Politiker, 2 vols. (Stuttgart, 1910), II, 556-57, 559; Bachem, V, 261, 268; Wahl, III, 538, 543-44; Ziekursch, III, 52; Nichols, 166; Erich Brandenburg, 50 Jahre Nationalliberale Partei, 1867-1917 (Berlin, 1917), p. 26.

parliamentary obstacles.[40]

Nevertheless, its opponents refused to yield. They launched a withering press campaign against both the bill and the Center party; old anti-Catholic Kulturkampf slogans and sentiments were resurrected. The public response was impressive. During February, the House of Deputies was flooded with petitions and resolutions condemning the bill: from liberal party organizations, from teachers' associations, from special committees organized to fight the bill, from city governments, and from university faculties. To this Bismarck added his criticism. The government's fundamental error, he asserted, was in trying to win over such an irreconcilable enemy as the Center.[41]

The wave of public protest unnerved the Kaiser. While the Conservatives continued to support the bill, he retreated. At a routine crown council on March 17, he rejected any thought of forcing the bill through with only Conservative and Centrist votes. A longtime advocate of Kartell solidarity, he demanded a compromise version

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[40]Bachem, V, 257-58; Wahl, III, 540, 544.

[41]Felix Rachfahl, Kaiser und Reich, 1888-1913 (Berlin 1915), p. 84; Dawson, II, 273; Wahl, III, 543-44; Waldersee, II, 231; Nichols, pp. 175-80; Holstein, III, 400-01; Schulthess', 1892, pp. 68-70; Hermann Hofmann, Fürst Bismarck, 1890-98, 3 vols. (Stuttgart, 1914), II, 13-17, 27.

acceptable to the middle parties. But compromise was no longer possible. Public agitation had frozen party positions; there was no room left for maneuver. In effect, the Kaiser's instructions meant killing the bill.[42]

In protest, Minister of Education and Public Worship Robert von Zedlitz-Trützschler, an author of the bill, resigned. The next day Caprivi followed suit, laying down all his Reich and Prussian offices. Only with the greatest difficulty did the Kaiser pursuade him to continue as chancellor and Prussian foreign minister; under no circumstances would the proud general consent to carry on as Prussian Minister-President. William II's decision on the school bill, however, was final. On March 28, the government formally withdrew it from the Landtag.[43]

The impact of this reversal was profound. The Conservatives regarded the government's volte-face as a political affront. They were humiliated not only because the crown had deserted them, but also because it had done so prematurely. With more warning they might have saved

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[42]Waldersee, II, 232; Nichols, pp. 175-81; Ziekursch, III, 52-53; Bachem, V, 258-60, 268; Wahl, III, 545-46; Kröger, p. 25; Holstein, III, 405-06, 408-09; Rachfahl, pp. 84-85; Dawson, II, 274; Röhl, pp. 83-84.

[43]Wahl, III, 546; Ziekursch, III, 53-54; Bachem, V, 259; Nichols, pp. 181-88; Rachfahl, pp. 84-85; Röhl, pp. 86-88; Dawson, II, 274; Tirrell, p. 146.

face by turning away from the bill before its withdrawal. The Center felt even more betrayed. Amid renewed Kulturkampf fears and suspicions, it resumed its old position of tactical opposition; perhaps the pattern of Bismarckian politics had returned. Just as important, the spirit of cooperation among the Kartell parties was devitalized. The bill's debates ended with Conservatives in rigid opposition to Free Conservatives and National Liberals; this breach was not easily closed. Furthermore, the middle parties did not resume their close relationship with the government; after the school bill affair, no party wished to appear as its special supporter.[44]

The government had fallen among all stools; its conduct had alienated all parties. Caprivi's ability to command a Reichstag majority was never more doubtful. The government's position was made even more awkward by the urgency of army expansion. The stage was set for the even greater political struggle which followed.[45]

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[44]Bergsträsser, p. 156; Tirrell, pp. 146-48; Nichols, pp. 187-89; Rachfahl, p. 85; Preussische Jahrbücher 71 (1893): 378, 384; Spahn, pp. 30-31; Röhl, p. 75; Bachem, V, 256, 259, 271.

[45]Rüdt, pp. 43-44; Röhl, pp. 35, 89, 91-92, 98-99, 102; Rachfahl, p. 85; Nichols, p. 185.

CHAPTER II

POLITICS OF OPPOSITION: INTRODUCTION OF THE ARMY BILL IN THE REICHSTAG

Caprivi's decision to remain as chancellor was largely motivated by his concern for the army bill. To gain its passage, the government would have to draw upon the full measure of good will remaining from the conciliatory policies of the past years, a task for which Caprivi was best suited. Furthermore, the chancellor felt a deep, personal commitment to the bill, the duty to see it through to completion.[1]

This dedication, however, was no guarantee of success. As Caprivi worked throughout the summer and fall of 1892, first to draft the bill, and then to defend it, he encountered opposition from all quarters: from the Kaiser, from many high-ranking army officers, from the general public, from all the political parties, and from Bismarck. In the absence of any obvious threat to Germany's security, the military issue was soon eclipsed by more far-reaching economic, political, and social questions. By year's end, the chancellor seemed isolated and vulnerable, the bill's future unpromising.

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[1]Bachem, V, 268.

It was in his effort to make the increases more palatable to the Reichstag that Caprivi clashed with the Kaiser. Verdy's plan had been based on continuing the three-year military service. Caprivi insisted upon reducing this to two years. The stiff resistance to the modest army bill of 1890 had convinced him that this concession was essential to winning further increases. The two-year service was a cherished goal of National Liberals, Radicals, and Centrists alike. By conceding it in advance, the chancellor hoped to offer them an irresistible quid pro quo. In his opinion, the reduced term would not harm the army's efficiency; already almost half of all recruits were placed on indefinite leave after two years.[2]

The Kaiser, however, regarded the three-year service, not as a bargaining chip, but as a sacred inheritance from his grandfather. Since 1848 the army had been the monarchy's bulwark against the ever-recurring onslaughts of liberal democracy. The Prussian army had retained its status as a separate caste, officered mostly by aristocrats and taking its oath, not to the constitution, but to the person of its supreme commander, the king. The

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[2]Fritz Hellwig, Carl Ferdinand Freiherr von Stumm-Halberg, 1836-1901 (Heidelberg, 1936), p. 465; Wahl, III, 458-60; Hammann, p. 43; Werdermann, p. 23; Rachfahl, Kaiser und Reich, p. 87.

constitutional conflict of the 1860's centered around the liberal attempt to make the army responsible to parliament. To minimize military class-consciousness, the liberal Landtag insisted on the two-year service, while William I and his war minister, Albrecht von Roon, demanded the three-year term. With Bismarck's help, the king and the army triumphed; the army's independence from the Landtag, implying royal independence from the constitution, was upheld. Under Bismarck the Reich army, led and dominated by Prussia, occupied an even more separate and privileged position. Its oath was taken to its supreme commander, the king and kaiser, not to the constitution. But unlike the Prussian army, it was not controlled by a responsible ministry; rather, Reich army affairs were managed through the Prussian War Ministry. The Reichstag's only control over the army lay in its right to approve military budgets, a prerogative greatly attenuated by the septennat principle. As the monarchy's independence from the Reichstag was symbolized by the Kaiser's personal control over the army, so that control was in turn symbolized by the three-year service.[3]

Throughout 1891, William II and Caprivi were locked in a running battle over this question. In June, the

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[3]Craig, pp. 136-79, 217-45; Huber, Heer und Staat, pp. 197-219, 269-72; Rachfahl, Kaiser und Reich, p. 87; Rüdt, pp. 44-45; Werdermann, p. 22.

Kaiser announced that he would never give up the three-year service. Caprivi responded by offering to resign; without this concession, he argued, army expansion was certain to be rejected. Dissolution and new elections would not produce a more docile Reichstag. The crown would then be faced with a serious dilemma: either withdraw the bill or force it through by some form of coup d'état, such as a change in the electoral law. While the Kaiser obviously favored the latter course, Caprivi found both unacceptable; withdrawing the bill would dangerously weaken monarchical prestige while a coup d'état would threaten the Reich with disintegration. Immediately the Kaiser backed down, stressing that his remarks were meant only to generate discussion. For the time being, the subject was dropped. But in August the Kaiser again expressed his determination to preserve the three-year service. As before, the chancellor persuaded him to reconsider. Yet, the monarch was unwilling to give in completely, preferring instead to defer a final decision for at least a year.[4]

By the spring of 1892, however, Caprivi was convinced

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[4]Siegfried von Kardorff, Wilhelm von Kardorff, ein nationaler Parlamentarier im Zeitalter Bismarcks und Wilhelms II, 1828-1907 (Berlin, 1936), p. 247; Helmuth Rogge, Friedrich von Holstein Lebenbekenntnis in Briefen an eine Frau (Berlin, 1932), p. 160; Holstein, III, 384n; Röhl, pp. 71-72; Rüdt, p. 43; Waldersee, II, 223; Nichols, pp. 207-20; Werdermann, pp. 22-25, 33, 47.

that the army bill could no longer be postponed. The Kaiser had to be pressed into a decision. In a memorandum to William, Caprivi wrote: "If the desire of the Reichstag for the statutory introduction of the two-year service is not at least partially met, a strengthening of the army cannot be achieved. . . . The question is not whether the two-year service is in itself preferable to the three-year service, but whether the three-year service is worth sacrificing in order to raise the peacetime strength by 77,500 men."[5]

The Kaiser's answer came on August 18. In a speech before an assembly of officers, he rejected any thought of disregarding his grandfather's three-year service. If the Reichstag would be unpatriotic enough to refuse increases for that reason, then he would rather get along with a small, well-disciplined army.[6]

With these remarks, the chancellor's resignation appeared imminent. But Bismarck's mounting criticism of the regime made Caprivi's retention essential. This was

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[5]August Keim, Erlebtes und Erstrebtes (Hannover, 1925), p. 53; Werdermann, pp. 27-29, 34-35, 49; Hammann, p. 43; Nichols, pp. 211-12; Rüdt, pp. 44-45.

[6]Schulthess', 1892, pp. 131-32; Wedel, pp. 189-90; Times (London), 26 August 1892; Karl Wippermann, ed., Deutscher Geschichtskalender (Leipzig, 1885-1934), 1892 (II), pp. 2, 12; Rachfahl, Kaiser und Reich, pp. 87-88.

pointed out to the Kaiser by his friend and advisor, Philipp zu Eulenburg. Submerging his own predilection for the three-year service, Eulenburg sent William a memorandum urging cooperation with Caprivi. The School Bill, he wrote, had already weakened monarchical prestige. The army bill was even more important. "Therefore, it must be able to count on success in the Reichstag." Once introduced, it could not be withdrawn. Insisting on the three-year service would surely lead to Caprivi's resignation. This alone would be a disastrous defeat. Bismarck would then be in a position to force reconciliation on the crown and regain the reins of government. With the Iron Chancellor returning "as the savior of the Fatherland" and "as the savior of His Majesty," monarchical prestige and authority would be undermined. "It would mean the bankruptcy of the Kaiser."[7]

Reluctantly William gave in. He and his chancellor agreed to a formula that would allow the crown to save face. There was to be no formal repeal of the constitutional provision establishing the three-year service, but the government would promise to observe the two-year service for all infantry recruits. On October 15, the

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[7]Werdermann, p. 35; Johannes Haller, Philip Eulenburg: The Kaiser's Friend, trans. Ethel C. Mayne, 2 Vols. (New York, 1930), I, 149-52; Holstein, III, 422-23.

Kaiser signed the bill.[8]

Among military circles opposition to the two-year service was more resolute. Most generals associated the three-year period with the military achievements of William I and Bismarck; any departure from it threatened to degrade the quality of the army's training and preparedness. By continuing to oppose the shorter service, many generals hoped to appeal to two of the Kaiser's more pronounced traits: his changeableness of mind and his fondness for the Prussian military tradition. If the Kaiser now withdrew his support from the bill, Caprivi would resign. As his successor, William would certainly select someone, perhaps Waldersee, who was more disposed toward safeguarding military interests. This attitude further reinforced the inclination of the Reichstag to oppose the bill. In late November, Free Conservative Carl Ferdinand von Stumm-Halberg noted: "Each Reichstag member quotes the remarks of a friendly general or other group of officers who have expressed disapproval at almost every provision of the army bill."[9]

In the face of this discontent, Caprivi was undaunted.

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[8]Werdermann, pp. 26, 29-30; Hohenlohe, II, 451; Nichols, pp. 213-14.

[9]Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1892-93, 8, II, Volume 1, p. 65; Keim, pp. 53-54, 75; Hohenlohe, II, 451-52; Hellwig, pp. 465-66; Hammann, p. 43; Nichols, pp. 225-26; Rachfahl, Kaiser und Reich, p. 88.

He stood firmly by his plan of sending the bill to the Reichstag in late November. In its final form, this bill called for an augmentation of 91,000 men in the peacetime strength, at an additional annual cost of 64-66 million Marks. To finance it, the chancellor proposed to raise the indirect taxes on beer, spirits, and stock exchange transactions. In addition to the two-year service, the measure contained another concession to Centrists, Radicals, and National Liberals, all of whom favored a more frequent review of the military budget; the review period was to be reduced from seven years (the septennat) to five years (a quinquennat).[10]

As rumors of these provisions spread throughout the late summer and early fall, the Conservatives expressed disapproval. Like many generals, they objected to abandoning the three-year service and the septennat; but even more fundamental to their opposition was the growing hostility toward Caprivi and his "new course" policies, an attitude reflected by the recent change in party leadership.

Otto von Helldorff-Bedra, the party chairman since

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[10] Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1892-93, 8, II, Volume 1, pp. 7-20 and Anlageband II, pp. 993-95, 1039; Schulthess', 1892, pp. 158-85; Verdermann, 1892 (II), p. 89; Rüdt, pp. 36, 43-44; Oncken, II, 577-79; Bachem, V, 268; Rachfahl, Kaiser und Reich, p. 89.

1876, was among Caprivi's more loyal supporters. A moderate and longtime advocate of Kartell solidarity, he rejected the narrow agrarian perspective and religious radicalism of the party's extreme right faction, the Kreuzzeitung wing. As the chancellor became increasingly unpopular, so did Helldorff; at the same time, the Kreuzzeitung's appeal mushroomed. Led by William von Hammerstein and Christian Adolf Stöcker, this wing opposed submerging Prussian, Conservative interests among those of the other Kartell members. Rather, it argued, the party should pursue a course more independent from both the government and the other parties. The expanding industrial sector was strangling the agrarian way of life and nurturing the growth of Social Democracy. The solution was simple: the primacy of agricultural interests to inhibit industrial growth, and a closer association of church and state to combat atheistic Social Democracy. It was this wing which most zealously championed the School Bill and which was most perturbed by its withdrawal; the Kreuzzeitung was particularly incensed at Helldorff's role in the affair. Hoping to preserve Kartell solidarity, he had urged the Kaiser to kill the bill. When this became known, the Kreuzzeitung unleashed a bitter press campaign against him. In response, Helldorff called for a split between moderates and extremists,

but he had seriously misjudged the party's mood. To his surprise, the moderates deserted him. In April, he was deposed as party chairman and excluded from the Conservative faction in both houses of the Prussian Landtag. The views of his successor, Otto von Manteuffel, were generally those of the Kreuzzeitung.[11]

A major factor in Helldorff's downfall and Caprivi's unpopularity was the growing animosity toward the trade treaties. Soon after their passage, grain prices had plummeted. Between December 1891 and September 1892, the price of wheat fell from 225 to 163 Marks per metric ton, and that of rye from 239 to 147 Marks. The party was convinced that the treaties were to blame; the price decline began as soon as the tariff reductions took effect and continued as the rates were extended to more and more countries. So distressed were the Conservatives that by the late summer of 1892 their chief aim had become the reversal of Caprivi's economic policy.[12]

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[11]Dieter Fricke, ed., Die bürgerlichen Parteien in Deutschland, 1830-1945, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1968-70), I, 673, 682; Times (London), 24 September 1892; Tirrell, pp. 132, 146-47; Wahl, III, 544-46; Wippermann, 1892 (I), pp. 102, 104, 167; Kröger, p. 25; Hellwig, pp. 425-28; Hans Leuss, Wilhelm Freiherr von Hammerstein, 1881-1895, Chefredakteur der Kreuzzeitung (Berlin, 1905), p. 104; Nichols, p. 188; Bergsträsser, pp. 158, 160; Rachfahl, Kaiser und Reich, pp. 86-87; Booms, pp. 27-30; Schulthess', 1892, pp. 82-83, 86, 91, 99.

[12]Bachem, V, 254, 272; Tirrell, pp. 156-57; Nichols, pp. 217-18.

The army bill offered just such an opportunity. The Conservatives shared with the Kaiser and the army a deep-seated allegiance to the three-year service. By opposing its abandonment, they hoped to persuade their impressionable sovereign to withdraw his support from the bill before it went to the Reichstag. Caprivi would then resign, his concessions would be deleted, and the way would be cleared for a new agricultural policy. Furthermore, in their opposition the Conservatives assumed that they had at least the Kaiser's tacit approval.[13]

From August to November, the Conservative press vigorously attacked the bill. "The question of the two-year service," wrote the Kreuzzeitung, "is no political fancy . . . . but rather . . . a preeminent question of national power." The inviolability of the three-year service was a cornerstone in William I's conception of honor and duty. Now Caprivi shamefully proposes to surrender it as a simple parliamentary maneuver. The two-year service means a poorer quality of training for recruits. Personnel turnovers in units will be more frequent, lowering esprit de corps, discipline, and efficiency. Yet these qualities are the hallmarks of the Prussian military tradition; they have made the German

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[13] Neue Preussische Zeitung (Berlin), #375, 13 August 1892 (hereafter cited as Kreuzzeitung); Leuss, pp. 104-05; Kardorff, p. 270; Goebel, pp. 23-24; Nachfahl, Kaiser und Reich, p. 88.

army superior to any other, man-for-man. The lesson of recent times is that the first battles are the decisive ones; therefore, it is foolish to diminish the quality of the standing army in order to increase the size of the reserves. "The Conservative party is in a peculiar position . . . [The present government is asking] it to support a proposal against which it has enthusiastically and successfully fought for over thirty years, shoulder to shoulder with past governments." The party cannot support a bill which is so detrimental to the country's defense and which seeks to "abandon a treasure which many . . . hold too dear ever to consider a political commodity."[14]

These appeals, however, did not induce the Kaiser to block the bill. On November 23, Caprivi presented it to the Reichstag. There it was immediately opposed by all the major parties and seemed likely to be rejected. The Conservatives were delighted; no matter what happened, they stood to gain. If the bill failed, Caprivi would probably resign and, at Conservative insistence, would be replaced by someone more sympathetic to agriculture; dissolution of the Reichstag and new elections, at a time of

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[14]Kröger, pp. 60-61; Kreuzzeitung (Berlin), #375, 13 August 1892; #438, 19 Sept. 1892; #402, 29 August 1892; #466, 5 Oct. 1892; #467, 6 Oct. 1892; Kölnische Zeitung (Cologne), #848, 26 Oct. 1892; Times (London), 29 Aug., 24 Sept., and 11 Oct. 1892; Goebel, pp. 23-25.

heightening agrarian and anti-Semitic dissatisfaction, could only boost Conservative strength. If Caprivi did persuade the National Liberals and the Center to rally behind the bill, he would still need the Conservatives' support; this might be obtained if doubts about the two-year service could be put to rest, but even then only in exchange for sweeping agricultural concessions. In either case, the Conservatives would rescue agriculture.[15]

This was the theme of Manteuffel's Reichstag speech of December 10. After reviewing the party's apprehensions about the two-year service, he pledged to keep an open mind during the forthcoming sessions of the military commission; in itself, the two-year service was not an insurmountable obstacle to Conservative support. Relief for agriculture, however, was a prerequisite. The sad plight in the countryside, he argued, was largely due to the government's economic policies. The indirect taxes associated with the bill would weigh most heavily on rural areas, and could even deepen the depression there. To win the Conservative vote, the government would not only have to demonstrate the bill's pressing necessity, but would also have to help agriculture bear the enormous

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[15] Germania (Berlin), #252 (3d edition), 3 Nov. 1892.

financial burden involved.[16]

With the increasing likelihood of new elections, agricultural relief was only one of the Kreuzzeitung's concerns. Almost as important was that of expanding the party's electoral appeal. For years, the Kreuzzeitung had urged the Conservatives to transform themselves into a mass party by raising the twin banners of agrarian agitation and anti-Semitism. While Helldorff was chairman, the majority spurned this suggestion. Mass agitation, Helldorff argued, was nothing more than perverse demagoguery, incompatible with the party's role as champion of law and order; rather the Conservatives' chief appeal should stem from their position as the most loyal and largest royal party. After Helldorff's overthrow, however, the arguments for anti-Semitism grew more persuasive. The School Bill crisis impressed many Conservatives with the power of mass agitation, a view reinforced by the rapid growth of Germany's two mass parties, the Center and the S.P.D. During April and May 1892, the party almost amended its program in an anti-Semitic sense; only the failure to agree on specific terms thwarted the

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[16] Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1892-93, 8, II, Volume 1, pp. 245-50; Times (London), 12 Dec. 1892; Kröger, p. 64; Goebel, p. 25.

effort.[17]

Then in the spring and summer a wave of anti-Semitism swept across the country. One incident involved a man of dubious integrity, Rector Hermann Ahlwardt, who had previously been dismissed from a Berlin parish school for dereliction of duty and who had already served a prison term for libeling the Berlin City Council. In April Ahlwardt published the pamphlet Jewish Rifles, which accused the Jewish firm of Ludwig Loewe of deliberately supplying the army with defective rifles. Although denied by the government, Ahlwardt's account was widely accepted. Anti-Semitic indignation quickly spread throughout Germany, and within a few weeks Ahlwardt became something of a popular hero. A few months later, a murdered child was found in the little town of Xanten on the lower Rhine. On the basis of pure speculation, a respectable Jewish butcher was charged with committing a ritual murder. Although he was eventually acquitted, the butcher's trial captured national attention and led to innumerable outbursts of anti-Semitism.[18]

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[17] Preussische Jahrbücher 69 (1892); 841-42; Kröger, p. 26; Schulthess', 1892, p. 99; Tirrell, pp. 62-63; Nichols, p. 218; Hajo Holborn, A History of Modern Germany: 1840-1945 (New York, 1969), p. 282.

[18] Preussische Jahrbücher 69 (1892): 841-49; Schulthess', 1892, pp. 92, 94, 100, 119, 342; Nichols, p. 218; Times (London), 22 July 1892; Dawson, II, 280.

These developments made it easier for the Conservatives to couple anti-Semitism and agrarian agitation; but one subsequent event was decisive in convincing them to do so. On November 24, in the rural and traditionally Conservative election district of Arnswalde-Friedeberg (Brandenburg), Ahlwardt won a plurality in a Reichstag bye-election. He received 14,049 votes while the Conservative candidate polled only 2876. Then, in the run-off election, he easily defeated the Radical candidate. Ahlwardt's victory, declared the Kreuzzeitung, is no isolated phenomenon: "In Conservative circles people perceive a grave national and economic danger in the steadily growing power of Judaism . . . . The 24th of November has revealed a picture of the mood as it has developed among the masses of the Conservative electorate." In both city and countryside, the Jews are blamed for the harsh economic conditions. This unrest "has already thinned the ranks of the Radical party and, because there has been no aspiring anti-Semitic party, has strengthened the ranks of the Conservatives." Anti-Semitism is, therefore, "the bridge on which the desertion from liberalism to conservatism will occur." It is also the means for arresting the infectious spread of Social Democracy. Most workers are not as anti-religious, anti-monarchical, or anti-national as the S.P.D. asserts. They are, however,

fundamentally anti-Semitic. In their common struggle against Jewish capitalism, Conservatives and workers could develop bonds that would strangle the S.P.D. But anti-Semitism is a double-edged sword; if the Conservative party acts quickly, it can seize the undisputed leadership of the movement; but if it hesitates, the radical anti-Semites will form their own party, into whose ranks massive numbers of longstanding Conservative supporters will flock. The Kreuzzeitung's message to Conservatives was clear: Either adopt anti-Semitism and become a mass party, or balk and accept political obscurity.[19]

The power of this logic soon became evident. In Berlin on December 8, at a party congress called to consider the issue, the Conservatives adopted a new program, pledging "to fight against the demoralizing growth of Jewish influence upon the life of the nation." Furthermore, the delegates deleted from the draft program the words, "we repudiate the excesses of anti-Semitism."[20]

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[19] Kreuzzeitung (Berlin), #560, 29 Nov. 1892; #569, 4 Dec. 1892; #574, 7 Dec. 1892; Times (London), 2 Dec. and 6 Dec. 1892; Schulthess', 1892, pp. 185, 191; Kröger, pp. 27-28; Nichols, p. 238; Bergsträsser, pp. 157-58.

[20] Kreuzzeitung (Berlin), #576, 3 Dec. 1892; #577, 9 Dec. 1892; #586, 14 Dec. 1892; Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung (Berlin), #583, 13 Dec. 1892; Germania (Berlin), #287 (1st edition), 15 Dec. 1892; Times (London), 8 Dec. and 15 Dec. 1892; Fricke, I, 682-83; Dawson, II, 281; Leuss, pp. 107-09; Kröger, p. 26; Wolfgang Treue, Deutsche

The Conservatives were now more determined than ever to pursue their economic demands in connection with the army bill. New elections were not to be feared but welcomed, for the Conservatives considered themselves in the best position to rally popular support.

Like their Conservative brethren, most Free Conservatives hoped to undermine Caprivi's economic policy. There was, however, a small but prominent minority associated with large-scale industry that thought otherwise. As agrarian protest became closely intertwined with the army bill, the Free Conservatives found themselves divided into two camps: one pro-agrarian and the other pro-industrial. Although this rift was no surprise, it was uncharacteristic; since its founding in 1866, the party had stood more than any other for cooperation between agriculture and industry. Yet, the turbulent economic conditions after 1891 made it increasingly difficult to reconcile agrarian and industrial interests.[21]

Particularly divisive had been the controversy over Caprivi's "new course" policies, a struggle embodied in the party's two leading personalities, William von

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Parteiprogramme seit 1861, 4th ed. (Göttingen, 1968), pp. 23, 87-90; Oskar Stillich, Die politischen Parteien in Deutschland, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1908-11), I, 251-53; Bergsträsser, p. 158.

[21]Pinson, pp. 166-67; Tirrell, p. 61.

Kardorff and Carl Ferdinand von Stumm-Halberg. Kardorff was a Junker landlord, Stumm a Saar iron and steel industrialist; Kardorff opposed the trade treaties and despised Caprivi, while Stumm supported the treaties and admired Caprivi; Kardorff was the leading proponent for a double monetary standard, while Stumm backed the chancellor's efforts to preserve the gold standard; Kardorff actively sought reconciliation between the Kaiser and Bismarck, hoping to restore the latter's dominance in political affairs; Stumm since July 1892 had turned completely away from Bismarck and placed his trust in Caprivi.[22]

For Free Conservatives the army bill intensified this struggle. Kardorff spoke for the majority. He echoed the Conservatives' objections to abandoning the three-year service, but clearly subordinated these to the more critical question of agrarian relief. Kardorff regarded Caprivi as the "grave-digger" of agriculture, a man completely insensitive to rural needs. Kardorff's opposition to the bill, like that of the Conservatives, was aimed at Caprivi's dismissal or resignation. But unlike the Conservatives, he was uneasy about the prospect of new elections. In such troubled times the

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[22] Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1892-93, 8, II, Volume 1, pp. 258-59; Kardorff, pp. 273-75; Hellwig, pp. 450-53, 459-64; Tirrell, pp. 153-56; Nichols, p. 219; Bergsträsser, p. 160.

extreme left would prosper most. Nonetheless, he felt that dissolution would be avoided: When faced with the bill's inevitable failure, the Kaiser would let Caprivi go; then, by making agricultural concessions, the new chancellor could easily secure enough support to pass a scaled-down version of the bill.[23]

Foremost among such concessions, Kardorff insisted, was the double monetary standard. Since Germany had adopted the gold standard in 1873, the relation of gold to silver had fallen dramatically, from 1:15 to 1:30. Silver, in other words, was worth only half of what it had been twenty years before. On the world market, expanded economic activity seemed to have outrun the gold supply, causing a steady rise in the value of gold-backed currency and an accompanying general decline in prices. This deflationary trend spelled disaster for the heavily indebted farmer. Interest rates on his mortgages and loans remained high, while the cash value of his crops fell. Germany must not only adopt the bimetal currency system, argued Kardorff; it must also convince the other major powers to do so. Then, by bringing about an international agreement that fixed the exchange rate between

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[23] Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1892-93, 8, II, Volume 1, p. 65; Hellwig, pp. 465-66; Kardorff, pp. 271-74, 276, 278-79; Kröger, p. 11; Germania (Berlin), #252 (3d edition), 3 Nov. 1892.

gold and silver, the government would help to expand the money supply and stabilize prices on a world scale. This was the least that could be done to compensate agriculture for the ruinous effects of the trade treaties.[24]

The only alternative, warned Kardorff, was the continuing impoverishment of the countryside, a situation fraught with the gravest political consequences. The backbone of monarchical support lay not among the urban masses, which flocked to Social Democracy and left liberalism, but in the rural populace. Above all, agricultural ruination meant the irreversible decline of monarchical sentiment, as massive numbers of poverty-stricken farmers fled to the cities. The result could be a revolution more powerful than that of 1848. The government, he chided, had uttered many "pretty words" but had done nothing useful. Now the nation faced an inescapable decision: "Either we preserve the gold standard and abandon German agriculture, or we preserve our agriculture and abandon the gold standard."[25]

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[24] Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1892-93, 8, II, Volume 1, pp. 67, 262-64; Kardorff, pp. 321-29; Tirrell, pp. 78-79; 153-54, 222-23; Nichols, p. 290; Adolph Wagner, "Die neueste Silber Krisis und unsere Münzwesen," Preussische Jahrbücher 74 (1893): 138-66, 242-82; Johannes Croner, Die Geschichte der agrarischen Bewegung in Deutschland (Berlin, 1909), pp. 22-25, 119.

[25] Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1892-93, 8, II, Volume 1, p. 67; Hellwig, p. 262; Kardorff, pp. 275-76.

For most Free Conservatives such considerations were inseparable from the army bill. This Kardorff bluntly emphasized in December: "The decline of agriculture . . . means a decline in the military potential of our country. . . . For me, the army bill issue is simple: If the government does nothing for agriculture, then . . . it will be impossible for the country to shoulder the burdens associated with the bill." On the other hand, if the government adopts the bimetal standard, the country can afford not only 60 million Marks, but even a greater amount.[26]

In contrast, Stumm became the first Reichstag member to endorse the bill. Speaking on December 13, he argued that the increases were justified by the foreign situation. "If we reject the bill," he declared, "we will soon see the enemy in our country." He dismissed as anachronistic any objections to the two-year service; in effect, it was already operating smoothly under the guise of indefinite leaves. The bill's additional yearly cost amounted to only 1 1/3 Marks per capita, a bargain price for such an unprecedented improvement in national security. The economy would be far more disrupted by a war than by a slight increase in taxes. Besides, the additional expenditures

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[26] Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1892-93, 8, II, Volume 1, pp. 68, 264; Kardorff, p. 272.

would create more jobs in industry, and the expanded induction would reduce unemployment in city and countryside alike.[27]

Although sympathetic to agriculture, Stumm felt that industrial interests deserved equal consideration. After all, a strong industrial sector was in the nation's best interest. He doubted that rural conditions were so desperate and viewed Kardorff's agitation with distrust. Kardorff seemed intent on asserting permanently the dominance of agrarian interests over all others, including that of national security. This Stumm could not accept.[28]

On one point Kardorff and Stumm were in full accord. Both despised the anti-Semitic movement and refused any association with it. In their view, the Conservatives were pursuing a dangerous course in granting dignity to such demagoguery. By radicalizing their supporters, the Conservatives were unwittingly working for their own decline; inevitably the radical anti-Semites would form their own party, and attract a greater proportion of the traditional Conservative electorate than would otherwise

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[27] Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1892-93, 8, II, Volume 1, pp. 288-93; Hellwig, p. 466; Times (London), 14 Dec. 1892.

[28] Hellwig, p. 454.

have been the case.[29]

The National Liberals greeted the army bill with mixed emotions. They hailed the two-year service, but regarded the lack of a guarantee for its permanence as a serious flaw. There was nothing to prevent the resurrection of the three-year service except a fragile promise. In view of the opposition against abandoning the longer term, such a guarantee seemed especially desirable.[30]

Even more important, the National Liberals were shocked by the extraordinary size of the increases. There was no immediate danger of war, and the country was suffering not only from an agricultural crisis but also from an equally severe business depression. The slump which had begun in 1890 steadily worsened. The winter of 1891-92 was especially hard, with high unemployment and frequent rioting in the cities. The public was in no mood to shoulder the additional tax burden of 60 million Marks, and neither were the National Liberals. Most of all, they feared that the bill's cost would undermine economic recovery. Local and regional party congresses from all over

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[29] Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1892-93, 8, II, Volume 1, p. 68; Kardorff, p. 281; Tirrell, p. 153.

[30] Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1892-93, 8, II, Volume 1, p. 295; National Zeitung (Berlin), #583, 18 Oct. 1892; #595, 25 Oct. 1892; #597, 26 October 1892; #601, 28 Oct. 1892; Goebel, pp. 27, 29.

Germany adopted resolutions demanding the approval of only those increases which were "absolutely necessary." Opposition to the bill was especially acute in Baden, Württemberg, and Bavaria. Typical was the comment made by the Bavarian Nationalliberale Korrespondenz in mid-November: "All that has come from official and semi-official channels in defense of the [army] plan has only intensified the hopelessness of its adoption."[31]

Before the bill was introduced, the party leaders pleaded with Caprivi to postpone all increases for at least a year, to await a more favorable economic and political atmosphere. If this proved unworkable, they urged that the increases be scaled-down as much as possible, preferably to the point of introducing the two-year service without raising the peacetime strength.[32]

After the bill's introduction, they argued for compromise. They were distressed by the measure's widespread unpopularity and feared elections "in these times of external and internal dangers." During the opening

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[31] Die Nation X (1892-93): 35-36; National Zeitung (Berlin), #595, 25 Oct. 1892; #597, 26 Oct. 1892; #722, 25 Dec. 1892; Goebel, pp. 27, 29-30; Oncken, II, 582; Germania (Berlin), #252 (3d edition), 3 Nov. 1892; #262 (1st edition), 15 Nov. 1892; #265 (2d edition), 18 Nov. 1892; Times (London), 2 Nov. 1892; Schulthess', 1892, p. 72; Dawson, II, 274-75.

[32] National Zeitung (Berlin), #556, 1 Oct. 1892; #564, 6 Oct. 1892; Germania (Berlin), #272 (3d edition), 26 Nov. 1892.

debates, Bennigsen insisted that neither his colleagues nor the Reichstag could approve the bill in its entirety; a compromise still allowing for a significant increase, however, was possible. But if the government continued to demand all or nothing, he warned, the bill would be flatly rejected. Reich authority and prestige would suffer both at home and abroad. Elections would only produce a more hostile Reichstag. The empire would then find itself in a constitutional conflict similar to that of Prussia in the 1860's. Such a conflict was difficult enough for a homogeneous state to bear, but impossible for a federal state like Germany, in which military affairs formed the backbone of the whole national existence. With hope and concern, Bennigsen declared: "We must and will succeed in bringing about a compromise between the government and parliament."[33]

In their quest for a workable compromise, the National Liberals were motivated by yet another consideration. Prospects were brightening for a union of the two major liberal parties, the National Liberals and the Radicals. Both were in general agreement on all key church, school, and economic issues. Furthermore, their

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[33]Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1892-93, 8, II, Volume I, pp. 294, 297; National Zeitung (Berlin), #597, 26 Oct. 1892; #722, 25 Dec. 1892; Oncken, II, 582-83; Times (London), 14 Dec. 1892.

common efforts to promote the trade treaties and oppose the School Bill had clearly demonstrated the efficacy of united liberal action. Thereafter, serious thought was given in both parties to the possibility of a merger. From the National Liberal viewpoint, the withdrawal of the School Bill had created the ideal conditions for it: A clerical-conservative coalition had been thwarted, and the Ultramontanes alienated from the government; if the liberal parties could combine forces and pursue a program supportive of Caprivi and the Kartell, they would displace the Center as the Reichstag's pivotal party.[34]

This was possible, but only if the Radicals could be pursuaded to advance liberal ends by cooperation, and not confrontation, with the regime and with other liberals. In this respect, the army bill was a formidable obstacle. Traditionally military issues evoked the Radicals' greatest animosity toward the government. Nonetheless, Bennigsen felt that the Radicals could support a bill that introduced the two-year service with full legal guarantees and with only a slight increase in the peace-

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[34]Ludwig Maenner, Prinz Heinrich zu Schoenaich-Carolath: Ein parlamentarisches Leben der wilhelminischen Zeit, 1852-1920 (Stuttgart, 1931), p. 61; Goebel, pp. 27, 34-35; Bachem, V, 261; Brandenburg, p. 26; Kölnische Zeitung (Cologne), #762, 24 Sept. 1892; Preussische Jahrbücher 72 (1893): 188-91; Rachfahl, "Eugen Richter und der Linksliberalismus im neuen Reiche," Zeitschrift für Politik 5 (1912): 353-54.

time strength. But the bill's size and lack of guarantees made Radical support impossible. Thus, Bennigsen's effort to formulate a compromise acceptable to the Kartell, the government, and the Radicals was also an attempt to keep the movement toward liberal unity on track.[35]

Within the Radical party, sentiment for a closer union of liberals in a pro-government sense had deep roots. The fusion of Progressives and Secessionists in 1884 to form the party had a related purpose. Crown Prince Frederick William was widely known for his liberal views. Many anticipated that as king he would introduce a full-fledged parliamentary system, a course Bismarck and the right were sure to oppose. To succeed, Frederick would need a solid phalanx of liberal support; it was with this role that the Radical party identified itself. Frederick's tragic death in 1888, after only ninety-nine days of rule, left the party bewildered and discouraged; his successor, William II, was hardly known for his liberal inclinations. Their hopes of becoming a court party dashed, the Radicals needed a new long-range strategy.[36]

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[35]Maenner, pp. 61-62; Goebel, pp. 28, 34-35; Brandenburg, p. 25.

[36]Bergsträsser, pp. 145-46, 151; Goebel, p. 37; Maenner, p. 60; Friedrich Naumann, Die politischen Parteien (Berlin, 1910), pp. 34, 36-37; Fricke, I, 355-57; Holborn, pp. 254, 273; Tent, pp. 325-27, 335-56; Zucker, pp. 224-25; Nichols, pp. 8, 11-12; Dawson, II, 218-19;

The years from 1890 to 1893 saw the party's two wings increasingly clash in their search for that strategy. While the Secessionists continued in their vision of a broad liberal coalition, Richter and the Progressives reverted to the oppositional stance of the old Progressive party. The Secessionists welcomed Caprivi's conciliatory policies, seeing in them the seeds of a rapprochement with the government that would give left liberals a positive influence on legislation; in return for their support, they expected to secure important concessions for liberalism. Richter was more pessimistic. The regime, he argued, would make parliamentary concessions only in response to the continuous pressure of confrontation. Above all, Richter was a man of strict principle, valuing purity of liberal ideals over pragmatic achievements gained at the slightest expense to those ideals. The Secessionists, on the other hand, placed such achievements above doctrinal purity.[37]

Stillich, II, 304; Oncken, II, 452, 512-13; Ziekursch, II, 415-16; Rachfahl, "Richter," pp. 324, 326, 333-34; Andreas Dorpalen, "Emperor Frederick III and the German Liberal Movement," American Historical Review 54 (1948-49): 24-25; Adolf Rubinstein, Die Deutsch-Freisinnige Partei bis zu ihrem Auseinanderbruch, 1884-1893 (Berlin, 1935), pp. 56-58.

[37] Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1890-91, 8, II, Volume 3, pp. 1793, 1809-10; Times (London), 9 May 1890; Fricke, I, 359-61; Bergsträsser, p. 155; Goebel, p. 35; Tent, pp. 334-35; Zucker, pp. 229-33; Schulthess', 1890, p. 56 and 1891, pp. 45, 50-51, 54.

There were other sources of friction within the party. From its inception, this union of Progressives and Secessionists was uneasy. The two groups never formed a truly homogeneous party. Both retained their own newspapers, which periodically engaged in heated exchanges.

Finances were in part separate, and local organizations belonged clearly to one group or the other. Even membership on party committees reflected their separate identities; as the party's majority wing, the Progressives always outnumbered the Secessionists by one.[38]

An even more fundamental source of friction was Richter himself. He was a brilliant orator and the best-known Radical figure. But as party leader, he displayed an authoritarian bent which consistently aroused the Secessionists' ire. He was in the habit of formulating party positions in his own newspaper, the Freisinnige Zeitung, and on the floor of parliament without consulting his colleagues. This practice led to press feuds and eventually to power struggles within the party hierarchy. The Secessionist's unsuccessful attempts to strip the chairmanship from Richter in 1887 and 1890 were largely motivated by personal animosity. In both cases, the Progressives rallied behind him, forcing the Secessionists to back

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[38]Thomas Nipperdey, Die Organisation der deutschen Parteien vor 1918 (Düsseldorf, 1961), pp. 206-09; Zucker, p. 202; Rubinstein, pp. 74-75.

down.[39]

The supreme aggravation of these tensions came with the army bill debates. Although the entire party opposed the measure, the two wings differed fundamentally in the tone of their opposition. The Secessionists welcomed Caprivi's concessions, but believed that the sagging economy could not support such a huge increase. Theodor Barth, a leading Secessionist, wrote in October: "How can a nation remain militarily effective when it is economically exhausted . . . . A further requisitioning of national strength for military purposes cannot be accomplished without the most severe damage to the overall development of the German nation."[40]

Still, the Secessionists' tone was conciliatory, almost apologetic. They left open the possibility of a smaller increase and praised Caprivi personally, noting especially the beneficial effects of his commercial treaties. Caprivi, they insisted, was a man of integrity, who would never introduce such a bill "without the full subjective conviction of its necessity." The Secessionists also took special pains to emphasize that they

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[39] Schulthess', 1890, pp. 87, 101; Rachfahl, "Richter," pp. 337-53; Rubinstein, pp. 27-30; Tent, p. 334; Fricke, I, 361; Zucker, pp. 207, 229-33.

[40] Die Nation, X, 20.

in no way wished to force the chancellor from office: "The present chancellor embodies the view that a governing statesman in the German Reich . . . can assert a position above the parties without continuously intriguing against the people's representatives in Bismarckian style." No successor could be expected to continue his methods; "Caprivi's fall would also be the fall of a system."[41]

Richter and the Progressives adopted a harsher line. Their opposition went beyond immediate economic questions. Richter's Freisinnige Zeitung quickly established the position that no increase in the peacetime strength was acceptable. On this point, no compromise was possible. In his long career, Richter had opposed every military bill which he had encountered. He considered such legislation synonomous with strengthening Prussian militarism, the real obstacle to a liberal state. In a speech given in early November, Richter called for the bill's rejection, not only on its own merits, but as a means of asserting the authority of parliament "once and for all":

> It is not a question of merely so many more men and so much more money. It is the authority of the German Reich and the value of our national representation which is at stake. For the past thirty years the absolutist principle, under the

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[41] Die Nation, X, 35-36, 84, 97-98, 129-30; Goebel, p. 37; Zucker, p. 236.

> cover of military expenses, has penetrated into all our institutions. Is this absolutist principle to continue after the disappearance of the Bismarckian regime? Are the German people to be allowed at last, by the practical recognition of a reasonable constitutionalism, to obtain that share in the management of their own affairs which all other civilized nations have already secured?[42]

During the bill's first reading, the division within the party was more fully revealed. On November 30, Richter delivered a sarcastic speech, directly attacking Caprivi's integrity. He accused the chancellor of misleading the public by intentionally exaggerating the military strength of France and Russia while minimizing German preparedness. There was no threat of war, he argued. The country was not to be frightened by appeals to the spirit of panic. And what about the severe economic depression through which the country was suffering? Caprivi had neglected to consider that success in any future war would depend just as much upon a well-filled treasury as upon an efficient army. This bill, he continued, would ruin the economy and should be rejected for that reason alone. There was not the slightest chance for compromise.[43]

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[42] Kreuzzeitung (Berlin), #442, 21 Sept. 1892; #509, 30 Oct. 1892; Times (London), 15 Nov. 1892; Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung (Berlin), #476, 11 Oct. 1892; Germania (Berlin), #252 (3d edition), 3 Nov. 1892; Seeber, p. 203; Goebel, pp. 35-36; Wippermann, 1892 (II), p. 129.

[43] Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1892-93,

The Secessionists were alarmed by the gruff tone of speech. Only the day before, Richter had assured them that he would be gracious toward Caprivi during the debates. On December 2, Heinrich Rickert, leader of the Secessionists, countered with a reconciliatory speech of his own. He emphasized the reluctance with which many Radicals opposed the bill; no personal slight was intended toward the chancellor. The Radical party, he declared, had the utmost admiration for his foreign and commercial policies. In his concluding remarks, Rickert clearly raised the possibility of compromise:

> As a matter of patriotism, we are willing to discuss and examine the army bill lying before us with complete objectivity. Not only the General [Caprivi] but we too have a Fatherland which must be protected . . . . We represent the economic interests of the people, and, if one goes beyond certain limits, we are obligated after a purely objective examination to say: enough, no more! Only out of objective interests in this sense do we disapprove of the government's bill.[44]

It soon became apparent, however, that the majority of the party backed Richter. On December 3, he indirectly

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8, II, Volume 1, pp. 49-60; Zucker, p. 237; Times (London), 1 Dec. 1892; Rachfahl, "Richter," p. 355.

[44] Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1892-93, 8, II, Volume 1, pp. 104-14; Vossische Zeitung (Berlin), #567, 3 Dec. 1892; Kölnische Zeitung (Cologne), #961, 4 Dec. 1892; Times (London), 3 Dec. 1892; Goebel, pp. 36-37; Zucker, p. 237; Kardorff, p. 273; Rachfahl, "Richter," p. 355.

reprimanded the Secessionists on the floor of the Reichstag for their mild position. His comments evoked an extraordinarily spirited applause from the Radicals. The meaning was clear enough. If the Secessionists forced a showdown, they would lose. For the time being, therefore, they were muzzled. It was also clear that most local party organizations favored Richter's position; from all regions of Germany came a flood of resolutions demanding absolute and unconditional rejection of the bill.[45]

Like the Radicals, the Centrists opposed the bill but were bitterly divided on the question of compromise. The non-Bavarian members, who controlled the party hierarchy, favored an application of Windthorst's tactics: a tentative position of mild opposition used as a lever to pry concessions from the government. Implicit in this approach was the belief that a compromise was both possible and desirable. The North German Catholic press (Germania, Kölnische Volkszeitung, Westfälischer Merkur, and Tremonia) criticized the bill chiefly because of its size; the costs, they insisted, would exceed the country's financial

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[45] Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1892-93, 8, II, Volume 1, p. 133; Klein-Hattingen, II, 493; Goebel pp. 36-37; Kölnische Zeitung (Cologne), #961, 4 Dec. 1892; Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung (Berlin), #116, 9 Mar. 1893; National Zeitung (Berlin), #638, 18 Nov. 1892; Germania (Berlin), #262 (1st edition), 15 Nov. 1892; Kreuzzeitung (Berlin), #112, 7 March 1893; #118, 10 Mar. 1893.

capacity. From these remarks, one could easily have concluded that a significant reduction in manpower would bring Center support. This impression was reinforced by the public comments of leading party figures. For example, Ernst Lieber, later to become the Center's chief spokesman against the bill, declared in September that the party's final position would reconcile the concerns for security and prosperity. In other words, the party could support increases in the interest of national defense or reject them because of their economic impact. Quite correctly, Lieber's statement was evaluated by the Freisinnige Zeitung as leaving open every interpretation and possibility. During the same week another party notable, Felix Porsch, speaking before the Stuttgart Volksverein, emphasized the need for a "wait and see" attitude: "[Our] contemporaries have already debated the question for a month . . . . The Center has cold blood. We will examine the bill objectively after its formal introduction." As of October 30, Leiber was still pursuing this line. In Aachen, he stated: "It is better not yet to speak the final word. . . . Our duty will be to determine whether the economy can support an expanded army."[46]

In Bavaria, however, the idea of suffering further

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[46] Germania (Berlin), #211 (1st and 3d editions), 15 Sept. 1892; #252 (1st edition), 3 Nov. 1892; Goebel, pp. 49, 51, 56; Spahn, pp. 32-33.

economic hardships on behalf of the army was extremely unpopular. Since Prussia dominated the army, any increases were equated with strengthening the coercive influence of Prussian militarism. Given Bavaria's traditional, anti-Prussian, separatist sentiments, another army bill, coming so soon after those in 1887 and 1890, was unacceptable. There was also an economic dimension. Bavaria produced far more beer per capita than any other region in Germany; as a result, the proposal to raise beer taxes was particularly distressing. With their economy already shaken by falling crop prices, Bavarians were infuriated by the prospects of shouldering a disproportionate share of the bill's cost.[47]

This resentment and hostility were accurately reflected by the party's Bavarian wing. Its leaders predicted a party split if the Center contributed in any way to the bill's passage. Conrad von Preysing, a Bavarian Center deputy in the Reichstag, published an open letter in which he characterized the bill as a "calamity." The issue, he noted, was a burning one of singular importance for Bavaria; in the current Landtag elections there, the sole issue was the protest "against the unbearable

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[47] Bachem, V, 271, 275, 279-80; Tirrell, p. 184; Fricke, II, 894-95; Germania (Berlin), #262 (3d edition), 15 Nov. 1892; 20 Oct. 1892; #245 (1st edition), 25 Oct. 1892; Times (London), 23 Aug., 27 Oct., and 7 Dec. 1892.

situation" that would result from the bill's passage. The Münchener Fremdenblatt predicted the "bursting apart" of the Center if it aided the bill; as a minimum, all thirty-three Bavarian members of the Center's Reichstag faction "had" to vote against it. Finally, on November 15, Balthaser Daller, leader of the Bavarian Center, declared the bill to be unacceptable, even in compromise form.[48]

To a lesser degree, protest was also intensifying in the other Center strongholds--Silesia, the Rhineland, and Westphalia. From these areas the party received more and more petitions and resolutions condemning the bill.[49]

Lieber, who headed the party's democratic wing, was especially dismayed by this clamor. From his travels throughout Germany, he concluded by early November that the bill was no longer a question of party tactics but of survival. For the sake of unity, Lieber and his wing drifted by degrees toward out-and-out opposition. References to the limitations imposed by the Windthorst Resolutions became more frequent.[50]

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[48] Germania (Berlin), #191 (2d edition), 23 Aug. 1892; #255 (1st edition), 6 Nov. 1892; #256 (1st edition), 8 Nov. 1892; #258 (3d edition), 10 Nov. 1892; #260 (1st edition), 12 Nov. 1892; #264 (1st edition), 17 Nov. 1892.

[49] Germania (Berlin), #256 (1st edition), 8 Nov. 1892.

[50] Germania (Berlin), #252 (1st edition), 3 Nov. 1892; Fricke, II, 894-95; Bachem, V, 272-73; Goebel, p. 49;

The party's conservative wing, however, remained fixed in its determination to seek a compromise *à la* Windthorst. Consisting mostly of titled nobility from Silesia and Western Germany, this wing controlled a disproportionate share of positions in the party hierarchy and was generally inclined to support the Kaiser, the government, and the army. Its leader, Franz Xaver von Ballestrem, was also party chairman and vice-president of the *Reichstag*. While Lieber and his wing believed that party policy should be formulated in a democratic fashion, Ballestrem and his wing felt that the hierarchy should make all such decisions in aristocratic style; mass agitation, according to the latter group, had no place in policy-making.[51]

Thus, the Center was divided. Yet, only with the December *Reichstag* debates was the extent of this division fully exposed. Karl von Huene-Hoiningen spoke for the conservative wing, Preysing for the Bavarian, and Lieber for the democratic. Referring repeatedly to the Windthorst Resolutions, Huene rejected any thought of approving the bill in its entirety. He stressed the need to guarantee the two-year service and, if possible,

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Tirrell, p. 184; *Times* (London), 27 Oct. and 7 Dec. 1892.

[51]Fricke, II, 894-95; Bergsträsser, p. 156; Bachem, V. 240-42.

to retain the existing peacetime strength. But he concluded his speech on an apologetic, and certainly conciliatory, note:

> I trust the government will see from my expressions that its proposals are encountering opposition and that we will scrutinize the bill from every angle. . . . We desire to reach an understanding with the government, and we believe we can and must do so. For when one side emphasizes the military aspect of the bill, the other side must stress the economic consequences. I trust we will unite in the single aspiration to do what is necessary for the general welfare . . . . We will attempt an understanding on this basis, and we will succeed.

His meaning was clear: for reasons of compelling military necessity, the conservative wing could set aside Windthorst's Resolutions and accept a compromise which still provided for substantial increases.[52]

In contrast, Preysing offered little hope for compromise. His wing, he asserted, adhered rigidly to the Windthorst Resolutions and would have nothing to do with the bill in its present form. His associates were prepared "to hear the arguments put forth [by the government] and to evaluate them objectively," but reconciliation on any basis was unlikely: "The Windthorst Resolutions are the signposts which point to the path we must travel. Discontent prevails throughout the country . . . . It is the curse of each military demand

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[52] Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1892-93, 8, II, Volume 1, pp. 228-33; Rachfahl, Kaiser und Reich,

that it breeds further demands. In Bavaria these proposals are especially distrusted, not in the spirit of narrow-minded hostility, but in that of patriotism." Love of the Fatherland, he continued, was an outgrowth of the nation's economic solidarity and prosperity; any increases in such difficult times threatened to undermine them both.[53]

Lieber assumed the middle-of-the-road position. Compromise was possible, but only on the basis of the formula: the legal guaranteeing of the two-year service within the framework of the existing peacetime strength. Otherwise, he warned, the Center would not even discuss a comprehensive reorganization of the army. Although he repeatedly cited the Windthorst Resolutions, the basis of his opposition was chiefly economic: "No one would wish to think that we light-heartedly pass over those thoughts which concern the military posture, the dignity, and the greatness of our Fatherland . . . . The matter revolves around the question: Should we destroy ourselves in peacetime in order to prepare for the possibility of war? This preparation would surely surpass the energy of the German people, who cannot bear any more

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p. 92; Times (London), 12 Dec. 1892.

[53]Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1892-93, 8, II, Vol. 1, pp. 312-13; Schulthess', 1892, p. 208.

sacrifices."[54]

In subsequent months this question of compromise continued to dominate all party deliberations. As the conservative wing moved closer toward the government and as the Bavarian wing became more vociferous in denouncing such behavior, Lieber was hard pressed to hold the Center together.

Within the S.P.D. there was no debate over the possibility of compromise. Social Democrats were automatically against any strengthening of the standing army. "The Hohenzollern monarchy," wrote Vorwärts in August 1892, "is a soldiers' monarchy. Militarism is its child." Its army is but the mercenary force of capitalism, an obstacle to the economic transformation of society. The more class conflicts sharpen, the nearer approaches the prospect of revolution. For that reason, the bourgeoisie feed millions of young men into the jaws of militarism, to have so many "death machines" on hand for shooting down socialist workers. "Capitalism and militarism are inseparable. We must rid ourselves of both."[55]

As an alternative to the standing army, the S.P.D.

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[54] Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1892-93, 8, II, Volume 1, pp. 327-31; Times (London), 15 Dec. 1892; Rachfahl, Kaiser und Reich, p. 92.

[55] Vorwärts (Berlin), #196, 23 Aug. 1892; Goebel, pp. 31-32.

advocated a militia system, based on Scharnhorst's concept of universal military education. This system, the party argued, would produce more efficient and effective soldiers "than the best-drilled machines of militarism." Twice as many soldiers could be trained for half the cost. Furthermore, such a system would be better suited for preserving the peace. A militia army was unsuited for offensive warfare; thus, Germany's neighbors would not have to fear aggression. International tensions would ease as the possibility of war grew more remote. On the other hand, if Germany were attacked, no force would be better suited for its defense; a militia army was really a nation-in-arms, over which an invading army could never prevail.[56]

For the party, then, rigid opposition to the army bill was a matter of principle. The issues of the two-year service and the quinquennat were irrelevant. "Militarism is evil in every form," wrote Vorwärts. "Without exception, the other parties are rooted in militarism and are therefore prepared for discussions, compromises, and political gamesmanship. Social Democracy's response is a sharp, stern 'no'." The bill will only impose new and unnecessary burdens on the German people, already

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[56]Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1892-93, 8, II, Vol. 1, pp. 308-11; Goebel, pp. 31-33; Vorwärts (Berlin), #196, 23 Aug. 1892; #251, 26 Oct. 1892; #252, 27 Oct. 1892; Treue, p. 86; Bertrand Russell, German Social Democracy (London, 1896), p. 140.

oppressed by militarism's crushing demands. It would also trigger an armaments competition among the major powers that would serve as a lasting threat to peace.[57]

From the onset, the S.P.D. hoped for a dissolution and new elections. After their sweeping electoral gains in 1890, most Social Democrats had concluded that future elections would bring even greater success. Their confidence seemed well-founded. Germany was rapidly becoming an industrial giant. Its urban working class was expanding at an unprecedented rate as large portions of the rural population migrated to the cities. Even more important, a growing percentage of the newly urbanized was responding favorably to the call of socialism. The S.P.D. even regarded the spread of agrarian and anti-Semitic agitation as a progressive development. Despite its reactionary character, this agitation would raise the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie to a higher plane of political consciousness. In time, they would realize that their real enemy was not Jewry or the trade treaties, but capitalism itself. They would then accept the notion that only socialism could end their impoverishment. Combined with the army bill's general unpopularity and the obvious dissension within many of the other parties,

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[57] Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1892-93, 8, II, Volume 1, pp. 303-04, 311-12; Vorwärts (Berlin), #241, 14 Oct. 1892; #244, 18 Oct. 1892; #270, 17 Nov.

these considerations convinced the S.P.D. that new elections could only swell its ranks. Thus, already in the early fall of 1892, the party was making full preparations for an election campaign.[58]

As chancellor, Bismarck had made any opposition to military increases appear unpatriotic, usually by raising the specter of imminent foreign aggression. By late December 1892, however, Caprivi was in no position to use this technique. In November, William II had emphasized in his speech from the throne that Germany's relations with all powers were friendly. The next day before the Reichstag, Caprivi had denied himself the right to invoke the slogan "War in Sight" or to "indulge in pessimistic language about the foreign situation to promote the bill." At the same time, Bismarck, his prestige and popularity still largely intact, emerged as one of the bill's harshest critics. Who would feign to call the titan of German unification unpatriotic?[59]

1892; Times (London), 15 Oct. 1892 and 17 Nov. 1892; Goebel, p. 32.

[58]Vorwärts (Berlin), #241, 14 Oct. 1892; #253, 28 Oct. 1892; #263, 9 Nov. 1892; #269, 16 Nov. 1892; #274, 22 Nov. 1892; Times (London), 30 Sept., 5 Nov., 16 Nov., and 22 Nov. 1892; Robert S. Wistrich, "The SPD and Antisemitism in the 1890's," European Studies Review 7 (1977): 177-81; David S. Rosen, "German Social Democracy Between Bismarck and Bernstein" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1975), pp. 3, 55; Walter Tormin, Geschichte der deutschen Parteien seit 1848 (Berlin, 1967), pp. 117-18.

[59]Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1892-93,

On November 4, the Leipziger Neueste Nachrichten published an interview with the ex-chancellor, who challenged the government's underlying assumption regarding the bill, namely, that it was necessary: "With our existing army strength we could, with proper leadership, operate successfully even on two fronts . . . . I can recognize nothing which makes the danger [of war] more urgent than in 1888. Quite the contrary, there is absolutely no prospect of war for at least two or three years." Besides, he insisted, there was no real danger of a two-front war. The skillful conduct of foreign policy should be able to prevent a powerful anti-German coalition from ever forming.[60]

Bismarck was particularly critical of plans to abandon the three-year service. It had proven itself repeatedly for thirty years; tampering with it was a dangerous experiment, he warned. As long as the first battles were the decisive ones, the quality of the standing army, not the quantity of troops available upon mobilization, would be the crucial factor: "No one claims that the quality of our troops would improve under this bill. On the contrary, we believe it will decline; it is a contradiction in terms to attempt a strengthening of

8, II, Volume 1, pp. 1-2, 7-21; Wahl, III, 461; Rachfahl, Kaiser und Reich, pp. 90-91.

[60]Hofmann, II, 165; Otto von Bismarck, Die gesammel-

the army by reducing its proficiency."[61]

All the parties took great delight in quoting Bismarck, for his criticisms enhanced the respectability and appeal of their own opposition. In this sense, even his irreconcilable political adversaries--the Radicals, the Centrists, and the Social Democrats--found him to be an invaluable asset.[62]

In mid-December the Reichstag concluded its opening debates and referred the bill to a commission for further study. In the face of such widespread opposition, the press, most party leaders, and even many government officials predicted its withdrawal or rejection. Caprivi, however, remained optimistic: The Kartell parties would support the bill once they had aired their grievances; with its conservative wing at the helm, the Center would steam into government waters, there to be joined by the Secessionists. After a vigorous struggle, Caprivi predicted, most of the increases would be approved. To everyone's surprise, both predictions proved accurate.[63]

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ten Werke, 15 vols. (Berlin, 1924-35), IX, 276; Bachem, V, 269-70; Schulthess', 1892, p. 141; Rachfahl, Kaiser und Reich, p. 91.

[61]Hofmann, II, 162-67; Goebel, pp. 12-13; Bismarck, IX, 273-80; Schulthess', 1892, pp. 141-46; Rachfahl, Kaiser und Reich, p. 91.

[62]Vorwärts (Berlin), #262, 8 Nov. 1892; Times (London), 29 Sept. 1892 and 13 June 1893; Bachem, V, 270-71; Goebel, p. 12.

[63]Keim, pp. 54-55, 59-60; Hammann, pp. 48-49; Krüger, p. 62.

CHAPTER III

DEFEAT AND DISSOLUTION: THE ABORTIVE SEARCH FOR COMPROMISE

The Kaiser was increasingly disturbed by the harsh public criticism of the army bill, especially that made by the Conservatives, Free Conservatives, and army generals. After all, he had signed and approved the measure, fully expecting all such royalists to fall in line. Further opposition, he reasoned, not only infringed upon his sacred prerogatives as chief warlord, but also raised doubts about his sagacity. Opposition from the right, explained Eulenburg in late December, was based on the false impression that monarchical support for the bill was feeble. William acted immediately to clarify his position. On New Year's Day, at a reception for his commanding generals, the Kaiser emphasized his full commitment to the bill. He refused to delete a man or a Mark, or to alter any of its provisions, including those pertaining to the reduced service period. "If the half-crazy Reichstag opposes me," he declared, "I will send it to the devil. . . . I will crush all opposition."[1]

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[1]Kröger, pp. 61-62; Bachem, V, 275-76; Rachfahl, Kaiser und Reich, pp. 92-93; Waldersee, II, 274; Goebel, p. 25; Die Nation, X, 219-20; Schulthess', 1893, p. 1; Wahl, III, 463; Haller, I, 153-55; Wippermann, 1893 (I), pp. 45-61; Nichols, p. 241.

These remarks placed the Conservatives in an awkward position. With William now publicly and irrevocably behind the bill, continued opposition meant an open breach with the crown. For most Conservatives, this was unthinkable. Their quarrel was with Caprivi, not the Kaiser. On January 8, the Kreuzzeitung announced that the party would yield: "We firmly adhere to our viewpoint [that abandoning the three-year service is a mistake]. We have done our duty and refuse to accept the responsibility [for what might follow]. But in light of recent events, we realize that our position enjoys neither the requisite parliamentary nor military support to serve as the basis for further bargaining. In the present circumstances, we can only substitute the most acceptable course [i.e. the army bill] in order to prevent the adoption of a completely unacceptable one." The Free Conservatives and most army generals soon followed suit. On January 27, the Kaiser's birthday, at public banquets held throughout Germany, many of the more recalcitrant generals, including Waldersee, made enthusiastic speeches on behalf of the bill.[2]

The Conservatives' economic and political aims,

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[2]Kreuzzeitung (Berlin), #13, 8 January 1893; Preussische Jahrbücher 71 (1893): 381; Goebel, pp. 25-26; Kröger, pp. 62-63; Times (London), 5 Jan., 12 Jan., and 1 Feb. 1893; Rachfahl, Kaiser und Reich, p. 93; Die Nation, X 283; Waldersee, II, 282, 284; Schulthess', 1893, p. 8.

however, remained unchanged. While formally accepting the bill, they continued to hope for its rejection. This hope seemed well-founded. Most of the other parties persisted in their opposition. Furthermore, the Conservatives were quick to discourage compromise, the only apparent way to avoid a dissolution. The nation's security, they insisted, required all the proposed increases. Anything less would be unacceptable. Ostensible devotion to the bill also promised to enhance the Conservatives' electoral appeal. Traditionally the voters rallied behind the government whenever elections centered about critical issues of national defense. Now the party could lay claim not only to the agrarian and anti-Semitic vote, but to the patriotic one as well.[3]

In their pursuit of a wider agrarian following, the Conservatives were encouraged by the growing sense of frustration felt in the countryside. Reflecting such frustration were the remarks of Ruprecht-Ransern, a Silesian tenant farmer, who in mid-December published a call for action that startled the nation. Farmers, he declared, should join forces with the Social Democrats to demonstrate once and for all the power of farmers and their determination to stop the government's ruinous policies.

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[3]Krőger, p. 63; Nichols, p. 243; Hellwig, p. 468; Kardorff, p. 461; Die Nation, X, 98; Times (London), 13 March 1893.

Dissatisfaction is being expressed only "cautiously and timidly . . . . We must cease to complain, we must shout. We must shout so that the whole country hears. We must shout so that it penetrates into the parliamentary halls and ministries. We must shout so that we are heard at the very steps of the throne."[4]

While Ruprecht's references to the Social Democrats were generally dismissed, his call for more decisive action was not. On February 18, 1893, the Bund der Landwirte, or Farmers' League, was established in Berlin, largely to combat Caprivi's persistent efforts to negotiate more trade treaties. With astonishing speed, the Bund won a mass following. Within three months twenty Silesian agricultural societies, the agricultural society of Westphalia, the Union of Wüttemberg Farmers, the German Peasants' League, and many similar groups had joined; its membership grew to over 162,000.[5]

To the Conservatives, the Bund presented both an opportunity and a threat. It professed to stand above

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[4]Tirrell, pp. 158-59; Kardorff, p. 276; Hans-Jürgen Puhle, Agrarische Interessenpolitik und preussischer Konservatismus im wilhelminischen Reich (1893-1914) (Hannover, 1966), pp. 32-33; Ziekursch, III, 58-59; Croner, pp. 131-32.

[5]Tirrell, pp. 164, 166, 169-73, 177; Nichols, p. 247; Puhle, pp. 34-37; Ziekursch, III, 59-60; Dawson, II, 277-78; Croner, pp. 133-38.

the parties, and its membership was open to all friends of agriculture, regardless of political affiliation. If the Conservatives established themselves as agriculture's preëminent champion, they could dominate the Bund and secure most of the agrarian vote. The Bund's mass following would become the Conservatives' mass following. But if another group, such as the Free Conservatives, successfully challenged them for that role, the Conservatives' appeal would be diluted. Their hopes for the forthcoming elections would be crushed. Consequently, the Conservatives were forced to pursue a more aggressive agrarian policy, one which became even more inseparable from the army bill debates.[6]

This approach was apparent during the party's regional congress in Dresden on March 12. First, Manteuffel, the main speaker, stressed the party's devotion to the rural sector: "The wider the circles into which the agrarian movement extends, the more pleased the Conservative party will be. We are convinced that any agrarian who wants to join a political party will inevitably adopt our views. The close cooperation between Conservatives and agrarians exists because only our party fully endorses the agrarian movement . . . and comprehends its needs." Then, the

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[6]Tirrell, pp. 179-82; Krüger, pp. 47-48.

congress adopted a resolution condemning Caprivi's attempt to negotiate a trade treaty with Russia. Such a treaty would so weaken agriculture, the nation's leading industry, that military increases could not be financed. Conservative support for the bill, it was implied, might have to be withdrawn.[7]

Aside from such agricultural developments, most public attention from January to March was focused on the Reichstag's military commission. Here inflexibility was the rule. Meeting in twenty-eight sessions of futile debate, the commission rejected the original bill and all compromise versions. Discussion centered about two points: guarantees for the two-year service, and the size of the increases. The Radicals insisted upon a constitutional guarantee for the shorter service period. Furthermore, Richter refused to consider the slightest increase in the peacetime strength or to accept the quinquennat. The bill, he insisted, could only be approved for one and a half years. A longer period would be incompatible with one of parliament's long-denied prerogatives: the right to frequent review of the military budget. The Center's position was almost identical. It would, however, accept

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[7]Kreuzzeitung (Berlin), #115, 9 March 1893; #121, 12 March 1893; #122, 13 March 1893; #128, 16 March 1893; Times (London), 15 March 1893; Kröger, p. 63.

the quinquennat.[8]

Like the Radicals and Centrists, the National Liberals also wanted a guarantee for the two-year service, but this was only a secondary concern. The main task was to find a compromise. To that end, Bennigsen introduced two amendments: the first would have reduced the increases from 91,000 to 60,000 men, and the second would have required the continuation of the two-year service as long as the new level of peacetime strength was maintained or exceeded.[9]

To Bennigsen's surprise, these motions were spurned by all parties except his own. Richter and Lieber still refused to allow any increases. Even the guarantee for the service period was inadequate: If parliament ever tried to reduce military strength, the government could counter by threatening to reintroduce the three-year service. The Conservatives and Free Conservatives opposed giving any permanency to the two-year service; at best, it was a hazardous experiment. If found incompatible with military efficiency, they argued, the crown must reserve the right to abandon it. Furthermore, all the

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[8] National Zeitung (Berlin), #22, 12 January 1893; #28, 14 January 1893; #107, 15 February 1893; Kreuzzeitung (Berlin), #23, 14 Jan., 1893; Bachem, V, 276; Times (London), 16 Jan., 16 Feb., 11 Mar., and 17 Mar. 1893.

[9] National Zeitung (Berlin), #104, 14 Feb., 1893; #167, 10 Mar. 1893; Times (London), 13 Feb., 16 Feb., and 17 Mar. 1893.

requested increases would be required to offset the detrimental effects of the shorter service.[10]

Caprivi's position was similar to that of the Conservatives and Free Conservatives. The government, he argued, had only reluctantly shortened the septennat and conceded the two-year service. It did so, expecting to receive adequate compensation. Thus far, it had received none. "Without the compensations we demand," he declared, "there can be no question of allowing the two-year service." The government could not accept the "makeshift proposals" and "arbitrary figures" sponsored by Bennigsen, or anyone else. All the increases demanded, he insisted, were essential for the nation's security. Formal guarantees for the two-year service were unnecessary. Once this service period was fully implemented, it would be impossible to revert back to the old system without seriously disrupting the army's morale, efficiency, and organization.[11]

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[10] National Zeitung (Berlin), #107, 15 Feb. 1893; #110, 16 Feb. 1893; #182, 16 Mar. 1893; #185, 17 Mar. 1893; Kreuzzeitung (Berlin), #72, 11 Feb. 1893; #78, 15 Feb. 1893; #121, 12 Mar. 1893; #130, 17 Mar. 1893; Times (London), 20 Jan., 13 Feb., 16 Feb., 25 Feb., 4 Mar., and 17 Mar. 1893; Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1892-93, 8, II, Anlageband II, pp. 1016-1023, 1034-1037.

[11] National Zeitung (Berlin), #54, 25 Jan. 1893; #167, 10 Mar. 1893; #182, 16 Mar. 1893; Times (London), 20 Jan., 11 Mar., and 17 Mar. 1893; Kreuzzeitung (Berlin), #76, 14 Feb. 1893; Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1892-93, 8, II, Anlageband II, pp. 1016-1023, 1034-1037.

As expected, the commission rejected the bill and all counterproposals on March 17. Dissolution and new elections seemed very near. Yet, the inflexibility displayed in the commission was misleading. The possibilities for compromise were far from exhausted.[12]

Despite Richter's hard line in the commission, most Secessionists continued to favor compromise. New elections, they believed, would give agrarians the leverage to force Caprivi from office. Although not an ideal chancellor, Caprivi was a man of "personal integrity" and the "leader of a resolute anti-Bismarckian policy." He represented the interests of the Reich as a whole. His retention, as Barth emphasized in Die Nation, was essential:

> We have never made it a secret that we would view Caprivi's resignation, with reluctance. He is conservative, but he is a gentleman, as his predecessor was not and as his successor is not likely to be. Furthermore, the present chancellor is no passionate advocate of special agrarian interests, no colonial visionary, no promoter of anti-Semitism. He represents a commercial policy which is generally in line with moderate liberal opinion. If Caprivi resigns, things will get worse. This conviction leads us to wish that the army bill not become the stone over which he trips.

Junkers were enemies of national unity, civic freedom, and economic justice. Having deposed Caprivi, they would

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[12]National Zeitung, #185, 17 Mar. 1893; Oncken, II, 583; Bachem, V, 276, 280-81; Times (London), 18 Mar. 1893; Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1892-93, 8, II, Anlageband II, pp. 1033-37.

curtail parliamentary prerogatives and abolish universal suffrage. Agrarian interests would lord over all others. "He who decides to fight the army bill," wrote Barth in March, "must also be ready to stand his ground during the subsequent reactionary period." There is more at stake here than military burdens. With this in mind, Barth and fellow Secessionist Ludwig Bamberger negotiated secretly with Caprivi throughout April. These talks, held without Richter's knowledge, indicated that the Secessionists were prepared to vote against the rest of the party, if necessary, in order to secure a reasonable compromise.[13]

The National Liberals were even more fearful of dissolution. In their view, Reich unity was hanging in the balance. Elections amid such unprecedented agitation would favor the extremes, the Conservatives and the S.P.D. The former would control the Reichstag and, in carrying out its reactionary schemes, would provoke incalculable disorder and unrest, perhaps even civil war. It would take a lifetime to restore stability. In the meantime, monarchical prestige and authority would have suffered irreparable damage.[14]

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[13] Die Nation, X, 158-59, 285, 331, 376-77, 435-37, 457, 494-96; Zucker, pp. 237-38.

[14] Preussische Jahrbücher 71 (1893): 384-87; National Zeitung (Berlin), #51, 24 Jan. 1893; #175, 14 Mar. 1893; #181, 16 Mar. 1893; #188, 18 Mar. 1893; #193, 21 Mar. 1893; Oncken, II, 583-84.

All this was avoidable, insisted Bennigsen, if only Caprivi would be more flexible. "It is the duty of all serious politicians to compromise," he continued. To demand all or nothing was irresponsible. With the Conservatives sure to reject any compromise, it was necessary to gain the support of the Center and the Secessionists. This could be done if Caprivi would give his blessing to Bennigsen's proposal, the best balance between military and economic needs. Without such an indication, however, no party would dare to alter its position.[15]

Although Bennigsen and Caprivi continued to meet privately, the latter showed no sign of yielding. National Liberal fear and frustration reached new heights. An increasing number of members began to doubt whether their party had done enough. Should Bennigsen have offered more? they asked. Could Caprivi's intransigence mean that all the increases were really needed? Desperate to avoid dissolution, many were willing to answer "yes." By mid-April almost half of the party's local organizations had reversed themselves and adopted resolutions calling for acceptance of the government's bill. The rest of the party, however, vigorously protested. Bennigsen's

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[15] National Zeitung (Berlin), #33, 17 Jan. 1893; #51, 25 Jan. 1893; #100, 12 Feb. 1893; #169, 11 Mar. 1893; #193, 21 Mar. 1893; Oncken, II, 584-85; Times (London), 17 Jan. 1893; Goebel, p. 30.

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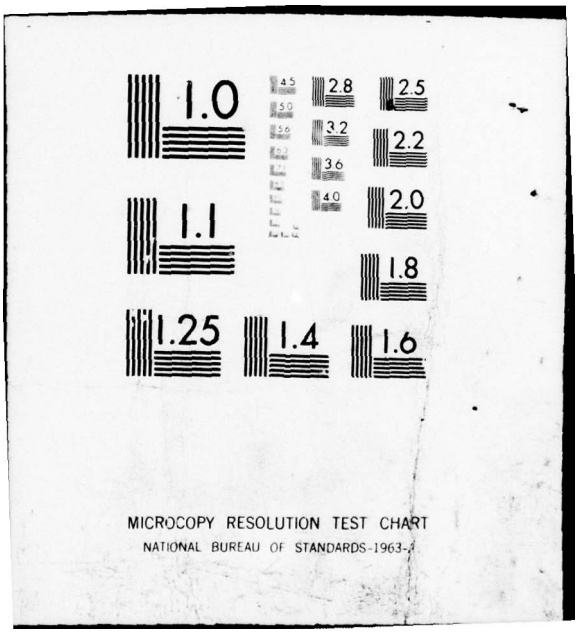
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proposal, it was argued, was the only hope for compromise. It represented the largest increase the Center and Radical parties were likely to accept. This dispute demoralized the party and weakened its bargaining position. It was obvious that the National Liberals would rush to support the first compromise proposal with any prospects for passage.[16]

Like the Secessionists and National Liberals, the Center's aristocratic wing continued to work for compromise. Meeting regularly with Caprivi during April, its leaders offered to trade Centrist support for religious concessions. Specifically, they sought a pledge for the repeal of the Jesuit Law of 1872, the last piece of Kulturkampf legislation still in effect. The return of the Jesuits to Germany, they reasoned, was such a popular cause among Catholics that the party would be able to reconsider its position on the army bill. Economic considerations would give way to religious ones. Unrest and division within the party would disappear, for unity was traditionally greatest on religious issues of such magnitude. The result would be Centrist support for a compromise measure granting most of the increases requested in

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[16]National Zeitung (Berlin), #22, 12 Jan. 1893; #119, 20 Feb. 1893; #130, 24 Feb. 1893; #164, 9 Mar. 1893; #212, 29 Mar. 1893; #231, 12 Apr. 1893; #236, 14 Apr. 1893; #240, 15 Apr. 1893; #264, 25 Apr. 1893; Vorwärts, #21, 25 Jan. 1893; Die Nation, X, 436; Goebel, p. 30; Germania (Berlin),

the original bill. Not surprisingly, both Caprivi and the Kaiser were pleased with the proposal.[17]

This compromise effort soon gained the support of Pope Leo XIII. During early April, Ballestrem visited the Vatican and found that the pope shared the views of the party's aristocrats: With public opinion so aroused by irrational agitation, new elections now could cause the Center to lose its pivotal position in the Reichstag. This would be a grave setback for German Catholics. Why risk such losses? At all costs, elections should be avoided through compromise. Returning to Berlin, Ballestrem immediately called for a party meeting, at which he revealed the pope's counsel and argued for its acceptance. To his disappointment, the majority, led by Lieber, refused to reconsider its position.[18]

In Lieber's view, the aristocrats' plan, already dangerously naive, was made even more so by the Vatican's endorsement. The pope's advice, he argued, would not remain a secret. In short order, it would be common

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#85 (1st edition), 14 Apr. 1893; #87 (3d edition), 16 Apr. 1893.

[17] Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1892-93, 8, II, Volume 3, pp. 2140-43; Spahn, p. 27; Bachem, V, 280-82, 285; Times (London), 27 Feb. and 27 Apr. 1893; Nichols, pp. 245, 251-52.

[18] Goebel, p. 60; Times (London), 4 May 1893; Bachem, V, 284, 286; Nichols, p. 251; Schulthess', 1893, p. 32.

knowledge. If the party now suddenly reversed itself without cogent political grounds, it would appear to be under papal domination, even in purely economic and national matters. Non-Catholics and strongly nationalistic Catholics alike would be outraged. Legitimate doubts would be raised about the Center's patriotism. Did it owe its allegiance to Rome or to Germany? Furthermore, the Center would appear to represent the Vatican's interests more than those of its own electorate, on whose behalf it had thus far opposed military increases. Certainly its claim of being a full-fledged political party, and not just a clerical interest group, would be difficult to prove.[19]

Even more important, any Center support for substantial increases would be viewed by Catholic agrarians as a betrayal of their vital interests. For them, the issue was entirely economic. Any attempt now to reconsider it solely from a religious angle would bring accusations of duplicity.[20]

The Center, Lieber was convinced, was on the brink of disintegration. Only the most determined opposition to all increases could prevent the loss of its agrarian

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[19]Spahn, pp. 33-34; Bachem, V, 284, 286; Bergsträsser, p. 156; Times (London), 27 Apr. 1893.

[20]Tirrell, pp. 173-74; Bachem, V, 280.

electorate, especially in those areas where the army bill was most unpopular--west of the Elbe. In general, most agrarian Catholics were dissatisfied with the Center's economic policy. In 1891 the party had unanimously supported the trade treaties; as crop prices fell thereafter, so did the Center's popularity. In many respects, the party was considered to be on probation. The army bill was widely viewed as a test of its willingness and ability to defend agrarian interests.[21]

The greatest danger was in Bavaria. There the press repeatedly warned the Center not to expend a single vote for the army bill; otherwise, the people would dissociate themselves completely from the party. This was no idle rhetoric. Partly in response to rumors that the Center's aristocratic wing was promoting compromise, the Bayerischer Bauernbund, or Bavarian Peasants' League, was established on March 18. It immediately disclaimed any association with the "Prussian-dominated Center" and resolved to nominate its own candidates under the slogan: "no nobles, no bureaucrats, no clergymen, no doctors, and no professors--but only farmers."[22]

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[21] Ibid.

[22] Bachem, V, 272, 278, 280; Tirrell, pp. 173-74; Germania (Berlin), #41 (1st edition), 19 Feb. 1893; #46 (1st edition), 25 Feb. 1893; Goebel, p. 53; Times (London), 10 May 1893.

The Bund's membership grew rapidly. In response, the Bavarian Center party became even more vociferous in denouncing the army bill. On April 16, 1893, at a party congress in Neubeuern, Balthasar Daller, Chairman of the Bavarian Center stated: "If the Prussian members of the Center in the Reichstag assist in passing the army bill, then we Bavarians must withdraw ourselves from the Prussian Center party . . . . The Prussian state is a military state and knows no respect for its subjects; it has none at all for those of Southern Germany." A few days later, Lieber received a letter from Georg Orterer, a close friend and a leading figure in the Bavarian Center. Orterer warned: "The cause of the Center will be lost in Bavaria if it facilitates the passage of this monstrous bill in any manner." The party's organization and support here would cease to exist, almost overnight.[23]

Outside of Bavaria, the Center had to contend with the growing popularity of the Bund der Landwirte. Most Catholic peasant associations wanted to join. They were dissuaded from doing so only by the greatest exertions of the party leadership. Had the Bund gained their allegiance, the Center's influence with its rural electorate would have rapidly deteriorated. Still, the Catholic

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[23]Bachem, V, 272, 278; Goebel, pp. 54-55.

peasant associations of Westphalia, Hesse, Nassau, the Rhineland, Silesia, and Saxony recognized their "community of efforts and interest" with the Bund. It was clear that, if the Center aided the army bill, these associations would seek full membership.[24]

The aristocratic wing, however, minimized such dangers and continued to work for compromise. In late April, Huene, Caprivi, and the Kaiser agreed on a formula: reduction in the requested increases from 91,000 to 77,000 men. It was obvious that the government's retreat was superficial. Most of the increases were retained, and there was no mention of guaranteeing the two-year service; the yearly costs would be reduced by only nine million Marks. Nonetheless, for several days this so-called Huene proposal seemed to have a chance for passage. Even before learning of its details, the National Liberals announced their support; the Secessionists appeared likely to follow suit.[25]

On May 1, the Radicals met to debate the proposal. The mood was stormy. Of sixty-eight members, only

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[24]Tirrell, pp. 173-74, 179.

[25]Germania (Berlin), #89 (1st edition), 19 Apr. 1893; Times (London), 17 April and 3 May 1893; Bachem, V, 278, 284-87; Kröger, p. 62; Goebel, p. 50; Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1892-93, 8, II, Volume 3, pp. 2140-43 and Anlageband II, pp. 1177-78. National Zeitung (Berlin), #279, 1 May 1893.

forty-seven attended. Richter inveighed with all his usual vehemence against any compromise which would raise the peacetime strength. Nine members, mostly Secessionists refused to accept this position. They reserved for themselves a free hand to work for an "understanding" based upon an increase in the peacetime strength, provided that such an agreement could win majority backing in the Reichstag. Furthermore, of the twenty-one absent members, at least fifteen were known to be sympathetic toward further compromise efforts.[26]

All hopes for passage, however, quickly faded. On May 2, the Center met and refused to endorse Huene's proposal. Only six members favored its adoption. In protest, Ballestrem, one of the six, resigned as party chairman, and Huene withdrew from the executive board. Without full Center support, the proposal had no chance for passage.[27]

The Radicals met again the following day. With one exception, all present submitted to Richter's position. Their reasoning was simple: It was obvious that neither

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[26]Germania (Berlin), #101 (1st edition), 3 May 1893; National Zeitung (Berlin), #282, 2 May 1893; #284, 3 May 1893; Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung (Berlin), #204, 2 May 1893; Times (London), 3 May 1893; Die Nation, X, 494-96; Goebel, pp. 39-40.

[27]Times (London), 4 May 1893; Spahn, p. 34; Bachem, V, 287-88; Kröger, p. 62.

Huene's proposal nor any other would secure a Reichstag majority; therefore, why not vote in unison to demonstrate party solidarity in the elections certain to follow?[28]

The rapidly diminishing prospects for Huene's proposal brought a sense of relief to the Conservatives. Initially the measure had placed them in a difficult position. On the one hand, they wanted to undermine any compromise and to force elections. They had vowed to vote against any reduction in increases. Opposing the proposal, on the other hand, would arouse the Kaiser's wrath and cast them in an unpatriotic light for the elections. Now, with the Center and Radical parties declining to support Huene's compromise, the Conservatives could afford to do so with the assurance that it would still fail. On May 3, the Kreuzzeitung announced that the party would give ground: "Again the Conservatives assert that they have yielded to the pleas of the chancellor in a patriotic spirit of unselfish devotion."[29]

On May 6, the Huene proposal went down to defeat in

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[28]Die Nation, X, 483; Times (London), 4 May 1893; National Zeitung (Berlin), #285, 3 May 1893; #288, 4 May 1893; Germania (Berlin), #103 (1st edition), 5 May 1893; Bachem, V, 287-88; Bergsträsser, p. 156; Goebel, p. 40; Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung (Berlin), #208, 4 May 1893.

[29]Kreuzzeitung (Berlin), #208, 4 May 1893; Bachem, V, 289; Goebel, pp. 26-27.

the Reichstag, 210 votes to 162. Voting against it were all the Social Democrats, most Centrists, and most of the Radicals. Voting in favor were all the Conservatives, Free Conservatives, National Liberals, as well as twelve Centrists and six Radicals. Caprivi immediately read the Kaiser's decree of dissolution, and new elections were scheduled for June 15.[30]

The six Radicals who voted for the proposal did so out of personal conviction. Richter was outraged. At a party caucus that same evening, he introduced a motion calling for their expulsion. He insisted that their action had seriously breached party discipline, shredded the image of party solidarity, and damaged election prospects. Most Secessionists had voted against the Huene proposal and were displeased with the six in question, who had accomplished nothing positive by their action. Yet, they respected the courage and conviction of these six. Expulsion was usually reserved for violations of the party program. But the Radical's program took no stand on peacetime strength; it only committed the party to demand the right of reviewing the military budget at least once during

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[30] Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1892-1893, 8, II, Volume 3, pp. 2215-2217; Bachem, V, 289; Kröger, p. 62; Hellwig, p. 470; Goebel, p. 41; National Zeitung (Berlin), #294, 6 May 1893; Times (London), 8 May and 13 May 1893.

each legislative session, that is, at least once every five years. Both the original army bill and the Huene proposal would have granted this demand. The six, therefore, had not violated the program. The Secessionists maintained that, in questions not involving this program, each member was free to form his own opinion and to vote according to his conscience. The six, they argued, had not violated party discipline but merely exercised their democratic prerogatives; expulsion was unjustified.[31]

In the Secessionists' view, Richter's motion threatened to set an unacceptable precedent. It implied that the party majority should determine the response of all members toward all issues; no independent or dissenting positions would be allowed. Since Richter dominated the Progressives, he would always control the majority opinion; he would now be in an even better position to dictate party policy. The Secessionists would lose all freedom of expression; this they found incompatible with the notion of a liberal party. Barth later wrote: "Only a liberalism free from all narrow-mindedness can protect the Reich from a disastrous future." The central question was "whether . . .

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[31]Goebel, pp. 41-43; National Zeitung (Berlin), #297, 8 May 1893; #294, 6 May 1893; #296, 7 May 1893; #302, 10 May 1893; Vorwärts (Berlin), #106, 6 May 1893; Germania (Berlin), #106 (1st edition), 9 May 1893; Treue, p. 85; Die Nation, X, 494-96; Kreuzzeitung (Berlin), #214, 8 May 1893; Wippermann, 1893 (I), p. 203.

freedom of decision should be circumscribed in questions apart from party principles."[32]

The Secessionists could not accept Richter's motion for yet another reason. The six were either Secessionists or Progressives sympathetic to the Secessionist outlook. The emotional and fraternal bond among them was great, and certainly transcended any action or issue not involving the essence of the party program. Barth later commented: "We were unwilling to sever ourselves from true comrades-in-arms of long standing, whose accord with their colleagues in all other political issues is unquestioned."[33]

Richter acknowledged freely that the six had not violated the party program. Yet he continued to pursue his motion. The party's strength, he reasoned, was directly proportional to the ideological unanimity of its members. Since these six had shown themselves in fundamental disagreement with the rest of the party, they must be cast out. Richter punctuated his motion with an ultimatum: If the six remained, he would not.[34]

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[32] Die Nation, X, 494-96.

[33] Die Nation, X, 494-96; National Zeitung (Berlin), #294, 6 May 1893; Goebel, p. 41.

[34] Goebel, pp. 41-43; National Zeitung (Berlin), #294, 6 May 1893; #296, 7 May 1893; #297, 8 May 1893; Die Nation, X, 494-96.

Rudolf Virchow, a leading Progressive, attempted to mediate. He suggested adopting an election program broad enough to accommodate both viewpoints on the army bill. The issue could be debated in separate pamphlets so that ultimately the voters and local election committees would decide, district by district, which viewpoint to support. He wisely cautioned that Richter's motion had drawn battle lines, not between the bulk of the membership and a few rebels, but between the two major wings of the party.[35]

Nonetheless, Richter forced a vote, and his motion passed, 27 to 22. The consequence should have been predictable. The Secessionists, joined by a few Progressives from Schleswig-Holstein, immediately seceded and formed their own party, the Radical Union [Freisinnige Vereinigung]. Richter and the remaining Progressives then formed the Radical People's Party [Freisinnige Volkspartei].[36]

Thus, while the majority of Reichstag members, as well as Caprivi and the Kaiser, sought to avoid dissolution, they found no common ground. With all the

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[35] Germania (Berlin), #106 (1st edition), 9 May 1893; Goebel, p. 42; Rachfahl, Kaiser und Reich, pp. 97-98.

[36] Bergsträsser, p. 157; Klein-Hattingen, II, 493-94; Ziekursch, III, 66-67; Zucker, pp. 238-39; Rachfahl, Kaiser und Reich, p. 98.

major parties except the Conservatives and Social Democrats in a state of discord, most political leaders looked toward the elections with great anxiety, even fear. For the most part, their apprehension proved to be well-founded.

CHAPTER IV

THE ELECTORAL STRUGGLE AND PASSAGE OF THE ARMY BILL

One of the more striking aspects of the campaign was the almost complete absence of electoral alliances. From the Conservatives' viewpoint, competition for the anti-Semitic and agrarian vote made Kartell cooperation impossible. As representatives of large-scale industry, the National Liberals were tainted with Jewish money and influence. Cooperating with them would weaken the Conservatives' anti-Semitic appeal. Already the most radical anti-Semites had formed their own party, the German Reform party, and were disparaging the sincerity of the Conservatives' anti-Jewish zeal. Cooperation with the Free Conservatives was ruled out for a related reason; that party generally abhorred anti-Semitism and included a number of industrialists.[1]

In agriculture, the Conservatives' chief rivals were the Free Conservatives and the Reformists. All three endorsed the Bund der Landwirte's electoral

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[1] Kreuzzeitung (Berlin), #216, 9 May 1893; #232, 19 May 1893; National Zeitung (Berlin), #306, 13 May 1893; Times (London), 29 May and 2 June 1893; Fricke, I, 36, 38-40; Tirrell, p. 189.

program and, therefore, advanced the same agrarian demands. This made competition very intense. The Conservative party wanted to demonstrate that it would be the most resolute, the most uncompromising, and the most aggressive in pursuing those demands. In this connection, any alliance with a non-agrarian party, such as the National Liberals, or even a substantially agrarian party, such as the Free Conservatives, would make the Conservatives' assertions less convincing.[2]

Just as important, the Conservatives' confidence led them to spurn the Kartell. They felt that their appeals would win an unprecedented number of seats. Joining this alliance meant withdrawing their candidates in most districts traditionally won by the Free Conservatives or National Liberals. It was in these districts, however, that the Conservatives expected to make the most headway. Participating in the Kartell was not only embarrassing, but self-defeating as well.[3]

Looking beyond the elections, the Conservatives planned to impose their will on the Reichstag and on

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[2] Kreuzzeitung (Berlin), #216, 9 May 1893; #219, 11 May 1893; #221, 13 May 1893; #232, 19 May 1893; Times (London), 12 May, 15 May, and 29 May 1893; Kröger, p. 64; Schulthess', 1893, pp. 55, 59-61.

[3] Kreuzzeitung (Berlin), #213, 7 May 1893; #214, 8 May 1893; #215, 9 May 1893; Times (London), 8 May and 7 June 1893.

the government. As a minimum, this involved abolishing universal manhood suffrage, repressing Social Democracy, dismissing Jewish officials, forcing Caprivi's resignation, and making agrarian interests paramount. The National Liberals and Free Conservatives were certain to oppose many of these actions as threats to national unity. Therefore, why help them gain seats in districts which Conservative candidates might otherwise win?[4]

The Free Conservatives were troubled by this parochialism. More than ever, they feared massive gains by the opposition. If the Huene proposal were again rejected, the Reich would be shaken to its foundations. "The great danger . . . to date," wrote the Post, "is the disunion of the patriotic parties." The Kartell must continue. Otherwise, the opposition will ride to victory on that disunion. The Conservatives, they argued, had underestimated the threat of Social Democracy and overestimated the value of agrarian agitation and anti-Semitism. Agriculture was important, but the nation stood on the brink of catastrophe. This was no time to divide forces and pursue narrow interests. It was time to unite "against the sinister elements which seek to

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[4]Kreuzzeitung (Berlin), #219, 11 May 1893; #221, 13 May 1893; Times (London), 12 May, 15 May, and 6 June 1893; Schulthess', 1893, p. 55; Kröger, p. 64.

undermine Christianity, Monarchy, family and property."[5]

Particularly alarming was the Conservatives' stand on the Huene proposal. While the Free Conservatives announced their unqualified support, the Conservatives adopted an ambiguous position. There were still many flaws in the proposal, argued the Kreuzzeitung. The Conservatives could not commit themselves irrevocably to its approval. Dedicated almost exclusively to economic questions, the Conservatives' election manifesto was evasive on the issue of increases. It said only that the party favored "the full development of the nation's strength as an indispensable condition for the maintenance of German power and European peace." It was obvious what the Conservatives had in mind: either to replace the proposal by another retaining the three-year service, or to bargain their support for Caprivi's dismissal and agrarian concessions. Such an approach, insisted the Free Conservatives, was irresponsibly parochial. It would only divide the patriotic vote.[6]

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[5]National Zeitung (Berlin), #306, 13 May 1893; Kreuzzeitung (Berlin), #215, 9 May 1893; Times (London), 9 May 1893.

[6]Kreuzzeitung (Berlin), #210, 5 May 1893; #215, 9 May 1893; #219, 11 May 1893; #221, 13 May 1893; Times (London), 9 May, 12 May, and 15 May 1893; Kröger, p. 64; Schulthess', 1893, pp. 55-56.

The National Liberals were even more alarmed by the Kartell's breakdown. No party feared Social Democracy more. Not only were they frustrated by the Conservatives' myopic intransigence, but also by Caprivi's failure to engineer a strong campaign à la Bismarck. Under the Iron Chancellor, they argued, such a campaign would have centered about a single issue--patriotism. There would have been only two parties: the "patriots," and the "enemies of the Reich." Bismarck would have been in the front ranks, forging electoral alliances and public opinion. Caprivi, however, seemed to have disappeared. He had allowed the Kartell to disintegrate, while his patriotic appeals had been restrained and uninspiring. Completely absent were the "gall and vinegar" of his predecessor. As a result, the campaign was something of a free-for-all, in which the leading issues only remotely touched upon military increases and patriotic duty. Never had so many candidates representing so many parties run in so many districts.[7]

The pervading mood in the party was one of profound disillusionment. There was resentment over the brusque

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[7]National Zeitung (Berlin), #296, 7 May 1893; #299, 9 May 1893; #303, 10 May 1893; #306, 13 May 1893; #323, 24 May 1893; #339, 2 June 1893; #354, 10 June 1893; Preussische Jahrbücher 72 (1893): 564-65; Die Nation, X, 551; Times (London), 11 May and 29 May 1893; Brandenburg, pp. 25-26.

manner in which Caprivi had rejected Bennigsen's compromise proposal. Soon thereafter party pride and prestige had suffered an even greater blow. When Caprivi did accept a compromise measure, it was one formulated by, and named after, an Ultramontane. Never had the party seemed more isolated or vulnerable. All strains of extremism worked against it. To Social Democrats and extreme agrarians, the National Liberals were hated capitalists. In the anti-Semitic view, they protected the interests of Jewish moneybags.[8]

The National Liberals saw themselves as the voice of moderation and reason. That voice, however, seemed strangely out of tune with the times. Their main electoral appeal was patriotism, expressed by unqualified support for the Huene proposal. Yet, even that appeal was largely undermined by their old political idol, Bismarck. As elections neared, the ex-chancellor's criticism of the abandonment of the three-year service became more intense.[9]

There were other grounds for discouragement. The

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[8] Preussische Jahrbücher 72 (1893): 569-70; Times (London), 27 Sept. 1892 and 15 June 1893.

[9] National Zeitung, #357, 13 June 1893; Kardorff, p. 271; Hofmann, II, 219-20; Bachem, V, 270; Times (London), 18 May, 13 June, and 15 June 1893; Preussische Jahrbücher 72 (1893): 186-87, 569-70; Schulthess', 1893, pp. 56-57.

party's grand designs for an all-Liberal coalition were now a shambles. Liberalism was split into three miniscule, uncoordinated parties; it had failed to capitalize on an ideal opportunity to secure a decisive and constructive voice in the nation's development. In the party's judgment, no such opportunity would again present itself. Liberalism's future seemed dim.[10]

This pessimism was reflected in the party's campaign plans. Only twenty-seven of the forty-two National Liberals in the Reichstag were willing to run for reelection. Among those retiring were such long-standing and distinguished members as Franz Buhl and William Oechelhäuser. In addition, the party contested only 181 districts. This was sixteen less than in 1890, when the party refrained from running candidates in many districts out of consideration for its Kartell partners.[11]

The two Radical parties, however, were in the worst position for the elections. Because of the threats from the right and the left, they initially agreed to cooperate. Their split was characterized as a "gentlemanly

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[10]Goebel, pp. 27-28; National Zeitung, #302, 10 May 1893; #339, 2 June 1893; Oncken, II, 585-86.

[11]Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1890-91, 8, I, Anlageband I, pp. 165-231; 1893-94, 9, II, Anlageband I, pp. 269-323; Times (London), 15 May and 30 May 1893; National Zeitung, #331, 28 May 1893; #355, 11 June 1893.

parting of ways." Both groups, insisted the Radical Union, continued to support the program of the Radical party; disagreement had come over the issues apart from principles. A joint commission of six members, three from each party, was formed to provide a "friendly forum" for discussion of common interests, that is, to coordinate election efforts. Competition that might fragment the Radical vote was to be avoided. At the district level, Radical organizations were to remain intact. Each was to nominate a single candidate, either a Radical Unionist or a member of the Radical People's party, to represent left liberalism. These arrangements raised hopes among many Radicals that mutual antagonisms could be minimized and that full reconciliation would follow the elections.[12]

It was soon apparent, however, that the two parties were drifting further apart. While the Radical People's party moved boldly toward the left, the Radical Union inclined toward the right. On May 7, Richter announced an electoral alliance with the South German People's party [Süddeutsche Volkspartei]. Composed almost entirely of representatives from Württemberg, this party

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12 Die Nation, X, 493-497; 508, 523; National Zeitung (Berlin), #327, 26 May 1893; Kreuzzeitung (Berlin), #214, 8 May 1893; Preussische Jahrbücher 72 (1893): 188-91; Goebel, p. 43; Times (London), 10 May 1893; Klein-Hattingen, II, 493-94.

favored a republican form of government in the spirit of 1848. It was staunchly oppositional and rejected military increases as vehemently as the S.P.D. At the same time, Richter spoke in favor of a "turn to the left" and emphasized the need to revive "the strong spirit and true perspective of the old Progressive party." It was obvious that his opposition had become even more cemented in principle. The Radical Unionists, on the other hand, were moving toward acceptance of the Huene proposal. While taking no stand for or against the measure, their election manifesto suggested two conditions under which the party could support it: if the two-year service were legally guaranteed, and if the financial burdens were not placed on the poorer classes.[13]

Tensions quickly mounted. Richter began to back away from his electoral arrangements with the Radical Union. How could he justify supporting any candidate who could not see the necessity of introducing the two-year service without raising the peacetime strength? he asked. To do so would only undermine the credibility of his own position and mislead the electorate. These words were

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[13] Die Nation, X, 497-98; National Zeitung (Berlin), #297, 8 May 1893; #304, 11 May 1893; #305, 12 May 1893; #307, 13 May 1893; Fricke, I, 637-41; Zucker, p. 200; Bergsträsser, p. 146; Salomon, II, 26; Tirrell, pp. 55-56; Schulthess', 1893, pp. 52-54; Times (London), 6 May, 9 May, 12 May, 19 May, and 22 May 1893.

soon followed by actions. Increasingly Richter's party introduced its own candidates into districts where the local committees had already endorsed Radical Union candidates. Then, on May 27, before the Commission of Six, Richter declared that his party would not endorse, or allow to run unchallenged, any Radical who had voted for the Huene proposal.[14]

In response, the Radical Union emphasized the foolishness of Richter's principled intransigence. Barth wrote in Die Nation:

> Conflicts over military questions have always led to a weakening of liberalism . . . . In no country in the world has one ever accepted the notion that liberalism's fate is linked to the number of annual recruits and to military expenditures . . . . The feeling that in military questions a quiet compromise is better than a noisy struggle is already gaining ground . . . . Certainly there are issues in politics involving basic principles, so that every concession is suicide . . . . Here [in military matters] one should not speak of a test of character . . . . Liberalism can never be an active force in Germany's political life unless it bears this in mind.[15]

By early June, the Radical Union had abandoned any hope of reconciliation with Richter. Its aim was now to set a new course for liberalism: "The uncritical

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[14] National Zeitung (Berlin), #311, 16 May 1893; #312, 17 May 1893; #313, 17 May 1893; #327, 26 May 1893; #330, 27 May 1893; Times (London), 19 May 1893; Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1893-94, 9, II, Anlageband I, pp. 269-323.

[15] Die Nation, X, 508-09; Times (London), 22 May 1893.

Bismarckian rapture, on the one hand, and doctrinaire opposition, on the other hand, have hindered the spread of liberal principles long enough. The time has finally come to break with the world of emotions and worthy sentiments in politics and to secure for liberalism a real influence in the political life of the nation. The Radical Union will strive for this end."[16]

Despite its rejection of the Huene proposal, the Center continued to struggle for survival. In Bavaria, Silesia, and Westphalia, particularist sentiments threatened to override the party's religious appeal. "The solid tower of the Center," wrote Vorwärts, "is crumbling to pieces, and the deafening trumphet blasts against the army bill cannot conceal this fact." This impression was reinforced by the lengthy delay preceding the appearance of the party's election manifesto. Most parties published theirs within a day of the dissolution. The Center's, however, did not appear until May 23, seventeen days later. This fueled speculation that even the party's leaders could not agree upon a common program.[17]

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[16] Die Nation, X, 537.

[17] Bachem, V, 289; Times (London), 25 May and 27 May 1893; Schulthess', 1893, pp. 64-68; Germania (Berlin), #117 (1st edition), 24 May 1893.

Many Bavarians were outraged that even twelve Centrists had voted for military increases. Of the twelve, ten were aristocrats, and nine were Prussians. Moreover, it was known that the party's aristocratic wing had worked more assiduously than any other parliamentary group for this shameful compromise. For Bavarians, the notion that neither aristocrats nor Prussians could be counted upon to represent Bavarian agricultural interests seemed more attractive than ever. As a result, the Center's popularity suffered greatly while that of the Bayerischer Bauernbund continued to expand. The Bund began to nominate candidates, and eventually contested eighteen of Bavaria's forty-seven electoral districts. For the Center the challenge was serious. With even moderate success, the Bund could gain enough prestige to displace the Center as Bavaria's leading party in subsequent elections.[18]

To help calm such agrarian unrest, most of the party's aristocrats decided not to run for reelection. Many bowed out to local farmers who would have more drawing power as popular candidates. The most notable exception was Huene. Having withdrawn from the party, he entered himself as a candidate in a large number of Silesian

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[18] Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1893-94, 9, II, Anlageband I, pp. 302-307; Bachem, V, 289; Kröger, p. 62.

districts. His sole appeal was to patriotism. Furthermore, he organized other ex-Centrists to run on the same program. The Center feared that Huene and his followers would cause a profound split in the Catholic vote. This, in turn, would enable other parties to triumph, even in districts traditionally won by the Center. Such a split was likely. Located so near to the Russian frontier, Silesians were usually well-disposed toward military increases. The Center's fear was the Conservatives' hope. The latter gave substantial moral and material aid to Huene's group. "It is the duty of all men," wrote the Kreuzzeitung, "to rally behind this element, which has placed the interests of the Fatherland above party considerations . . . . [We] will rally to place ourselves at their side for the upcoming electoral struggle."[19]

A similar situation developed in Westphalia. There on May 24, Burghard von Schorlemer-Alst, one of the party's oldest and most respected members, made a startling demand. At a regional meeting he introduced a resolution proposing to reserve four Westphalian Center candidacies for professional farmers only. The resolution was promptly defeated. Alst and a sizeable following

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[19]Kröger, p. 64; Bachem, V, 290-91, 294; Kreuzzeitung (Berlin), #244, 27 May 1893; Times (London), 11 May, 12 May, and 3 June 1893.

immediately withdrew from the party and issued their own manifesto. In it, they stated their intention of contesting Catholic constituencies in Westphalia against the Center's official candidates. Alst's challenge was serious because most of his supporters came from the influential Westphalian Bauernverein.[20]

These and other disharmonies among the bourgeois parties elated the Social Democrats. Never had their prospects for spectacular gains been so favorable. They had been preparing for this election since the preceding August, and were able to nominate candidates in 382 of Germany's 397 districts. This was an astounding feat. The Center, for instance, ran candidates in only 214 districts, the National Liberals in 181, the Conservatives in 167, the Radical Union in 65, and the Free Conservatives in 64. With so many candidates, the S.P.D. was in a position to take maximum advantage of the internal and external discord so widespread among the other parties.[21]

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[20] Times (London), 26 May 1893; Bachem, V, 292; Schulthess', 1893, pp. 61-62.

[21] Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1893-94, 9, II, Anlageband I, pp. 270-323; Times (London), 21 April, 23 May, and 5 June 1893; National Zeitung (Berlin), #339, 2 June 1893; Vorwärts (Berlin), #92, 20 April 1893; #107, 7 May 1893; #129, 4 June 1893; #138, 15 June 1893.

The elections, which took place on June 15 and 23, did not disappoint the Social Democrats. Not surprisingly, they made impressive gains while the Radical parties suffered a catastrophic defeat. As shown in table 2, the S.P.D. acquired nine additional seats and raised their popular vote from 1,427,298 to 1,786,738, more than any other party. The Radicals were less fortunate. Together both parties secured only thirty-seven seats, twenty-nine less than they won in 1890. Their defeat was even greater than indicated by the final figures. On the first ballot, the Radical Union won only three seats, and the Radical People's party none at all. Richter barely won reelection on the second ballot, and then only with massive Centrist and Socialist support.[22]

The Conservatives were very disappointed with the results. Agrarian agitation and anti-Semitism had not given them the mass following they expected. Overall, the party lost one seat. Anti-Semitism did, however, demonstrate its appeal. The independent anti-Semites more than tripled their seats and increased their popular vote fivefold, from 47,500 to 263,861. Most of these gains were made in districts traditionally held by

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[22]Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1890-91, 8, I, Anlageband I, pp. 228-233; 1893-94, 9, II, Anlageband I, pp. 270-71; Pinson, p. 602; Tent, pp. 338-39; Times (London), 24 June 1893.

TABLE 2

COMPARISON OF *REICHSTAG* ELECTIONS: 1890 and 1893

Party	1890		1893	
	No. Votes	No. Deputies	No. Votes	No. Deputies
Conservatives	895,103	73	1,038,353	72
Free Conservatives	482,315	20	438,435	28
National Liberals	1,177,807	42	996,980	53
Radical Union	———	—	258,481	13
Radical People's Party	———	—	666,439	24
Radical Party	1,159,915	66	———	—
Center	1,342,113	106	1,468,501	96
S.P.D.	1,427,298	35	1,786,738	44
Independent Anti-Semites	47,536	5	263,861	16
Others (Poles, Guelfs, Danes, Alsatians, etc.)	765,923	50	756,185	51
No. eligible voters	10,145,877		10,628,292	
No. valid votes cast	7,298,010		7,673,973	
No. Deputies in *Reichstag*		397		397

SOURCE: *Stenographische Berichte über die Verhandlungen des Reichstages*, 1890-91, 8, I, Anlageband I, pp. 228-238; 1890-94, 9, II, Anlageband I, pp. 270-71; Koppel S. Pinson, *Modern Germany, Its History and Civilization*, 2d. ed. (New York, 1966), p. 602.

Conservatives. The Conservatives' leading anti-Semite, Stöcker, failed to win reelection; Ahlwardt, the Reform party's leading figure, on the other hand, won election in two districts while serving a jail sentence for libel. No longer could the Conservatives claim the leadership of the anti-Semitic movement.[23]

The Free Conservatives and National Liberals were pleasantly surprised by their success. The Free Conservatives added eight seats, and the National Liberals gained eleven. They were, however, in no mood to celebrate. Both had received fewer popular votes than in 1890, and both were alarmed by the S.P.D.'s gains.[24]

Of all the parties, the Center was the most relieved. It lost ten seats but emerged substantially intact, having successfully met the challenges in Silesia, Westphalia, and Bavaria. Huene and his followers received little popular support while Alst's candidates were roundly defeated. In Bavaria, the party was happy to have lost only four seats to the Bauernbund. All losses occurred in districts where the outcome was traditionally uncertain; the party lost none of its

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[23] Die Nation, X, 598; Ziekursch, III, pp. 67-68; Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1890-91, 8, I, Anlageband I, pp. 228-233; 1893-94, 9, II, Anlageband I, pp. 270-71.

[24] Ibid.

ancestral seats. Just as important, the Center remained the largest party in the Reichstag.[25]

One of the more striking results of the election was the change brought about in the composition of the Conservative, Free Conservative, and Center parties. This change was largely attributable to agrarian dissatisfaction. Among Conservatives, most of those who had shown the inclination to moderate agrarian demands or to cooperate with Caprivi were not returned. Of the twenty-two who had protested the Trivoli Program and the party's intimate association with the Bund der Landwirte, only five were reelected. For the most part, only uncompromising agrarians committed to the Bund's program received mandates. Higher state officials and even Rittergut owners holding government positions won few seats. Of seventy-three Conservatives, only thirty were reelected, and most of these were closely associated with the Kreuzzeitung wing. Free Conservatives became more closely identified with agriculture; of the party's twenty-eight members, twenty-three were now agrarians. In Bavaria, the Bauernbund's campaign against the

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[25] Times (London), 17 June and 23 June 1893; Bachem, V, 292, 294; Tirrell, pp. 189-91; Ziekursch, III, 67-68; Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1893-94, 9, II, Anlageband I, pp. 270-323.

nobility proved remarkably effective; not a single aristocrat was elected. Of the Center's thirty-one aristocrats, only twelve were reelected, and most of these in western Germany. To everyone's surprise, no nobles were elected to the Center from Silesia, traditionally the stronghold of the party's aristocratic wing. There was no doubt that the new Reichstag's mood would be even more staunchly agrarian, a development which did not augur well for Caprivi.[26]

The new Reichstag met on July 4. Caprivi reintroduced the Huene proposal and made two important concessions. The two-year service, he promised, would be continued beyond the quinquennat period. Furthermore, he offered to finance the increases provisionally, not with indirect taxes, but with matricular contributions from the state governments. If the Reichstag and the government subsequently failed to agree on an alternate method, this funding would become permanent. Only those most capable of paying, he assured the members, would bear the costs of the increases. Under no conditions would additional burdens be imposed upon agriculture or the poorer classes. Disappointed by the election, the Conservatives

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[26] Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1893-94, 9, II, Anlageband I, pp. 270-323; Kröger, p. 51; Tirrell, pp. 190-91; Times (London), 3 July 1893; Bachem, V, 294-95.

were in no mood to force another. Reluctantly they assented. Caprivi's concessions fell short of the Radical Union's campaign pledges. Yet, with the only alternative being another dissolution, they, too, yielded; their votes were the margin of victory. On July 15, the Huene proposal passed, 201 votes to 185. Voting for the bill were all the Conservatives, Free Conservatives, National Liberals, anti-Semites, Poles, and Radical Unionists, as well as two Centrists. The nine-month struggle was finally concluded, but its consequences continued to influence German political life throughout the 1890's.[27]

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[27] Stenographische Berichte des Reichstages, 1893, 9, I, Volume 1, pp. 11-14, 82, 99-101, 139-40; Times (London), 1 July and 8 July 1893; National Zeitung (Berlin), #346, 6 June 1893; Wahl, III, 466-67; Rachfahl, Kaiser und Reich, p. 99; Ziekursch, III, 68.

CHAPTER V

EPILOGUE

The agrarian movement revitalized the Conservative party. Thereafter economic interests became paramount, while old conservative principles were largely set aside. By associating themselves so intimately with the Bund, the Conservatives gained a broader social base and won recognition as the leading spokesman for agriculture. In so doing, however, they lost much of their appeal as a royalist party, as well as much of their political flexibility and independence. They were now committed to a resolute struggle against any policies or developments detrimental to agriculture. No quarter was allowed or given, even in return for important concessions in other areas. If the Conservatives became the chief voice of the Bund, it must also be said that the Bund determined more and more the content and tone of party policy. Increasingly their interests and emphases became inseparable. Thus, the same party that claimed to defend the monarchy and to be above parties and classes became an unashamed champion of narrow economic interests.[1]

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[1]Leuss, p. 111; Bachem, V, 272: Tirrell, pp. 182-83, 185-88; Holborn, pp. 319-20; Ziekursch, III, 60-62; Puhle, pp. 226-74; Wahl, III, 558-64; Grebing, pp. 62-63; Booms, pp. 24-31; Bergsträsser, pp. 158-59; Tormin, pp. 100-101.

The Conservatives' advocacy of anti-Semitism, however, was short-lived. Unlike agrarian agitation, anti-Semitism was a profound disappointment. The Reform party, and not the Conservatives, had captured the movement's undisputed leadership. Moreover, most Reformist gains were made at Conservative expense. Further patronage of the movement, reasoned many Conservatives, only legitimized a form of agitation which threatened to reduce their own strength and influence. For many Conservatives, the attachment to anti-Semitism had been more superficial than heartfelt; it had been a demogogic approach designed to win a mass following. Now that it had failed to prove its worth, most were ready to drop it entirely. Without Conservative support and persistent economic disaffection, anti-Semitic appeal waned. In subsequent elections the radical anti-Semites received fewer and fewer votes, and to the end of the monarchy anti-Semitism remained a peripheral phenomenon of German political life.[2]

The "middle parties" were terrified by the S.P.D.'s gains. Together the Free Conservatives and National Liberals had won nineteen new seats. Yet, they never felt more insecure. Both had desperately sought to avoid

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[2]Holborn, p. 321; Die Nation, X, 598; Kröger, p. 28; Tirrell, pp. 205-06; Dawson, II, 280-81; Tormin, pp. 100-102.

elections, the results of which only confirmed their worst fear--that the "red menace" was growing in strength and influence. Increasingly this fear served as the mortar for a closer and closer cooperative relationship with each other, the government, and the Conservatives, aimed at combatting the onslaught from the left.[3]

This cooperation was facilitated by National Liberal emphasis on national, and not liberal, considerations. Long ago the party had sacrificed much of its liberal zeal for a positive voice in politics. Now even the liberal rhetoric had largely vanished. In the army bill struggle, the party's sole concern was the preservation of Reich unity. Above all, this meant avoiding conflicts over controversial issues that might divide the Kartell. Only in this way could the pro-government parties make a strong stand to protect Reich authority from the corrosive effects of particularism, Social Democracy, and narrow interest politics.[4]

Left liberalism never recovered from the election. The Radical Union, and even many Progressives, rightly blamed Richter for the party split and the electoral disaster. Richter, on the other hand, argued that

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[3]Pauline Relyea Anderson, The Background of Anti-English Feeling in Germany, 1890-1902 (Washington, D.C., 1939), pp. 84-86; Pinson, pp. 168-69; Goebel, p. 34.

[4]Times (London), 27 Sept. 1892; Pinson, pp. 168-69.

the Secessionists were at fault. The Radical People's party had done poorly at the polls, he insisted, only because it hadn't turned far enough to the left. In the face of such antagonisms, there could be no hope for reconciliation. Each party immediately took steps to draw up its own program. Hopelessly divided into two miniscule parties, left liberalism never again played a significant role in German politics.[5]

The Center's future was brighter. In many ways, it emerged from the army bill struggle even stronger and more unified. It quickly regained the allegiance of its disaffected members. The party had experienced a bold change of leadership. The aristocratic wing had disappeared, and Lieber had become the party's undisputed leader, a position he would hold for almost a decade. He had successfully led the Center through troubled times and was rightly credited with having prevented the party's collapse. Just as important, the Center's basic character had changed. Largely due to Lieber's influence, it was transformed from an aristocratically-led religious party to a democratically-led political party, refusing to see all issues

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[5]Tent, p. 339; Ziekursch, III, 67; Pinson, p. 602; Bergsträsser, p. 157; Anderson, pp. 106-11; Die Nation, X, 508, 581-83, 586-88, 598, 616-17, 647-48; Zucker, p. 240; Times (London), 19 June 1893.

from a strictly clerical perspective. Furthermore, the Center's opposition was not permanent or based on principle; Lieber's major concern was to hold the party together. Having done so, he followed another course, one more in line with his long-range political strategy: In return for a more influential voice in legislation, the Center rendered consistent and substantial support to the government during the ensuing years of the Wilhelmian Era.[6]

After the elections, no party was more euphoric than the S.P.D. With so many divisions among the bourgeois parties, capitalism seemed close to collapse. The turn toward narrow interest politics, the government's isolation, the growing strength of Social Democracy, and the spreading economic discontent reinforced that view. Such developments could only encourage those who advocated the evolutionary, and not revolutionary, path to power. Why foment revolution, perhaps prematurely, and risk military defeat? Why not wait a little longer until the corrupt system caved in under the weight of its own contradictions?[7]

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[6]Bachem, V, 294, 306, 314-16, 318-19, 328-35; Spahn, p. 35; Anderson, p. 86; Dunne, p. 84; Pinson, pp. 190-92; Bergsträsser, pp. 156.

[7]Rosen, pp. 55-56; Bergsträsser, pp. 165-69.

Thus, all parties emerged from the army bill struggle somewhat transformed. Their altered perspectives and orientations proved to be enduring.

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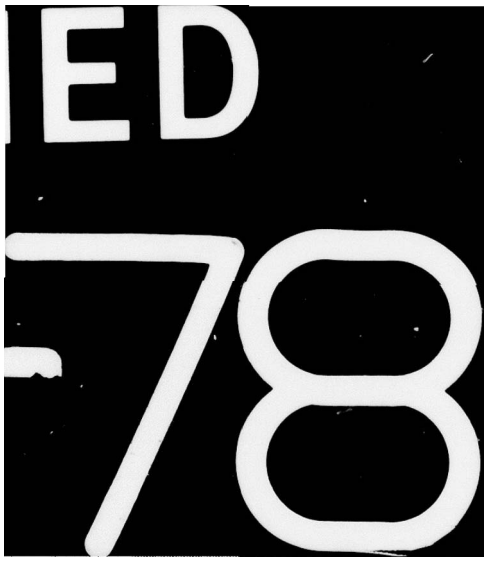
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