

SIGNIFICANT TENDENCIES IN GERMAN POLITICS

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“**H**E who doubts that Germany shall henceforth be governed in a liberal and social spirit is blind politically,” was the comment of Ernest Bassermann, the leader of the National Liberals, on the recent election to the Reichstag. In spite of the lack of concrete definite issues, no election since 1870 has been so significant as the one that was held in January, 1912. For many years the German people have been advancing with halting steps on the road to self-government. Forces which have long been at work in the politics of the Fatherland, are now for the first time beginning to make themselves felt. Germany is at the cross-roads; not at the sharp turn of revolution, but at the gentle yet decided curve of evolution toward political democracy.

The antecedents of the recent election go back to the one of 1907 when the Conservative parties, as a result of a khaki campaign over colonial expansion, won 105 seats and could count on the Liberals with their 85 members and a possible Centre support of 105. The Social Democrats were roundly beaten, having lost about half their seats, and numbered but a paltry 43 deputies. This was the high tide of Junker success, and their brilliant leader, Prince von Bülow, then Chancellor, proceeded to organize the coalition known as the “Bülowblok,” composed of Conservatives and Liberals, the representatives of national ideals as opposed to the internationalism of the Socialists and the ultramontanism of the Catholics. To all appearances the “national” combination seemed safely entrenched in power and von Bülow destined to remain in office indefinitely.

But nowhere are appearances more deceptive than in “Blok” politics. The alliance of Liberals with Conservatives was an unnatural combination of elements whose interests were mutually hostile. Middle-class industrialists representing capital and agrarian aristocrats representing land are not apt to work harmoniously except under stress of a revolution from be-

low. Let an important economic issue arise and the carefully nurtured "Bülowblok" would be rent in twain. Such an issue did arise in the Imperial budget of 1908, when the Chancellor recommended an inheritance tax to pay for the increase in the army and navy. The Conservatives refused to support it, and the Liberals dared not oppose it, with the result that the "Blok" went to pieces. The Centre rallied to the support of the Conservatives, the inheritance tax was voted down and von Bülow was forced to resign. The determination of the agrarians to defend their class interests at all costs unwittingly set a precedent for ministerial responsibility which, in theory, they utterly reject and abhor. This "Desperado-politik," as it was termed, of the Junkers was one of the chief causes of the recent electoral overturn. As in England, it was a budget to provide for the increased cost of armament that was to prove the undoing of the Conservatives.

The task of forming a new "Blok" was given to Herr von Bethmann-Hollweg, the new Chancellor. As Germany cannot be governed without the Conservatives or with the Socialists, an alliance had to be formed with the Centre, the only party which had the votes and the desire to support the Conservatives. It was then that the notorious "blue-black blok" was organized which governed the Empire during the last five years in the teeth of growing popular discontent. In spite of religious differences, the new coalition worked harmoniously, as both parties represented essentially agrarian interests. In order to raise the new taxes, the Government introduced what it euphemistically termed "financial reform" or consumption taxes on tobacco, beer, tea, coffee, sugar, brandy, matches; stamp taxes on checks, notes, shares of stock, etc. The middle and working classes saw with dismay the Government in the hands of the agrarians, who were determined to throw the burden of taxation on their shoulders. Popular discontent expressed itself in the by-elections, which in almost every instance went in favor of the Socialists, and increased their representation from 43 to 53. In 1909 was organized the powerful Hansabund with a membership of 300,000 merchants and manufacturers whose aim was to fight the agrarian interests. As everywhere else, prices have been rising

in Germany, and, as everywhere else, the party in power was blamed. To fan the flame of popular indignation came the Morocco fiasco, which further discredited the Government.

It was at this time of general dissatisfaction that the new Reichstag was to be elected. On January 2, 1912, the official organ of the Government, the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, published an appeal to the electors to support the Government. It declared that the great industrial development of Germany was the outcome of national unity, and that the social problems attendant thereon were bravely and efficiently met. Factional and class conflicts were weakening the German people. The Empire was the envy of all other nations, hence the need of a strong army and navy to protect its interests. A Reichstag should be elected that would aid in the work of industrial development, social reform and the protection of national interests. The Social Democrats have no sympathy with these tasks, hence coöperation with them is impossible; moreover this "party of disorder and negation" was an ever-present danger to the unity of the Empire and the present system of society. Therefore it behooved all other parties, particularly those representing the middle classes, to unite in support of the Government at the polls. The Conservative-Centre "Blok" presented no programme to indorse or reject, but merely contented itself by raising the cry of "Down with the Socialists!"

The election showed the following results:

Socialists,	110	seats—gain of 57 seats
Centre,	93	" —loss " 10 "
Radicals,	46	" " " 3 "
National Liberals,	44	" " " 7 "
Conservatives,	43	" " " 15 "
Free Conservatives,	13	" " " 12 "
Anti-Semites,	14	" " " 6 "
Poles,	19	" " " 1 "
Danes, Alsatians and Guelphs,	13	" " " 1 "
Independents,	2	" " " 2 "

The number of seats captured by the "Blok," including the Particularists and Independents who generally vote with it, is 197; whereas, the Left can count only 202, a majority of five.

The total number of votes was 12,206,808. Of these, the Socialists received 4,250,329 or 35 per cent. of the whole; Centre 2,035,290 or 17 per cent.; Conservative groups 1,855,946 or 15.5 per cent.; National Liberals 1,672,619 or 13 per cent.; Radicals 1,558,330 or 12.5 per cent. The Socialists gained about one million votes; the Centre lost about 145,000 votes; the Conservatives lost about 150,000; the National Liberals gained about 350,000; and the Radicals gained about 325,000. The total vote of all the Left parties in round numbers was 7,338,000, and of all the Right parties 4,664,000, a clear majority for the Left of about 2,674,000 votes.

For the first time in the history of the Empire, the German people, by an overwhelming majority, have refused a vote of confidence to their Government. In a truly democratic State, this would inevitably lead to a change of Government. What is usually forgotten, however, is that the Reichstag is not a legislature in the full sense of that term, but a ratifying body which legitimatizes the legislation of the Bundesrat or Federal Council. The Reichstag is still in the "protesting" stage of its development, very much like the English Parliament in the time of the Stuarts. Hence the ballot in Germany is largely an academic affair. To vote means that an opportunity is given to the elector to say whether he likes or dislikes the policies of the Government, not that it should be ousted. An adverse vote is merely a form of "heckling" those in control. The German workman, unlike his French brother, does not take kindly to barricades and street fights. He prefers to march in protest; to speak in protest, to vote in protest; in short to do everything but fight in protest. He is the only political Platonist extant. Nevertheless, over seven million voices shouting in protest may cause even a Romantic Kaiser and a reactionary aristocracy to listen with respect.

The most significant result of the election is undoubtedly the increase in votes, seats and prestige of the Socialists. For the first time they find themselves the leading party in the Reichstag. The growth from 124,000 votes in 1871 to 4,251,000 in 1912, or over one-third of the entire electorate, is sufficiently startling to awaken the liveliest apprehensions in regard to German poli-

tics. The common explanation, that it is not a Socialist, but a protest vote, which rolls up this enormous total, is true enough. But it fails to take into consideration the important fact that the habit of voting the Socialist ticket, once acquired, becomes a confirmed part of the elector's political psychology and tends to change his entire outlook upon society in general. The number of Socialist voters who desire the immediate establishment of the Coöperative Commonwealth is, in all likelihood, very small in any country. The Socialist vote everywhere is a protest against political and economic conditions, and especially so in Germany. The important thing to bear in mind is, however, that so many Germans have chosen the Social Democrats as their medium of protest. The marked tendency of all currents of discontent to flow into the Socialist channel is mainly due to the fact that the Liberal parties have so often played false to their ideals by allying themselves with the Conservatives. To vote Socialist, then, has become the most effective way of demanding that the Reichstag should become truly a legislature, ministerial responsibility be established, the iniquitous three-class Prussian franchise abolished, unjust distribution of seats corrected, and the country freed from agrarian and clerical domination. At the campaign meetings it is these things that are emphasized by Socialist orators, not "surplus value," "economic determinism" or the "Coöperative Commonwealth." They declare, and with truth, that the Social Democrats are the only party that can be trusted to hold fast to their principles, and not be swayed either by fear or by Court blandishments, which have so often proved successful in influencing the middle-class parties. How to turn to political use this powerful vote-getting organization is a great problem. The Socialists are too strong to remain passive, too weak to act alone and, until now, too doctrinaire to unite with other parties.

For the first time since its organization, the Centre party will not be the most numerous element in the Reichstag. In spite of many attacks by Bismarck and von Bülow, the clericals remained unshaken until this year. Now, for the first time, its outer works have been stormed and captured by the advance guard of the enemy. As we have already seen, it lost ten seats

and about 145,000 votes to the Socialists. Most significant is the fact that the losses have occurred in the very citadels of German Catholicism, Bavaria and the Rhenish-Westphalian districts. In Bavaria the Centre lost four seats, electing 29 deputies out of a delegation of 48 to the Reichstag. It received 468,452 votes out of 1,267,541, or 38.7 per cent. of the entire Bavarian electorate, showing a loss since 1907 of 6 per cent. The Socialists captured nine seats, a gain of five, and received 328,170 votes or 27.2 per cent. of the whole, a gain of 6.1 per cent. The Liberals and Radicals also made large gains at the expense of the Centre and the Conservatives. The elections to the Bavarian Landtag or local legislature resulted in a greatly reduced clerical majority. Out of 163 members, the Centre elected 87, a loss of 11; the Socialists 30, a gain of 9; Liberals and their allies 39, a gain of 12; Conservatives 7, a loss of 10. This was in spite of an unequal apportionment and an overwhelming Catholic population. During the campaign there was a working agreement between the Socialists, Liberals and Radicals to coöperate whenever possible against the common enemy, the Centre.

Hardly less significant was the overturn in the Rhenish-Westphalian districts. In these industrial communities the workingman, until now, unfailingly supported the clerical party. In the Reichstag elections, Cologne, the capital of German Catholicism, was captured by the Socialists for the first time in forty years. The Socialist candidate was elected over the Centre in the second ballot by a majority of 3,300, in spite of the fact that the Catholic candidate was Dr. Karl Trimborn, a distinguished member of the Reichstag, who was particularly active in promoting social legislation in favor of the working class. The Centre also lost Düsseldorf and two seats in Alsace to the Socialists. This Catholic set-back may have far-reaching results. The Centre is the best-organized and best-disciplined party in Germany and, as a rule, it neither gains nor loses, advancing only with the advance of population. A defection, therefore, means that a permanent breach has been made in the Catholic citadel into which will pour the hosts of Socialism.

Born to defend itself against persecution, the Centre lives to defend the present order against radicalism. As it professes no

particular political principles, it can consistently combine with any party that is willing to advance Catholic interests. The Kulturkampf over, the clericals quickly realized that their essential interests were the same as those of the monarchy and aristocracy. On their side, the Lutheran Junkers, out of fear of Socialism, welcomed the aid of the Ultramontanes. Both elements profess essentially the same views in matters economic. Though confessional in principle and organization, the Centre is really a peasant party, representing agricultural interests. A *rapprochement* took place between the Catholics and Conservatives, which ended in a firm coalition that governed Germany from 1891, excepting the short time during the break with von Bülow in 1907, over his Colonial policy. The price the Government paid for clerical support of its military and naval budgets, high tariffs and consumption taxes was the admission of the Jesuits into Germany, the establishment of a Catholic faculty in the University of Strasburg and religious instruction in the primary schools. The Centre, even more than the Conservatives, was the object of attack during the recent campaign. The Conservatives were sure to be in power, no matter how few the number of their deputies, but a reduced Centre meant an embarrassed and helpless Conservatism. The rapid industrial development of Germany is working a revolution within the ranks of the Centre itself. Essentially a party of peasants, it was bound to lose strength unless it attracted the laboring classes. The great problem of the Catholic Church in Germany is how to capture the working-man, or how to prevent him from being captured by the Socialists. For that reason, the Centre has been the stout advocate of social legislation, has organized Catholic labor unions and founded coöperative societies. The ideas of Christian Socialism, first advocated by that far-seeing statesman-pontiff Leo XIII, were welcomed by the German Catholics. Nevertheless, the efficient aid rendered by the clericals in securing the defeat of the inheritance taxes, and their willingness to join hands with the hated Junkers in levying unpopular excises, caused the Catholic working-men to turn to the Socialists in the recent election.

The middle-class parties are now at the turning point of

their history. Without a definite programme or even a definite tendency, timorous adherents of constitutionalism, the Liberals have ever been the ready allies of the Conservatives whenever needed to promote "national" interests, i. e., imperialism. For this reason, the once powerful party of Lasker, Falk and Richter has been constantly losing ground and is now reduced to a paltry 44 seats in the Reichstag. The middle classes, always the stout champions of constitutionalism in every land, out of fear of Socialism, have been willing to tolerate the half-veiled absolutism of the monarchy in Germany. But behind the monarchy was the landed aristocracy, whose economic interests are naturally hostile to those of capitalism,—with the result that the middle classes have been compelled to pay the piper for the tune called by the agrarians.

It is becoming increasingly evident that the bourgeois parties have realized the folly of such a course. Germany is now primarily an industrial, not an agrarian State. The task of the Liberals is, therefore, to displace the landed aristocracy from the position of being the governing element in the Empire. The Junkers out of the way, the Liberals hope to fall heir to the conservative sentiment of the country. To oust the aristocracy means the introduction of political reform in Germany. But, as history has shown, this cannot be accomplished except through an alliance of the middle and working classes. Many farsighted Liberals are shrewd enough to realize that a democratized Germany would, in the long run, redound to their benefit and not to the Socialists'. It would withdraw from the Socialist columns the large number of those who vote "red" in protest; and where would those votes go if not to the Liberals? The idea of a "Grossblok," or an all-Left combination "from Bassermann to Bebel" to oppose the Conservatives, is gaining force daily in German politics. It first took practical shape in 1906 in Baden, where the Social Democrats and Liberals joined forces and elected a majority to the local Diet. Uncompromising Socialists were greatly scandalized when the Baden members of the party actually voted for the budget. This was tantamount to a recognition of the "bourgeois State," so heartily execrated by all "true believers" in the gospel according to Marx.

During the Reichstag election, the friendliness between Liberals, Radicals and Socialists was too marked to escape notice. At the second ballotings there was a perfect understanding between these parties to vote for each other whenever possible. Ernest Bassermann himself was elected with the help of Socialist votes. The *Vossische Zeitung*, spokesman for large industrial interests, said that there was greater danger from the Conservatives and Centre than from the Socialists, and advised Liberals and Radicals to vote for Social Democrats at the second ballotings. The Socialist organ, the *Vorwärts*, advised coöperation with the bourgeois parties for the reason that, in spite of fundamental differences, the Liberals stood for a new era of political freedom and social well-being. Commenting on the election, the same paper declared that the Socialists had "supported the Liberals with all their power. We did it, not because we have any illusions about them. . . . We wished to give them a chance to make good their promises. It is now up to them. The Socialists, inside and outside of the Reichstag, will insistently demand the democratization of Germany, the betterment of conditions for the working class and the reform of taxation. We know that we can expect no help from the Liberals in our campaign against Imperialism, Protection or Colonial adventure. But the Liberals have stood for political freedom and social betterment. We shall hold them to their word."

Should the "Grossblok" idea take firm root, the huge Socialist party, so long condemned to political sterility, would become a powerful factor in reforming the government of Germany. For a time it was even a political advantage for the Social Democrats to hold fast to their doctrines and "protest." Many voted for them with perfect equanimity, knowing that they probably would not gain a majority; and, if by chance they did, the Government would find some way of circumventing them. Their very impotency attracted support. But new conditions bring new tactics even among German Socialists. They are, moreover, too sincerely devoted to political freedom to decide on a policy of obstructing reforms, long awaited and now at hand. The movement within the Socialist ranks, known as Revisionism, which aims to commit the party to progressive re-

form instead of to revolutionary dogmas, is sure to gain impetus from the recent election. The Social Democrats must accept Revision in practice. Whether they do so in theory or not may be safely left to the party metaphysicians to explain. A move to the Right is demanded by the Liberals as the price of coöperation. In their turn the latter are ready to move toward the Left to meet the Socialists half-way. From the recent election, there will probably emerge a new Social Democracy, a party chastened by victory, willing to listen to the Time Spirit and content to hold its larger programme in abeyance in order to aid in the work of political reform.

Among the many crying political evils in Germany, one of the most intolerable is the unjust distribution of seats. Something very close to a rotten borough system now exists in the Fatherland. The last apportionment was made in 1869, when one deputy was assigned to every 100,000 inhabitants. Since then, the population has increased from forty to sixty-five millions, and it has shifted from the country to the city, because of the rapid industrial development that has taken place in the Empire. These changes have made enormous differences in the number of people to each district, but the distribution of seats has continued to remain the same. There exist "giant" constituencies like Tetlow Charlottenburg with a population of 1,282,000 and "dwarf" constituencies like Schaumburg-Lippe, containing only 46,650 people, but each place sends one deputy to the Reichstag. In rural East Prussia 2,064,175 inhabitants send seventeen representatives, while Berlin's 2,071,557 send only six. It takes twice as many votes to elect one deputy in Berlin as it does to elect twelve in some parts of rural Germany. There exists the anomalous condition of a country that is economically, industrial, and politically, agrarian. Naturally the Conservatives, who come mainly from the country districts, are strongly opposed to a re-apportionment. Under the present unfair division, the parties of the Right received four and a half million votes and elected 197 members and the parties of the Left received seven and a half million votes and elected 202 members, a majority of only five seats. Well might the Conservatives say, "Give us the seats and we care not which party

gets the votes!" Writers on the American constitution have singularly failed to praise sufficiently the census provision, which requires a re-apportionment every ten years on the basis of population. In no country of Europe is representation as fair as in our own, in spite of occasional gerrymandering. Two of the most influential newspapers of Germany, the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and the *Berliner Tageblatt*, are at present conducting a campaign for a re-distribution of seats. The plan, favored by these journals, is to divide the 14,400,000 electors by 397, the present membership of the Reichstag, which will give 36,000; increase this figure by one-third of itself, and we get 48,000, which should be the legal unit of representation. The 74 districts that now have more than this should be re-divided and increased to 161, and the 33 that have less should be decreased to 24. This change would make the number of deputies in the Reichstag 475, which is not too large, as the English Parliament contains 670 members, the French Chamber of Deputies, 584, and the Austrian Reichsrath, 516. Under this change, Berlin would send fourteen instead of six to the Reichstag, Cologne, six instead of one, and Tetlow-Charlottenburg, nine instead of one. It is also urged that a new division of the Empire should include proportional representation, which is a growing idea in Europe at the present time.

The attitude of the landed aristocracy toward the great question of democracy in government is typical of their class at all times and in all places, being one of uncompromising hostility. Able, honest and progressive in a paternal sense, they are yet stubbornly opposed to placing the direction of the State in popular hands. Democracy, a platitude the world over, is still suspect in Germany. This was well expressed by Baron von Oldenburg, an influential Conservative leader, when he declared that the tradition in Germany was such that the Kaiser could, at any time, say to a lieutenant: "Take ten men and clear out the Reichstag." If the abnormal growth of Socialism means anything, it means that the chasm between the Government and people is constantly becoming wider and deeper. The Conservatives regard the Socialists as a dangerous nuisance, and the remedy they propose is simple: "Suppress them!" Their funds

should be confiscated, their leaders jailed, their meetings prohibited and their newspapers suppressed. As one Conservative, named Kroeher, put it, "Social Democrats should be solely the object, not the subject, of legislation." The *Kreuzzeitung*, an agrarian organ, more moderately desires that the system of universal suffrage for the Empire should be changed, on the ground that Germans are not ripe enough politically to use it with discretion. But such Bismarckian methods are not likely to be adopted against a party polling over one-third of the entire electorate. The radical *Berliner Tageblatt*, in reviewing the recent election, was moved to say that in all lands the governing parties become democratized, but in Germany, the Bureaucracy have no other cry against the Socialists than "Put them down!" This was a war against the symptoms and not against the disease, and the result is that only in Germany is Socialism so strong and so dogmatic. The feeling on the part of the Junkers that an aggressive stand on the Morocco question by the German Government would have resulted in a Conservative triumph at the polls was voiced by the *Post*. It complained that the powers of revolution were growing steadily and yet the Kaiser did not speak the *word*. His ambition to be known in history as a lover of peace is responsible for the present sad state of Germany. The Kaiser alone can save her by inspiring the Fatherland to new deeds of valor. The *Deutsche Tageszeitung*, another Conservative journal, bitterly denounced Chancellor von Bethmann-Hollweg because he had opposed the chauvinist Herr von Heydebrand in the Morocco affair. In other words, the Conservatives would willingly bring on a war, in the hope that the cry of patriotism would give a set-back to Socialism. A truly Russian method of checking the growth of democracy!

The ablest champion of Conservatism in the press is Professor Hans Delbrück, whose views differ widely from those of his party colleagues. Commenting on the recent election in the February issue of the *Preussische Jahrbücher*, he writes that "in a parliamentary State, such a change of votes would have meant the resignation of the Government. There is no question of such a thing happening in Germany, where many parties exist, none

of them ever strong enough to conduct the administration. At the same time those in control of the State should be in sympathy with the new political situation. If the Conservatives, instead of helping things along, put themselves in opposition, they will compel the Government to look to the Left for support By their attitude toward tax reform and the indefensible Prussian franchise, the Conservatives have sinned greatly and they should pay the penalty. A concession that would go a great way to conciliate public opinion would be the reform of the Prussian three-class franchise and the reapportionment of the Empire." The attitude of Professor Delbrück is significant, as he is known to be in the confidence of those in authority.

It is quite possible that the agrarians themselves may bring about parliamentary responsibility in order to protect their own interests. It was the Conservative-Centre "Blok" that passed the resolution chiding the Kaiser for his indiscreet interview with the London *Telegraph*, and declaring that, in future, he should speak only through the Chancellor on foreign affairs. It was the same "Blok" that forced the resignation of von Bülow because they defeated his inheritance tax bill. Again, recently, as a result of Germany's backdown in the Morocco dispute, a resolution was passed by the same parties to the effect, that henceforth, all treaties concerning colonial affairs should receive the assent of the Reichstag as well as of the Bundesrat. In all likelihood, the present Chancellor, Herr von Bethmann-Hollweg, will reintroduce the inheritance tax bill, which is bitterly opposed by the Conservatives and Centre. Its defeat may lead to his resignation, and incidentally to a second important precedent for ministerial responsibility.

Upon Kaiser Wilhelm, more than upon anyone else, depends whether Germany is to continue her peaceful evolution toward parliamentary government or whether she is to be driven into a political *cul-de-sac*. The German people have arrived at their political maturity. That is the plain lesson of the great overturn in the recent election. The Kaiser, for all his Romanticism, is a shrewd, practical man, thoroughly alive to the new current of things in Germany. To be estranged permanently from their

subjects is not a Hohenzollern tradition. It was an ancestor of the present Kaiser, Frederick William III, who, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, voluntarily introduced the principles of the French Revolution, and so transformed feudal Prussia into a modern State. Will his descendant transform Germany into a parliamentary State? Only time will tell.

THE DANCING SEAL

WILFRID WILSON GIBSON

WHEN we were building Skua Light—
The first men who had lived a night
Upon that deep-sea isle—
As soon as chisel touched the stone,
The friendly seals would come ashore;
And sit and watch us all the while,
As though they'd not seen men before;
And so, poor beasts, had never known
Men had the heart to do them harm.
They'd little cause to feel alarm
With us, for we were glad to find
Some friendliness in that strange sea;
Only too pleased to let them be,
And sit as long as they'd a mind
To watch us: for their eyes were kind
Like women's eyes, it seemed to me.

So, hour on hour, they sat: I think
They liked to hear the chisels' clink:
And when the boy sang loud and clear,
They scrambled closer in to hear;
And if he whistled sweet and shrill,
The queer beasts shuffled nearer still:
And every sleek and sheeny skin
Was mad to hear his violin.

When, work all over for the day,
He'd take his fiddle down and play
His merry tunes beside the sea,
Their eyes grew brighter and more bright,
And burned and twinkled merrily:
And as I watched them one still night,
And saw those eager sparkling eyes,
I felt those lively seals would rise