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**CONSERVATIVES CONTRA CHANCELLOR:
OFFICIAL RESPONSES TO THE SPECTRE OF CONSERVATIVE
DEMAGOGUERY FROM BISMARCK TO BÜLOW**

... [T]he development of the Conservative Party has a great and long-lasting significance for the fate of the Reich and for the monarchy. The form of all party relationships is influenced by it. — Whether the middle parties gravitate to the left or strengthen a starkly monarchist Right ... will perhaps be decided by the development of the Conservative situation at this moment. ... For my part I am only an instrument, and desire to be nothing more, for the rallying of the reasonable Conservative elements — to separate these from mindless demagoguery. ... [A]n unambiguous statement of position by the Kaiser ... will show the government a firm course and bring the Conservative Party back to order again.

—Otto von Helldorff to Philipp Eulenburg, 23 May 1892.¹

Past approaches to the history of Wilhelmine Germany have tended to set up dichotomous analytical categories like "manipulation from above" and "self-mobilization from below" which now serve polemicists better than they do the serious student of Germany's past. Yet recent work has derived a number of syntheses from these sets of contending methods. In this paper I will consider one of these syntheses by studying how the German Conservative Party (DKP) responded to political forces acting upon it both "from the top down" and "from the bottom up."

One of two equations which helped determine the Conservatives' *intermediate* position in political society was the relationship between the Conservative Party and the government of Imperial Germany. Hans-Jürgen Puhle has pointed to the estrangement between the agrarian-Conservative community and the Kaiser's government as the result of the rise of an independent and chauvinistic agrarian movement after 1893. Yet despite his substantial contribution to the history of the German Right, Puhle has been unable to define the actual nature of this relationship more precisely than to say that it was "quasi-oppositional" and that the agrarians and Conservatives "hovered" between the extremes of governmentalism and opposi-

¹I wish to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for its generous support. Quotation from J.C.G. Röhl, ed., *Philipp Eulenburgs Politische Korrespondenz* (hereafter Röhl, *Eulenburg*), 3 vols. (Boppard am Rhein, 1976-83), II, 877.

tion.² In the introduction to a new *Festschrift* for Fritz Fischer devoted entirely to German Conservatism, Fischer's former students reaffirm Puhle's basic formulation, although with a twist: they say the Conservatives "oscillated between the extremes of a status-bound old-conservative club of notables and a 'populist' mass-movement of the Right."³

On the other hand, writers of general histories of Germany still seem unwilling to accept Puhle's argument about the deep rift between agrarian Junkers and the Wilhelmine establishment. They continue to display a disturbing tendency to include in their thumbnail sketches of the Conservative Party unqualified statements about "those agrarian elites which commanded the Prusso-German political system" and about the "hegemony of Conservatives in executive position and the persistent deference to their parliamentary representatives."⁴

Now it is certainly true that important institutions of the Reich defended a *status quo* in state and society which bolstered the position of the Junkers in many ways: these included the Prussian bureaucracy, the Prussian army, and the Prussian three-class franchise. It is also correct that Conservatives often used their privileged access to the Kaiser, his court, and his leading ministers to influence government decision-making on specific issues. Yet historians have skated over the interesting questions about the "conservative" nature of the German establishment.⁵ Indeed, the questions have rarely been asked. That is why the complexities and contradictions in the DKP's relationship with the Imperial government must be re-examined, to move beyond imprecise statements about a "Conservative hegemony" in society and politics. Did Germany's chancellors or the leaders of other elites ever seriously contemplate a full break from the Conservative Party? Or did they immediately submit when the agrarians threatened to withdraw their support from the government? How did they react, in specific cases, to the trend within the party toward opposition and uncompromising agrarian interest politics? Was the Conservative Party a stabilizing factor in Imperial politics: did it successfully "hover" between Wilhelm's ministers and the masses, between governmentalism and opposition? Or was it a

²H.-J. Puhle, *Agrarische Interessenpolitik und preussischer Konservatismus im wilhelminischen Reich, 1893-1914* (Bonn-Bad Godesberg, 2nd rev. ed. 1975), pp. 204, 212.

³D. Stegmann, B.-J. Wendt, and P.-C. Witt (eds.), *Deutscher Konservatismus im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert. Festschrift für Fritz Fischer* (Bonn, 1983), p. vii.

⁴V. Berghahn, *Germany and the Approach of War in 1914* (London, Basingstoke, 1973), p. 12; D. Schoenbaum, *Zabern 1913* (London, 1982), p. 34.

⁵Notable exceptions are essays by P.-C. Witt and B. Vogel in the *Festschrift* cited above.

destabilizing factor: did it "oscillate" between two extreme courses?

In an attempt to answer these questions it is worth noting first that the list of those who declared an allegiance to, or wished to work with, "enlightened", "healthy", or "reasonable" Conservatism is a very long one indeed. The line of chancellors who attempted to detach moderate Conservatives from their intransigent party colleagues extends unbroken from Otto von Bismarck, who sought a "middle-party" grouping in the 1880's, to Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, who practised the "politics of the diagonal" after 1909. Since this essay cannot consider the full range of such attempts, it will focus on three occasions when the government's strategy to deal with Conservative opposition was especially problematic (and therefore revealing): the DKP's Tivoli party congress in 1892, the *Mittelland* Canal dispute from 1899 to 1905, and the finance reform crisis of 1909.

The second equation which determined the middle position of the DKP was the relationship between the Conservative Party leaders and forces "below" them. Leaving aside the radical nationalists studied by Geoff Eley, none of whom displayed a sustained faith in party politics *per se*, one can identify three groups of rank-and-file popularizers who sought to broaden the popular base of the Conservative Party and make it a "People's Party."⁶ The first was the so-called "*Kreuzzeitung* group." The second was the Farmers' League (*Bund der Landwirte*, or BdL). The third was the collection of dissidents within the party who attempted to rally DKP opinion for Bernhard von Bülow's finance reform bill in 1909 and to mobilize urban Conservatives against their intransigent party leaders in the Reichstag. This movement found its clearest expression in the short-lived "Conservative Union."

I have previously examined these groups' strategies for Conservative popularity and how these campaigns in turn highlighted the problem of political participation within both the party and the Reich.⁷ This is not to say that a true social history of Conservative politics from below has yet emerged. More study must be undertaken into the organizational and programmatic idiosyncrasies of local Conservative associations before a complete topography of internal DKP relations,

⁶G. Eley, *Reshaping the German Right. Radical Nationalism and Political Change after Bismarck* (New Haven and London, 1980).

⁷See my "Conservative Popularizers and Political Participation in Late Nineteenth-Century Germany," unpublished paper, Stanford, 1984, and my 1983 Oxford D.Phil. thesis, "Reformist Conservatism and Political Mobilization: A Study of Factionalism and Movements for Reform within the German Conservative Party, 1876 to 1914," forthcoming as *Notables of the Right: The Conservative Party and Political Mobilization in Germany, 1876 to 1918*, Boston: George Allen and Unwin, 1986.

regional strength, and electoral support can be drawn. In particular, collective biography offers a useful way to identify common political denominators among a broad range of social and intellectual backgrounds within the Conservative milieu.

In the meantime, however, the connection between internal party controversies and the DKP-government relationship cannot be ignored, even in this paper where the focus is on official reactions to Conservative demagoguery. Because the government was continually trying to exploit disunity within Conservative ranks, it cannot be studied in isolation. Therefore, each of the three sections that follow will be introduced by analyses of the battles won and lost by popularizers and their critics within the Conservative Party. This will remind us of the significance of the "moderate" Conservatives who retained considerable influence in the top party organs and who did not wish to commit themselves fully to either governmentalism or demagoguery. Moreover, an examination of these pressures from above and below can help us gauge the relative strength of "elitist" and "popular" forces working at specific times to change the Conservative Party's position in the political hierarchy. For, as David Blackbourn has noted, focusing on the political parties themselves combines both perspectives and helps account for instabilities in the Wilhelmine system: "The political parties have [been] . . . neglected, occupying rather a blank space between the wire-pullers of government and the functionaries of the various pressure groups and *Verbände*. . . . It was the parties, however, which acted as the essential mediators of change."⁸

As a final note, it seems that the paradoxes of a "loyal Conservative opposition" can best be explored by reproducing as faithfully as possible the language of contemporaries. Adjectives like "democratic" and "demagogic" were used on all sides to vilify opponents' tactics, while government figures often had to reach for extended metaphors to express their outrage at the Conservative Party. Yet this language did not compel contemporaries to recognize their own ambiguous reactions to Conservative-government conflict. These catchwords, one might say, identified the party's middle position between forces above and below them, but they did not help resolve the DKP's basic dilemma: how to reconcile traditional elite influence with a program of political mobilization. Therefore, attention to language can offer insights into the complexity of party-state relations in pre-1914 Germany.

After the Conservative Party's founding in 1876, the chief

⁸David Blackbourn, *Class, Religion and Local Politics in Wilhelmine Germany. The Centre Party in Württemberg before 1914* (New Haven and London, 1980), p. 11.

proponent of an essentially anti-popular brand of Conservative politics was the overall party chairman and leader of the DKP's Reichstag caucus, Otto von Helldorff-Bedra. Helldorff's power within the Conservative Party derived largely from his close personal contacts with the Kaiser, Bismarck, and the leaders of the other two establishment parties in Bismarck's "Kartell," the National Liberals and Free Conservatives. He also enjoyed good relations with the pro-Conservative agrarian interest group, the Association of Tax- and Economic Reformers. With this backing, Helldorff's negative attitude toward internal party democracy prevailed during the 1880's.

Even before the party was a decade old, however, the dissident *Kreuzzeitung* faction had appeared. It was led by the editor of the Conservatives' most respected newspaper, the *Kreuzzeitung*, Baron Wilhelm von Hammerstein, and by the leader of the Berlin-based, anti-Semitic Christian Social Party, Court Preacher Adolf Stöcker. Behind these men stood a number of influential members of the Prussian Landtag, of Bismarck's state ministry, and of the Prussian army's general staff. The rapid expansion of the DKP's organization and press after 1876 had also created a corps of sympathetic Conservative activists and newspaper editors, especially in Berlin and the western provinces.⁹

This *Kreuzzeitung* group suggested that Helldorff's reliance on official favour and concentration on influence-seeking in Berlin were shutting the Conservatives off from new political allies. It brewed a powerful concoction of left-wing and right-wing ideals, with which, long before Bismarck fell from power, it had poisoned the two arrows it readied for its anti-Helldorff bow. These were anti-Semitic appeals to artisans, small shopkeepers, and other members of the *Mittelstand*; and demands for a break with Helldorff's traditional, patrician style of politics. In 1883, a west-German contributor to the *Konservative Monatsschrift* indicated how impatient some rank-and-file members of the party were becoming with Helldorff's leadership. He demanded the appointment of "completely independent" men within the growing Conservative Party apparatus, and he noted "how deeply the feeling has become rooted in the west and south of our Fatherland that the Conservative Party is merely a government party. . . . Here one has even less understanding and sympathy for ministerial absolutism than anywhere else."¹⁰ As long as Bismarck ruled, however, Hammerstein and Stöcker could not transform this loose collection of reformers and malcontents into a cohesive force for change within the party, and so could not undermine Helldorff's position completely. There was a general unwillingness among the

⁹Details in my "Reformist Conservatism," Ch. 3.

¹⁰*Konservative Monatsschrift*, 40 (2), (1883), 124-28.

Conservative old-guard to embrace radically anti-liberal or anti-Semitic policies.

In March 1890, Hammerstein's and Stöcker's formula for popular mobilization against National Liberal policies and against Helldorff's brand of governmentism acquired an essential ingredient which immeasurably increased its potency: the dismissal of Bismarck from the Reich chancellery. The effect of Bismarck's departure on Conservative-government relations can hardly be over-emphasized. For, within three years, the *Kreuzzeitung* group had drowned out voices of caution within the Conservative party, mobilized disenchanted Conservative associations in the provinces, ousted Helldorff, and poisoned relations between the DKP and Bismarck's successor, Leo von Caprivi.¹¹

The peak of this upheaval within the DKP was reached at the Tivoli party congress in December 1892. When the Conservatives met in the Tivoli brewery to revise their official program, it was an unprecedentedly tumultuous affair.¹² Stöcker's Christian Socials and other rabble-rousing anti-Semites dominated the day's proceedings. Stöcker's subsequently famous description was not far off the mark: "[Tivoli] was not a party congress in black tails and white gloves but in street clothes. This was the Conservative Party in the era of general and equal suffrage."¹³ Indeed, the medium was the message: one speaker at the congress rose to demand that Conservative leaders become "a little more 'demagogic'," though not "in the bad sense," as he put it, but rather "in the good sense." The most radical breaks with tradition at Tivoli — decried in absence by Helldorff — came on two points of the new program. One of these refused to condemn the excesses of the independent anti-Semitic groups, which had been intensifying their agitation and radicalizing their programs since the late 1870's. The other significantly moderated the Conservatives' previously whole-hearted endorsement of the use of state force against the adherents of Social Democracy.

Before examining the official responses to Tivoli, it is important to note that the congress not only had a highly significant pre-history, but also served as a potent symbol of *Kreuzzeitung*-group strength within the party for the next three years. In fact the traditional lines of

¹¹For background information see G. Eley, "Anti-Semitism, Agrarian Mobilization, and the Crisis in the Conservative Party: Radicalism and Containment in the Foundation of the *Bund der Landwirte*, 1892-1893" (hereafter "Radicalism and Containment"), to appear in John C. Fout (ed.), *Politics, Parties and the Authoritarian State: Imperial Germany 1871-1918* (New York: Holmes and Meier, forthcoming 1985); and D. Blackbourn, "Peasants and Politics in Germany, 1871-1914," in *European History Quarterly*, 14 (1984), 47-75.

¹²See the *Stenographischer Bericht über den allgemeinen konservativen Parteitag gehalten am 8. Dezember 1892 zu Berlin* (Berlin, 1893).

¹³Cited in P. Massing, *Rehearsal for Destruction* (New York, 1949), p. 64.

authority within the DKP were being questioned and in some cases redrawn even before Bismarck's dismissal, and this process continued until Stöcker's resignation from the Conservative Party in February 1896. In 1889 the *Kreuzzeitung* group had engineered a reorganization of the party's Committee of Eleven, which denied Helldorff's followers in the Reichstag caucus a majority on the DKP's top policy-formation body. In the following years a number of other individuals and groups expanded this assault on Helldorff into a broader onslaught against the "politics of notables." The Protestant pastors and small farmers of the Minden-Ravensberg area of Westphalia, for example, supported the editor of their local newspaper, Hermann Lange, when in 1892 he campaigned for the inclusion of more editors and middle-class Conservatives on the DKP's executive committees.¹⁴ This campaign, after Tivoli, resulted in the formation of an expanded executive group, the Committee of Fifty, with representatives from each province and state in Germany. Similarly dissatisfied with unpopular party leaders, Rhineland Conservatives met in 1893 to found an independent party organization in their province, hoping thereby to relieve themselves of the odium of co-operation with National Liberal and Free Conservative groups who had failed to win the allegiance of industrial workers and members of the *Mittelstand*.¹⁵ The "Bürger Associations" of Berlin Conservatives, composed mainly of officials, retired army officers, and small businessmen, were rallied in 1894 by leading Christian Social editors to oppose the Kaiser's extreme new anti-Socialist bill and his alleged plan for a *coup d'état* from above.¹⁶ A number of Pomeranian pastors did not shrink in 1895 from encouraging rural labourers to organize themselves in their battle with reactionary estate-owners, while early the next year the organ of the "German Society of Nobles" condemned the party leadership's "furtive opportunism" and "that foolish idea of the *Kartell*."¹⁷ The *Deutsche Adelsblatt* scoffed at the idea, so long endorsed by Helldorff and his allies in the party, that "the social question could be solved with political alliances or through police and the state prosecutor!"¹⁸ A Thuringian Conservative also advocated greater DKP independence: "The seeking of favour from above is much more dangerous than the quest for favour from the people. Both are destructive of character, Byzantinism and demagoguery, but the former is worse."¹⁹

¹⁴*Neue Westfälische Volkszeitung* cited by the *Reichsbote*, 6 August 1892.

¹⁵*Kölnische Volkszeitung*, 7 October 1893; *Reichsbote*, 8 October 1893.

¹⁶See my "Reformist Conservatism," pp. 182-84, and J. A. Schmitz, "Die christlich-soziale Bewegung und der Kampf gegen den Umsturz 1894-95" (diss., Cologne, 1938).

¹⁷The Pomeranian Conservatives issued a brochure entitled *Für unsere Landarbeiter. Eine freundliche Bitte an Besitzer und Geistliche* (Stettin, 1895).

¹⁸*Deutsches Adelsblatt*, 9 February 1896.

¹⁹Cited in *Das Volk*, 23 February 1896.

Many Conservative associations in these and other provinces reacted with horror at the news of the final split between Christian Socialism and the Conservative Party in early 1896. The Bavarians' *Süddeutsche Landpost* probably expressed this reaction most forcefully: "What are we to do in Bavaria? If the Conservative Party proceeds on the path it has chosen, we will have to face the serious question . . . whether we are to become a conservative court-party or a conservative people's party."²⁰

It is not too much to say that in the period 1890-96 these agitators, editors, and rank-and-file members together succeeded in questioning some very basic assumptions about the character and future development of the Conservative Party. We know that the radical restructuring of the party's organization and the reorientation of its policy advocated by these reformers did not happen. Tivoli represented the high tide, not just the first wave, of *Kreuzzeitung*-group victories. Yet the fact remains that throughout the period 1890-96 there was undoubtedly the *perception* in both party and government that a dramatic change of course might be in store for the DKP. Therefore, in the light of the alleged watershed for Conservative-government relations which historians have ascribed exclusively to the formation of the Farmers' League in February 1893, the perceived threat of Conservative demagoguery in December 1892 is not trivial at all.²¹

A number of studies have made us familiar with the Kaiser's entourage of advisers, courtiers, and hunting companions.²² These studies have generally focused on Wilhelm's most intimate friend, Count Philipp zu Eulenburg-Hertefeld, and his so-called "Liebenberg Circle." But most members of the Liebenberg Circle cared little for party politics, and their latent anti-Semitic views did not incline them to comment on the upheaval within the DKP in 1892. However, Philipp Eulenburg did correspond regularly with a number of government figures and political observers who offered counsel to Wilhelm on the problem of the Tivoli Conservatives. Among these were Helldorff; Caprivi; Caprivi's State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Baron Adolf Marschall von Bieberstein, as well as the later Foreign

²⁰Cited in D. Oertzen, *Adolf Stöcker*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1910), II, 386.

²¹Eley correctly observes in "Radicalism and Containment" that Puhle's view of events in February 1893 "ignores the main dilemma of official Conservatives, who were forced to face two ways: to reconcile opposition to the trade treaties with received governmental assumptions . . . [and] at the same time to cope with the equal novelty of an independent agrarian mobilization beyond their political control."

²²Including I. Hull, *The Entourage of Kaiser Wilhelm II* (Cambridge, 1982) and the collection of essays edited by J. C. G. Röhl and N. Sombart, *Kaiser Wilhelm II. New Interpretations* (Cambridge, 1983).

Secretary, Alfred von Kiderlen-Wächter; the councillor in the Foreign Office who was often critical of Wilhelm's attempt at personal rule, Friedrich von Holstein; the future chancellor, Bülow; and the Berlin correspondent of the National Liberal *Kölnische Zeitung*, Dr. Franz Fischer. Together, these observers reacted strongly to the growth of dissent and demagoguery in the DKP: they drew a direct connection between radicalism within the party and a larger campaign against stable party alignments, domestic peace, and the monarchy itself.

The strongest expressions of indignation and bewilderment voiced by Eulenburg's correspondents came in the wake of Tivoli; but steps had been taken long before the congress to support Helldorff and his cause within the Conservative Party. Eulenburg, for instance, was particularly relieved when Helldorff resumed his leadership of the Conservatives' Reichstag caucus in December 1890 after victory in a by-election. He wrote to Holstein: "Men like Helldorff are priceless now, and hopefully he will succeed with an assault on the . . . thick-headedness of the Conservatives. . . ."²³ Yet Holstein wrote to Eulenburg in May 1891 with more than a hint of desperation:

Helldorff is being pursued with the most extreme bitterness by the followers of Bismarck . . . because of his relation to the Kaiser. The Kaiser, if he wants to have support, must advance his friends and push back his opponents. Therefore I strongly advise that Helldorff be made *Oberpräsident* in Saxony. . . .²⁴

By the end of April 1892, Helldorff had been relieved of his title as party chairman. Quickly the task of rallying moderate Conservatives was transferred to the new Minister President of Prussia, Botho Eulenburg. Bülow hoped that Philipp Eulenburg's cousin would be able to turn around the Conservatives, without whom "Prussia cannot in the long run be governed, . . . or at least not well." As Bülow wrote to Philipp Eulenburg: "The Conservatives against the government — and against the crown, indeed — will ruin one another. Government and Conservatives . . . must remain together and tolerate each other, like man and woman in marriage."²⁵

Given the cumulative effect of the victories the *Kreuzzeitung* group had won in the first half-decade of Wilhelm's reign, it is hardly surprising that the official response to Tivoli was extreme. Broadly speaking, Eulenburg and his main correspondents in this crisis

²³Röhl, *Eulenburg*, I, 617, P. Eulenburg to Holstein, 25 December 1890. In 1901 Eulenburg elaborated on the metaphor: "The thick-headedness of our Junkers has something bullish about it. For breeding and in battle — that is, in war — tremendous. In the stalls of culture, . . . unsteerable, unruly. They do not recognize the dangers, and therefore will act accordingly in the canal question." Bundesarchiv Koblenz (BA Koblenz), P. Eulenburg Papers, 57, p. 23ff., P. Eulenburg to Bülow, 1 March 1901.

²⁴Röhl, *Eulenburg*, I, 683, letter of 23 May 1891.

²⁵Röhl, *Eulenburg*, II, 867f., letter of 18 May 1892.

identified five main dangers lying along the political path the Conservative Party seemed to have chosen at Tivoli. These were the elimination of governmental moderates and older parliamentarians from positions of influence in the party leadership; the benefit of this to Bismarck or other *frondeurs*, and the reciprocal loss of authority which the Kaiser would suffer; as a corollary to this, the future instability of the Wilhelmine alliance between the three most dependable state-supporting parties, and the effect this disruption would have on such "national" legislation as the Army Bill of 1893; the transformation of the Conservative Party into a group of radical anti-Semites; and — again closely tied to this — the advance of demagoguery and the revolutionary potential of any appeal to mass sentiments or radical means of agitation.²⁶ Let us examine these five dangers in turn.

The courageous party men who spoke out against anti-Semitism at the congress, and who were also welcome at the Kaiser's court, received almost universal praise from Holstein and the Eulenburgs. Holstein, for example, complained that some of Eulenburg's Conservative East Prussian relatives "were ridiculed and laid into as 'twaddlers'." The consensus — as expressed by Helldorff — was that the Conservatives had capitulated to "the mob" on 8 December. Holstein wrote: "The Conservative parliamentarians have the feeling that they have surrendered the leadership to 'the clubs.' Many to whom I spoke are hanging their heads."

Wilhelm's advisers saw Tivoli benefiting Bismarck directly, particularly since in December 1892 rumours of a new Bismarckian "National Party" were filling the pages of the political press.²⁷ Kiderlen-Wächter referred to the intrigues of the National Party when he observed to Philipp Eulenburg: "And people call themselves conservative . . ., who wish to found a party of 'dissatisfied ones' and talk of an 'absolutist' regime. Mutton-heads — in any case . . .!" — and then completed the thought with a drawing of two animals.

Only three days after Tivoli, Helldorff wrote to Eulenburg to express his doubts about the wisdom of introducing an important Army Bill to the Reichstag "at the high point of the movement which has established Bismarck's oppositional position." Nor was Kiderlen

²⁶To avoid excessive footnoting, a general reference is required at this point. The discussion below refers to observations made in the following correspondence from December 1892; BA Koblenz, Eulenburg Papers, 22, p. 792, P. Eulenburg to his mother, 15 December 1892; Röhl, *Eulenburg*, II, 988-98, including Helldorff to P. Eulenburg, 11 December 1892, Holstein to P. Eulenburg, 12, 13, 16 December 1892; Kiderlen to P. Eulenburg, 12, 18 December 1892; Fischer to P. Eulenburg, 12 December 1892; P. Eulenburg to Kaiser Wilhelm, 17 December 1892 and 9 January 1893 (p. 1181).

²⁷Founding proclamation (draft) with Bismarck's marginalia, correspondence, and press clippings, in BA Koblenz, O. v. Bismarck Papers, Bestand A, 69, "Presse 1890-94," f. 795 ff.

alone in believing that "the most dangerous — the only dangerous — opposition is that which will be made by Varzin [Bismarck's estate], Altona [Alfred von Waldersee's residence], and Hammerstein in the *Kreuzzeitung*. . . ."

In explaining the particularly important fourth and fifth motifs found in government critiques of Tivoli, one must remember that these observers were far more interested in combating the revolutionary *form* of the anti-Semitic movement than they were in protecting the rights of the Jews. In fact, there is a clear parallel between the situation in 1892 and the reaction to anti-Semitism in the early 1880's, when Bismarck complained of the socialist, not the anti-Semitic, aspect of Stöcker's agitation in Berlin. To be sure, letters from 1892 between Helldorff, Eulenburg, and Wilhelm indicate that they were not free of anti-Semitic prejudice. Nevertheless, these men sought to proceed with this "awkward question" with "as little noise as possible."

It was precisely these latent anti-Semitic convictions within the Wilhelmine establishment and the notion that the anti-Semitic movement could be steered into non-radical channels that led a number of moderates within the Conservative Party to go along with the *Kreuzzeitung* group. Even Helldorff's successor as party chairman, Otto von Manteuffel-Crossen, admitted that he had hoped to take the wind out of the anti-Semites' sails with the new DKP program. Otto Toppel, chief editor of the independent but (at that time) strongly conservative *Tägliche Rundschau*, wrote to Caprivi on 14 December to protest against the chancellor's Reichstag speech of two days earlier against the Tivoli Conservatives.²⁸ Toppel claimed that in its effort to direct anti-Semitism into a monarchical path the DKP would act only with "honour" and "loyalty." He added that, if the Conservative Party had become conscious earlier of its duty to take up the Jewish question, "the anti-Semitic movement in its present dimensions would have been an impossibility." Toppel felt that the Conservatives' recent passivity benefited the anti-Semitic — "and also the democratic" — movements. He concluded: "I believe that the charge of demagoguery, which has deeply offended wide circles of Conservatives, has been unjustly levelled."

Eulenburg's correspondents disagreed vehemently, despite their own ambivalence on the Jewish question. Holstein wrote despairingly to Eulenburg:

The Reich Chancellor had asked His Majesty to express to the Conservatives his disapproval of the demagogic tone of the party congress. Instead of this His Majesty called over Manteuf-

²⁸BA Koblenz and Zentrales Staatsarchiv Potsdam (ZStA I), Reichskanzlei Akten (Rkz.), 680, f. 443 ff.

fel when they next met and said laughingly to him: "You and your friends should all be hanged!" Naturally Manteuffel regarded that as no censure. His Majesty has not yet recognized the gravity of the situation.

Helldorff tried to convey an equally strong message to Eulenburg and, through him, to Wilhelm. "We are faced with a frightful brutalization of public opinion," he wrote; "all true foundations of social order, the crown, [and] the Reich are in the greatest danger. . . . In the end, this movement is the certain seed of Social Democracy." Franz Fischer of the *Kölnische Zeitung* agreed. He claimed that the Conservatives' unwillingness to censure anti-Semitic excesses at Tivoli signified "the acceptance of demagoguery in Conservatism, the mixing of fire and water, out of which nothing good can come, either for the party or the state."

Philipp Eulenburg often regarded it as his special task to pass along to the Kaiser opinions and warnings from Holstein, Helldorff, and others in very diluted form. Yet he gave no sign of believing that these observers were indulging in hyperbole, even though he described the Conservatives in childish terms: "They are sticking their tongues out at all of us — even Your Majesty!" Otherwise, Eulenburg was deadly serious about the danger presented by anti-Semitic agitation against large landowners and the Conservatives' blindness in not recognizing that danger. "The Social Democrats," he wrote, "are making way for the anti-Semites, because they are clever enough to recognize in them the pioneers of their own interests." The ideal of authority was being taken from the rural population, Eulenburg felt, by the anti-Semites in a "singing match" with the Social Democrats. If Wilhelm failed to make a decisive move, Eulenburg concluded, "the monarchical principle would be shaken to its foundations." The Kaiser would become a "*roi des gueux*."

This essay is not the appropriate place to consider the complicated events of 1893-96 which led governmental Conservatives and members of the Kaiser's circle to transfer their antagonism against the independent anti-Semites to the increasingly leftist Christian Social faction within the DKP.²⁹ However, a distinct line of continuity can be drawn between government reactions to Tivoli in December 1892, the Kaiser's anti-Socialist campaign for "Religion, Morality, and Order" in September 1894, and the role played by a Conservative-government *rapprochement* in encouraging the Conservative executive to break with Stöcker in February 1896. Wilhelm was certainly forgetting his own early enthusiasm for Christian Socialism when he declared in 1896 that "Stöcker has ended just as I predicted years ago." Yet, from the moment that radical Conservatism

²⁹See my "Reformist Conservatism," Chs. 6 and 7.

appeared as a major factor in German politics, Wilhelm's policy was (by his standards) a constant one. In May 1892, immediately after the *Kreuzzeitung* group had overthrown Helldorff, Philipp Eulenburg reported a conversation he had had with the Kaiser.³⁰ Wilhelm and Eulenburg agreed it was a disgrace "that men who claim to belong to a party loyal to the king do not meet the wishes of their monarch." The Kaiser, Eulenburg reported, "only seeks to strengthen the party on an up-to-date basis, through the invigoration of the *moderate* elements." Eulenburg then quoted Wilhelm's typically indignant remarks that the Conservatives were still professing ignorance of his support for the "middle parties." Wilhelm had declared:

This is the sense in which I have *always* spoken to . . . the Conservatives, and made the greatest effort in doing so. Each individual Conservative *knows* that, and it is *malevolence* if one claims otherwise. In any case I look gloomily into the future of the party. The subjugation of the moderate elements under the yoke of the extreme wing will destroy the whole party. It has *itself* to blame. It is a mystery to me how reasonable, orderly people can stand under the influence of a Hammerstein press. They are rushing to their ruin with their eyes open.

To probe more deeply what Wilhelm identified here as the "mystery" of Conservative opposition, the second part of this paper will begin with a discussion of the underlying tensions between the Conservative Party and the Farmers' League in the period 1893-1905, prefacing a study of official responses to the Canal Bill crises.

The immediate impetus for the founding of the Farmers' League in February 1893 was the need to organize the agrarian sector to defeat Caprivi's Reichstag legislation reducing tariffs on foreign grains entering Germany. The League failed in its initial objective: between 1891 and 1894 each of Caprivi's trade treaty bills was supported by Wilhelm and approved by parliament. During and after these parliamentary set-backs, certain elements within the Conservative Party and the BdL offered significantly different appraisals of the Conservative-government relationship.

To exploit disagreements between Farmers' League agitators and governmental Conservative parliamentarians, Caprivi had a number of weapons at his disposal. One was the use of Conservative leaders like Count Udo zu Stolberg-Wernigerode, who as *Oberpräsident* of East Prussia reported on and encouraged DKP dissent from the BdL in his province.³¹ The government, Stolberg declared, had never

³⁰BA Koblenz, Eulenburg Papers, 19, pp. 356ff., P. Eulenburg to Kiderlen, 25 May 1892.

³¹See BA Koblenz, *Rkz.* 416-18, for the extensive reports Stolberg regularly sent the chancellor.

before "struck sail before such an opposition, which is not based upon real foundations but rather upon the egoism of the leaders and the stupidity of the followers." He also described a "scarcely believable agitation" by the Farmers' League, designed to ensure that pro-treaty sentiment in East Prussia not be expressed.³²

In the Russian trade treaty crisis of 1893-94, Caprivi did not have to rely on Stolberg exclusively. Against the most outspoken agrarians he considered or actually began proceedings on the charge of *lèse majesté*.³³ To strike at Prussian officials who agitated on behalf of the BdL, he pressed Botho Eulenburg to issue a decree in late December 1893, "recalling" Bismarck's own decree of 1882 which forbade Prussian officials from acting contrary to the wishes of the crown.³⁴ By exploiting the symbol of the monarchy to his own advantage, Caprivi was clearly acting in line with the beliefs of the Kaiser and his advisers that Conservatives had to be reminded of their obligation to support the king and his ministers. At a parliamentary dinner, Wilhelm declared that he had no wish to go to war with Russia simply because of "a hundred stupid Junkers." This declaration gave one East Prussian Conservative deputy, who was also personally close to Wilhelm, an excuse to convene a local assembly of his voters; this assembly released him from his Farmers' League pledge, and he then broke with his caucus to vote for Caprivi's treaty. When Wilhelm learned this, he cabled him immediately with the message: "Bravo! Well done like a nobleman!"³⁵

When Caprivi finally won passage of the Russian trade treaty in March 1894, the official Farmers' League newssheet claimed that the German farmer was "now inclined . . . to see the Kaiser as his political enemy."³⁶ At this point many Conservatives were indeed in agreement with the radical agrarians that their first priority was to take revenge for the reduction of tariffs and topple Caprivi. This task they achieved — though certainly not by themselves — in October 1894. In the months and years ahead, however, moderate Conservatives disavowed agrarian radicalism with increasing frequency.

This dissent was led by the *Reichsbote's* editor, Heinrich Engel.³⁷

³²See *ibid.*, 418, f. 93ff., 133ff., Stolberg to Caprivi, 20, 29 December 1893, and BA Koblenz, Eulenburg Papers, 25, pp. 432-34, Stolberg to P. Eulenburg, 4 November 1893.

³³The title of this essay was suggested by the brochure published by the radical south-German agrarian leader, Baron Karl von Thüngen-Rosbach: *Thüngen contra Caprivi. Verteidigungsschrift* (Würzburg, 6th ed. 1894).

³⁴Caprivi-Eulenburg correspondence in BA Koblenz, Rkz. 418, *passim*.

³⁵See the *Reichsbote* and *Kreuzzeitung*, both 4 March 1894.

³⁶*Korrespondenz des Bundes der Landwirte* cited in the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, 18 April 1894.

³⁷One would need far more space than is available here to explore fully the many contradictions and inconsistencies in Engel's response to Conservative opposition.

Engel voiced the sentiments of Conservatives who feared a break with the government when he wrote as early as March 1894 that dissatisfaction among farmers and artisans must be channelled back within proper limits. He claimed that "opposition in principle" and the "tactic of arousing and exploiting dissatisfaction and mistrust among the masses" were dangerous new features of agrarian radicalism that did the work of democrats, anti-Semites, and Socialists.³⁸

By the summer of 1894, many Conservatives thought agrarian ambitions threatened their party itself, and this concern persisted. The DKP's party organ, the *Konservative Korrespondenz*, noted that in the Reichstag elections of 1893 the Farmers' League had supported some candidates who ran against Conservatives: "Our party members . . . will do well, despite all sympathy for the Farmers' League, *not to lose sight of this fact*, and to concentrate their whole energy on the building of our own Conservative organizations. . . ."³⁹ On the eve of a joint Conservative-Farmers' League congress in late 1896, the *Kreuzzeitung* highlighted the two groups' divergent political aims:⁴⁰ "The direction of the League is a purely agrarian one. . . . Only the Conservatives follow other goals in their program." In reply, the agrarian *Deutsche Tageszeitung* gave vent to the Farmers' League's frustration with timid Conservative notables in parliament. It wrote that "when the *individual* wants to do something in the Reichstag, the *caucus* enters, fearful that it could lose control over this individual, that he could embarrass it or disturb it too much from its inactivity." The BdL's message was clear: it would employ radical extra-parliamentary agitation to outflank governmental Conservatism.

These arguments illustrate that the continuing tension between Conservatives and radical agrarians was generated in part by the relative accessibility to the government and the Kaiser's court enjoyed by DKP notables, and the relative isolation of the Farmers' League's leaders. The moderates in the DKP felt that their first allegiance was to the Conservative Party, not its agrarian interest group. Unwilling to concede fully the principle of the imperative mandate — as with the East Prussian nobleman's defection on the Russian vote — this group wished to set limits to BdL extremism. This reinforced their claim that the party, not the auxiliary organization, was responsible for attracting the broadest possible range of

³⁸*Reichsbote*, 20 March 1894.

³⁹Cited in the *Reichsbote*, 23 June 1894.

⁴⁰By this point Hammerstein had resigned as editor of the *Kreuzzeitung* amid scandal. For the following, see press reviews in *Germania*, 25 October 1896, *Reichsbote*, 15 October 1896, and *Kölnische Volkszeitung*, 27 November and 24 December 1896.

electoral support, winning tactical advantages in parliament, and providing the fullest defence of the established order.

This distinction made by contemporaries helps explain the persistence of DKP-BdL tensions through the Canal Bill crises of 1899-1905. Of course one must be careful here not to exaggerate the scope of this factional conflict. Relative to other alliances and party groupings in the Kaiserreich, the Conservative-agrarian community remained a surprisingly cohesive force on the Right, winning important concessions from the government on many economic and political reforms which threatened "Junker interests." As well, the impact of concurrent parliamentary battles and changes of leadership in both the party and the government must always be kept in view. In this regard the bitter BdL-DKP conflict in December 1902 over the Bülow tariffs, which almost precipitated a full break between the agrarians and the moderate Conservatives, is especially important.⁴¹ In the wake of that crisis Bülow was able to exploit the failure of the BdL's plan to field its own candidates in the Reichstag elections of June 1903, playing upon rising Conservative fears about unprecedented Socialist strength in parliament. Nevertheless, even a relatively narrow study of the Canal Bill crisis illuminates some interesting features of the latent DKP-BdL conflict of interest.

The *Mittelland* Canal Bill of 1899, introduced into the Prussian House of Deputies where the strongest Conservative caucus sat, proposed the building of a ship canal from the Ruhr industrial area of western Germany to the Elbe river in the east.⁴² The government argued that the canal would contribute to industrial expansion and national integration. The agrarians, on the other hand, claimed that the canal would open the floodgates to foreign grain imports and further enrich the Ruhr industrial basin.

During the plenary debates which preceded the Landtag's final rejection of the first Canal Bill on 18 August 1899, the DKP and the BdL retained a surprisingly united front, considering their mutual suspicions in previous years. Yet the *Konservative Korrespondenz* was conspicuously eager to show that the majority of Conservatives had not fallen under the sway of the BdL in voting against the bill. The *Reichsbote* had in fact advised Conservatives to make a "royal sacrifice" and submit to the will of their king, and pro-Canal sentiments were expressed by Conservative press organs in the Rhineland, Baden, Berlin, and Silesia.⁴³ The *Korrespondenz des*

⁴¹The working-out of this conflict is richly documented in over 500 pages of press clippings in the *Reichslandbund* press archive, ZStA I, 6515-17, October 1902-June 1903. See also Puhle, *Agrarische Interessenpolitik*, pp. 222-25.

⁴²Details in H. Horn, *Der Kampf um den Bau des Mittellandkanals* (Cologne/Opladen, 1964).

⁴³Adam Röder wrote in the *Badische Landpost* (10 August 1899) that the Kaiser's canal project followed "the best Prussian and Conservative-agrarian traditions."

Bundes der Landwirte, however, warned the DKP that its goals as a "popular" party demanded that it not "degrade" itself as a "tool of the government."⁴⁴

Although the Conservatives and Farmers' League forced the government to withdraw a second Canal Bill in May 1901, by late 1904 a much less comprehensive canal project and the outcome of the 1903 elections provided about one-third of the Conservative caucus with reason enough to break with the BdL on this issue and vote for the canal. Thus in June 1904 the *Konservative Korrespondenz* had defended moderate, pro-Canal Conservatives by claiming that the DKP was better tuned to the voice of the people than was the Farmers' League.⁴⁵ Individual Conservatives offered other rationales for their governmental stance. Hermann Lange, editor of the *Neue Westfälische Volkszeitung*, wrote to a radical opponent of the canal that the prospect of a "liberal era" — if the Conservatives were totally excluded from the Canal Bill majority — left the DKP with little option but to vote with the government.⁴⁶ The leader of the Conservatives' Westphalian organization, Pastor Möller-Güterslow, wrote: "We cannot agitate against the canal with democratic means, as the League . . . is doing. . . . We have certainly had to accept worse things than the canal."

This willingness to compromise with the government infuriated Farmers' League leaders and activists. Conrad von Wangenheim, a member of the BdL's three-man directorate, rose in the Landtag to denounce the government's "system of whipping [the Canal Bill] through" parliament.⁴⁷ A prominent BdL functionary in Hessen, Franz von Bodelschwingh, felt the time had come when the agrarians had to expose the backstairs peddling of government favour. Otherwise, he claimed, the agrarians' opponents would be able to say: "See here, the agrarian demands are extreme; the agrarians cannot even manage to win enough ground with their arguments among the parties of the Right." Baron Wilhelm von der Reck, a former member of the DKP's Committee of Fifty and a confirmed agrarian supporter, also knew how Conservative-government relations were shaped. He wrote to Hermann Lange that defections to the government's side

⁴⁴*Kreuzzeitung*, 18 August, 7 October and 6 December 1899; *Deutsche Tageszeitung*, 12 August 1899; *Korrespondenz des Bundes der Landwirte*, 6 May 1899 and *Konservative Korrespondenz*, 19 September 1899, cited in Puhle, *Agrarische Interessenpolitik*, pp. 222f.

⁴⁵Cited in the *Berliner Börsen-Courier*, 3 June 1904.

⁴⁶BA Koblenz, Kleine Erwerbungen 455, Wilhelm von der Reck Papers, Lange to Reck, 16 December 1904; for the following, see Reck's correspondence with Möller, Bodelschwingh and Engel; also Bodelschwingh's letter to the DKP's Committee of 11. Wilhelm von der Reck is not to be confused with the Prussian state minister Eberhard von der Recke.

⁴⁷Cited in W. Bialke, "Die Kanalvorlage des Jahres 1899 und die konservative Partei Preussens" (diss. Berlin, 1944), pp. 56f.

were "a symptom that Bülow has negotiated with us." He continued: "Have some sort of offers been made to Manteuffel? Otherwise, the genial wind currently blowing remains a mystery to us." It was the Kaiser, Reck felt, who had manoeuvred himself into a "frightful" dilemma: Wilhelm would either have to break his royal pledge (that he would have the canal built), or break the constitution by compelling parliamentary deputies to vote for the canal legislation against their free wishes. Reck observed that it was this dilemma which had sent the Conservative Party into disarray.

August 1899 may well have been the occasion on which the government most seriously considered abandoning the Conservative Party as a prop of the political *status quo*. That the more draconian steps against the Farmers' League and Conservatives were undercut from the beginning or abandoned altogether does not detract from the significance of the fact that such ideas were entertained seriously. Indeed, the inability of the Kaiser and his government to reconcile paradoxical views of the DKP's essential role in the Kaiserreich's semi-parliamentary constitutional system becomes all the clearer when such non-events are considered.

In the early summer of 1899, Chancellor Chlodwig zu Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst wrote to Philipp Eulenburg: "If the Canal Bill is defeated we must have a [Landtag] dissolution, and the Prussian state will be moved onto rails further left. That does not frighten me; but it is always a step in the dark, and if it can be avoided, all the better."⁴⁸ By 20 August, in the first of a series of Prussian state ministry and crown council meetings over the next four days, Hohenlohe believed a dissolution was necessary to preserve the "authority of the crown and the government."⁴⁹ The DKP now regarded the issue as "a question of power," Hohenlohe told his ministers; "the whole attitude of the Conservative Party, which has allowed itself to be led by the Farmers' League and by personally-embittered leaders, is directed less against the canal than against His Majesty personally." It was therefore necessary to co-ordinate a Landtag dissolution and the dismissal of government officials who sat in the DKP caucus and were opposing the Kaiser's wishes.⁵⁰ Otherwise, Hohenlohe concluded,

... there exists the danger that the Farmers' League, including the Conservative Party, would force many officials more and more into its following and gradually, in common with the

⁴⁸BA Koblenz, Eulenburg Papers, 54, p. 150b, letter of 2 July 1899.

⁴⁹Protocols in BA Koblenz, *Rkz.* 2003, f. 40ff., 53ff., and 60-84.

⁵⁰See also Hohenlohe's notes in BA Koblenz, C. v. Hohenlohe Papers, 1612, *passim*.

anti-Semites, reach for means against the government as pernicious as those used by Social Democracy.

One minister observed in the ensuing discussion that “the agrarians . . . seek domination and wish to topple the whole ministry.” Johannes Miquel, the Prussian Minister of Finance, suggested on the other hand that new elections were unwise. Miquel’s argument was in line with his Conservative tendencies and connections, but the reasoning he used is important. For he claimed that, in an election campaign, the government would have to offer the slogan, “Here the crown, there the Farmers’ League.” But if the elections should fall to the latter — “which,” Miquel noted, “is not entirely impossible” — the situation would become even more critical for the Kaiser.

At the opening of the crown council with the Kaiser on 23 August, Hohenlohe dismissed Miquel’s arguments and did his utmost to make Wilhelm move against the Conservatives. He said the Conservative intransigence had the character of a “systematic opposition, . . . indeed, a conspiracy,” and added that since a large number of DKP deputies appeared dissatisfied with their leaders, a dissolution or the offer of compensations might prompt their rebellion. But, despite the advice from the majority of his ministers, the Kaiser in the end feared to launch an election campaign against the Conservatives. Instead, he merely adjourned the Landtag and had the offending Prussian officials dismissed from their posts. To make the DKP “feel his rage,” Wilhelm thought that shutting their leaders from his court would suffice.

Brief observations from three principal actors writing in the wake of this crisis illustrate some of the difficulties inherent in the government’s attempt to separate the Conservatives from their agrarian allies. Philipp Eulenburg wrote to Bülow that the government’s turn against the Farmers’ League was both “false” and “dangerous.” As evidence of this he cited a conversation he had had with an agrarian leader, who had told him that the BdL had enrolled many new members “from *radical* circles” immediately after the Landtag dissolution. This agrarian claimed that these new members clearly saw the BdL as “a lever (*Hebel*) against the monarchy.” Eulenburg looked to the DKP to reverse this trend. “The only element which is capable of keeping in check the decidedly democratic tendency of the League is the Conservative estate owners. . . .” Referring to the “democratic and demagogic stream” which was inundating Germany, Eulenburg concluded that a direct government campaign “against the League in the form of a fight against the Conservatives makes a hydra out of it.”⁵¹ The second participant unwilling to

⁵¹BA Koblenz, Eulenburg Papers, 54, pp. 204ff., letter of 29 September 1899.

proceed decisively was Wilhelm himself. After two of his leading court figures laid down their posts in sympathy with the dismissed Conservative officials, Wilhelm lamented to Bülow: "The great men of my court are leaving me."⁵² Soon thereafter he agreed to reinstate a number of county councillors (*Landräte*) to their posts. The third observer, Hohenlohe, most clearly displayed the extreme ambivalence in government circles. For, despite his earlier arguments, Hohenlohe could actually conceive of *neither* a full alliance nor a full break with the Conservatives. As he wrote to his son:

To have a dissolution without detaching the officials from the Farmers' League would not have much use. Above all, the administration must be purged. Still, I regret we have not had a dissolution. I am sure the Conservatives would have suffered a healthy defeat. *But of course how would H. M. [Wilhelm] work with a liberal ministry?*⁵³

When the Prussian state ministry, now under Bülow's command, began to consider reintroducing a Canal Bill in December 1900, a showdown with the DKP was feared as much as ever. By May 1901 the government had been forced a second time to withdraw its legislation and adjourn the Landtag. The Kaiser, Eulenburg, and others again expressed their frustration with the DKP in stark terms.⁵⁴ Eulenburg indulged in metaphors once more: the Conservatives were gnawing like dogs on a stick of dynamite and playing with fire like children: "Nothing shows the progress of the democratic idea more than the history of this 'loyal party'." However, Eulenburg also observed that Wilhelm "over- as much as under-estimates" the effects of his banishments from court. Eulenburg's counter-weapon against the BdL was more intrigue. Because the future DKP leader, Ernst von Heydebrand und der Lasa, was "a poisonous, ambitious viper," Eulenburg suggested "he would likely accept a post if one were offered to him." Another sort of reconciliation was pursued by the Kaiser's brother-in-law, the Duke of Schleswig-Holstein, who wrote to Wilhelm that it "would be the greatest misfortune if the Conservative Party showed itself to be unworkable as a government party."⁵⁵ Wilhelm's scorn for the DKP, however, remained unabated. He referred to it as the party "which has outlived itself and no longer understands the modern age — which has ceased to be, for all time, capable of governing (*regierungsfähig*)."⁵⁶

⁵²Correspondence in ZStA II, Merseburg, Hausarchiv, Rep. 53 E III, 4, f. 5-15; for the following, Fürst B. von Bülow, *Denkwürdigkeiten* (Berlin, 1930), I, 298.

⁵³BA Koblenz, C. v. Hohenlohe Papers, 1612, f. 249ff., letter to Alexander v. Hohenlohe, 25 August 1899; emphasis added.

⁵⁴For the following: BA Koblenz, Eulenburg Papers, 57, pp. 23ff., 85ff., letters to Bülow, 1 March and 4 June 1901.

⁵⁵BA Koblenz, Rkz. 1391/5, Herzog Ernst Günther von Schleswig-Holstein to Wilhelm, 17 May 1901.

⁵⁶Quoted in Eulenburg to Bülow, 4 June 1901, cited above.

If the Kaiser was lucky enough to be able to maintain the posture of “no surrender,” his ministers and provincial administrators did not regard their options so favourably. Through 1901 and 1902 the Prussian state ministry felt the negotiations to win support for a new tariff bill were too delicate to risk “upsetting” the Conservatives.⁵⁷ West Prussian *Oberpräsident* von Delbrück was not atypical in advising the chancellery of its dangerous course in alienating state-supporting forces: he reported that the political power of large landowners in his province often exceeded that of the *Landräte* and even rivalled his own. He was particularly unwilling to implement the government’s decree that electoral support in 1903 should only be given to friends of the canal.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, by late 1904 Bülow’s chancellery chief, the former DKP deputy Friedrich Wilhelm von Loebell, was again trying “under the table and secretly to sway individual [Conservative] members” to vote for the bill, and once more Stolberg was found trying to prompt defections in East Prussia.⁵⁹ Thirty-nine Conservatives succumbed to this pressure in early February 1905 and the Canal Bill finally passed.⁶⁰

The *Kreuzzeitung* had already explained away this defection, claiming that Bülow succeeded only because the government had avoided many former mistakes and did not make the canal a *political* issue.⁶¹ In fact, however, the government *did* regard this as a highly “political” victory over the radical agrarians. This is clear from an internal chancellery memo which circulated just three weeks prior to the final canal vote.⁶² This report focused on the importance of dividing as many Conservatives as possible from the Farmers’ League and winning their votes for the canal. The report’s author was encouraged that “the whole *Conservative* press . . . has taken a stand against [agrarian] agitation.” However, he was also cognizant of the dangers that still lay ahead in dealing with a party that feared public knowledge of its ties to the Kaiser and that sought popular appeal. He therefore estimated highly the significance of the victory which the government stood to win over the demagogues in the Farmers’ League.⁶³

⁵⁷Meeting protocols in BA Koblenz, *Rkz.* 2005, f. 56ff., 65ff.

⁵⁸On BdL-DKP-government relations in West Prussia, BA Koblenz, *Rkz.* 1081, f. 3ff., Delbrück to the Minister of the Interior, 15 December 1901; 1083, f. 1f., Delbrück to Conrad, 16 December 1902; 2006, f. 220, Hauptverein der Deutsch-Konservativen to [Loebell], 18 February 1905.

⁵⁹See *ibid.*, 2006, f. 71, 130ff., Loebell memo to Bülow, 14 November 1904, and Stolberg to [Loebell], 4 February 1905.

⁶⁰It is true that by the final vote (244:146) the DKP ayes were not decisive; but this only makes more significant the government’s belief that no legislation should be enacted without the moderate Conservatives’ backing.

⁶¹*Kreuzzeitung*, 21 December 1904.

⁶²BA Koblenz, *Rkz.* 2006, f. 98ff.: “Betreff die Aussichten der Kanalvorlage im Abgeordnetenhaus,” dated 19 January 1905 and probably written by Loebell.

⁶³Emphasis added.

It would undoubtedly have a critical effect if it were to become known at the last minute that officials or bearers of court titles were influenced in their votes or threatened with proceedings if they should decide against the canal. . . . However, if a majority can be won for the Rhine-Hanover Canal, that is at the same time a *desirable strengthening of those Conservative circles who object to the demagogic intrigues of the BdL*. The safe passage of the Canal Bill will therefore be at the same time an *auspicious success for the whole of domestic politics in Prussia*.

In the period 1900-1909, Bülow's adeptness at side-stepping political confrontation led Conservatives to believe that the compromises he demanded of both the German Left and Right were actually being delivered up by the latter. These doubts about Bülow's philosophy of "pairing" Liberals and Conservatives eventually impelled the DKP to follow the BdL on the crucial finance reform issue of 1909. As the final crisis in the short-lived "Bülow Block" of 1907-9, this reform was opposed by agrarian estate-owners who refused to sanction the introduction of a comprehensive inheritance tax.⁶⁴

The strains of the Bülow Block brought out older tensions between moderate Conservatives and radical agrarians, and the *Reichsbote's* warnings about an exclusively agrarian Conservative Party reappeared. When Bülow defended his planned finance reform in a speech in late November 1907, he told the Conservatives that they must be "moderate and broad-minded" like their counterparts in England. The *Reichsbote* agreed, but took offence at the chancellor's reference to the "agrarian" essence of the DKP. Engel wrote that the word "agrarian" had the negative connotation of "narrow-minded, self-seeking partisanship opposed to other interests." He added that, with agrarian one-sidedness, Conservatives would be "in danger of losing the confidence and trust of all serious, national, and truly conservative circles."⁶⁵

As the finance reform crisis became acute in early 1909, dissent from the BdL policy of uncompromising opposition to Bülow's legislation grew within Conservative ranks. The later Pan-German League leader, Baron Georg von Stössel, chairman of the Conservative Association in Potsdam, sponsored a strong declaration against the DKP's Reichstag caucus: its refusal to break with the extreme agrarians had produced the danger of "strong resentment" and "great alienation" among urban Conservatives, and the caucus might in the future be neither "loyally followed" nor considered "nationally

⁶⁴Background information in G. Vogel, "Die Konservativen und die Blockpolitik Bülows" (diss., Berlin, 1925), and P.-C. Witt, *Die Finanzpolitik des Deutschen Reiches von 1903 bis 1913* (Lübeck and Hamburg, 1970).

⁶⁵*Reichsbote*, 3 December 1907.

reliable."⁶⁶ The essential ingredients of Stössel's argument appeared repeatedly in anti-agrarian statements issued by various Conservative associations in the spring of 1909. These statements laid emphasis on the need for landowners to make the "national sacrifice" of 500 million marks in new taxes; on the fear of popular and royal disapproval if Bülow were ousted by the Conservatives in league with the Catholic Centre Party; on the prospect of losing Conservative voters in the cities and among the *Mittelstand*; and on the wish to support a kind of "noble Conservatism" standing above demagogic agitation, callous interest politics, and parliamentary intrigue.

This struggle against "one-sided agrarianism" waged by local Conservative associations in 1909 provided a crucial impetus for further attempts to reform the Conservative party in the five years before the war. Yet the wider implications of this dissent were clear to some observers even during the finance reform crisis. Noteworthy here was the program of party reform outlined by the "Conservative Union," a Berlin-based organization of predominantly middle-class Conservatives founded in July 1909. Declaring that the Bülow Block had been destroyed by "party egoism," the Conservative Union called for a "renewal of Conservatism" to make it "honourable again" and to help it "regain its force of attraction." These dissenters presented in their call to arms a comprehensive (if rather contradictory) appeal to all Conservatives who rejected radical interest politics and the sterile opposition practised by the BdL:

More contact with the people!
Independence from the Farmers' League!
Equity between city and countryside!
Away from the Centre Party!
Back to the Block concept against Social Democracy!
*Then the Conservative Party will become a People's Party!*⁶⁷

If Stössel and the Conservative Union typified the dissatisfaction with BdL intransigence that appeared among rank-and-file Conservatives, other evidence suggests that uncertainty and differences of opinion about parliamentary strategy were also found among top BdL and DKP leaders. In 1908, for instance, the *Kreuzzeitung* called on the agrarian-led "Economic Union" (*Wirtschaftliche Vereinigung*) in the Reichstag to join the DKP caucus, speaking of "the ambitious efforts of sectarians, who would rather be leaders in their small circle than mere co-workers in the large Conservative Party."⁶⁸ Around the same time, the BdL leader Gustav Roesicke wrote to Wangenheim that the Farmers' League needed to remain "above the parties" and

⁶⁶*Kreuzzeitung*, 25 March 1909.

⁶⁷Konservative Vereinigung, Aufruf, "Konservative Männer in Stadt und Land!"

⁶⁸Cited in Dr. Böhme, "Eine Fraktionsgemeinschaft der Rechten," *Das nationale Deutschland*, 26, 3 May 1908, 798-802.

not appear as an auxiliary "electoral association" of the Conservatives.⁶⁹ When Bülow's attacks on the agrarians in early 1909 led the BdL's leader in West Prussia, Elard von Oldenburg-Januschau, to counter with even more extreme polemics against the chancellor, Conservatives faced an increasingly difficult choice between the opposing fronts. Count Georg zu Dohna-Finckenstein, one of the Conservatives who had been banned from court after the canal vote, attempted to explain this dilemma to Loebell in the Reich chancellery. Oldenburg's style of agrarian radicalism, Dohna asserted, was a necessary tactical ingredient of the DKP's strategy within the Bülow Block:

[Oldenburg's] impulsive manner is . . . his *strength*, and one must bear with him if he sometimes lays it on too thick. . . . Within the Block we Conservatives must press our views energetically. *For that purpose*, there are provincial rallies and other extra-parliamentary meetings. Then, in the committees and in the parliamentary caucuses, the 'attainable' is separated from what is 'sought after.'⁷⁰

Dohna's letter must have created the impression that Conservatives were merely using BdL demagoguery to win concessions from the government, and that they did not endorse the full agrarian program. The *Kreuzzeitung's* early reaction to Bülow's conflict with the BdL would also have signalled that DKP leaders disapproved of the League's attempt to preclude a reconciliation between Bülow and the party. The *Kreuzzeitung* noted in late March 1909 that the liberals' tactic of blaming all difficulties on agrarian special interests was made easier by the BdL's provincial organizations, which were issuing declarations of no-compromise with the government and setting in gear "systematic agitation in the sharpest tones":

That has been *neither clever nor necessary*. The Conservative Party does not need such backing; it also does not allow itself to be influenced by it. Therefore one can only wish that no more agitational material against the Conservatives . . . will fall into the hands of . . . [the liberals] through such political declarations.⁷¹

The uncertain path of moderate Conservatives clearly troubled the BdL leaders greatly, particularly in 1908 but well into the spring of 1909. In November 1908, Roesicke warned Wangenheim that Bülow, an "opportunistic politician" *par excellence*, would not miss the chance to exploit an anti-BdL backlash among governmental Conservatives if Oldenburg were given free rein to attack the chancellor.⁷²

⁶⁹ZStA I, Wangenheim Papers, 3, f. 2, Roesicke to Wangenheim, 4 June 1908.

⁷⁰BA Koblenz, Rkz. 1391/5, f. 164f., Dohna-Finckenstein to Loebell, 3 February 1909.

⁷¹*Kreuzzeitung*, 28 March 1909.

⁷²ZStA I, Wangenheim Papers, 3, f. 87f., Roesicke to Wangenheim, [14] November 1908.

. . . This initiative would signify a great test of strength for those members of the Right who are of a susceptible disposition and character. The direct attack, which Oldenburg wants, requires a much greater energy and resoluteness from the Right, that is, the Conservative caucus, which in my view is *not* to be had. . . . To precipitate this conflict would alienate a large number of Conservative caucus members.

In April 1909, Roesicke and Wangenheim lamented again to each other that “things [were] critically shaky on the Right” due to the Conservatives’ “lack of insight, resoluteness, and reliability.”⁷³ The characteristic feature of the Conservatives’ reaction to the finance reform crisis, they felt, was “the defection of all the weak ones.” One of their deputies in the eastern province of Posen, Major Ernst August Endell, reported that pro-reform sentiments were being expressed by a governmental Conservative who was “otherwise a very reasonable Conservative man but, unfortunately, apparently corrupted and emasculated through the Free Conservative environment.”⁷⁴

For the BdL leaders, compromise with the government or with the other parties that supported its proposed inheritance tax could only be a sign of weakness. Agriculture had to remain strong, to provide the rallying point for a “proper” Block of state-supporting forces in the Reich. Wangenheim expressed this view very clearly after Bülow’s defeat when he wrote to Roesicke: “When Bülow says to the Conservatives that they must assimilate liberal viewpoints, he overlooks, I believe, the activity of the Farmers’ League, which indeed ensures that the Conservative Party is brought from its former torpidity to a more popular and thereby naturally more liberal [!] course.”⁷⁵ Thus Wangenheim’s proposal for Conservative “renewal” linked the three issues addressed by the Conservative Union: Conservative-government relations, moderate *versus* extreme Conservatism, and popular mobilization. Bülow, too, had to deal with these three problems.

Bülow’s efforts to prompt defections from the DKP in 1908-9 were in a way nothing more than a series of measures to keep from his own mind — and Wilhelm’s — the consequences if he should fail. On reports from Loebell and others, warning him in the autumn of 1908 that the DKP would never accept an inheritance tax, Bülow wrote impulsively in the margin: “Then the whole reform will fail,” and carried on with his campaign to win public opinion and renegade Conservatives for his plans.⁷⁶ In this campaign Bülow recruited some

⁷³See the Heydebrand-Roesicke-Wangenheim correspondence from April 1909 in *ibid.*, 3, f. 102f., and 4, f. 20-30.

⁷⁴ZStA I, Roesicke Papers, 34, f. 267, 272, Endell to Roesicke, 3, 19 April 1909.

⁷⁵ZStA I, Wangenheim Papers, 4, f. 60ff.

⁷⁶BA Koblenz, Rkz. 208, f. 21, marginalia on Loebell’s notes of 8 September 1908.

fringe Conservative figures to write brochures in favour of the government's tax reform. He also received indications of support from a wide variety of "conservative" circles. Although the various viewpoints expressed here did not amount to a tangible or cohesive anti-agrarian argument *per se*, the chancellor hoped — not entirely in vain — that some of these opportunities could be exploited.⁷⁷ Notable successes included the German *Mittelstand* congress of 13 April 1909, at which the Conservative *Mittelstand* leader, Carl Rahardt, called for an end to agrarian opposition; the resolution of 6 April 1909 from the executive committee of the Conservative associations in the Kingdom of Saxony, recommending acceptance of the inheritance tax if necessary; and the *Reichsbote's* consistent advocacy of a flexible and generous Conservative policy. The man who was identified by BdL leaders as the "*spiritus rector*" of Bülow's campaign from the chancellory, Ernst Levy von Halle, apparently even deliberately encouraged low-level government officials — who were due to participate in the *Mittelstand* congress — to believe that their salaries would be raised only after the inheritance tax votes were completed. Roesicke tried to express his outrage at this action by labelling Halle's strategy "democratic."⁷⁸

That a number of Conservatives desired the "carrot" of government attention to their views is shown by their correspondence in the files of the chancellory. These sympathetic letters included Conservatives' own tax schemes, suggestions to help Bülow gauge the mood of the party, and professions of incomprehension at the party leadership's short-sightedness and intransigence. Taken together this correspondence must have assumed a disproportionate significance in the political calculations of a chancellor growing more and more desperate to find a way around the impasse presented by the agrarians.⁷⁹ Moreover, the reaction of Bülow and his aides to such evidence of Conservative-BdL disunity was by no means passive.

⁷⁷For details see Witt, *Finanzpolitik, passim*, and my "Reformist Conservatism", pp. 264-88.

⁷⁸ZStA I, Wangenheim Papers, 4, f. 29f., Roesicke to Heydebrand, 10 April 1909.

⁷⁹I can cite only some of the material found in the chancellory files: BA Koblenz, Rkz. 209: "Zentralverein der Konservativen vor dem Potsdamer Tor" to the Reich chancellory, 6 November 1908; Rkz. 211: Otto Beutler (Conservative mayor of Dresden), discussed in Loebell to Karl Mehnert, n.d. [March 1909]; Rkz. 212: E. Weihe (Hessen representative on the DKP's Committee of 50) to Loebell, 4 May 1909; Dr. Kurt von Eichhorn to Loebell, 6 May 1909, sending his *Vorschlag einer Reichs-Gewinnzuwachssteuer* (Breslau, 1909); Resolution from the "United Conservative Associations" in the Berlin suburbs, 27 April 1909; Count Julius von Mirbach-Sorquitten to Loebell, 23 April 1909; pro-inheritance tax resolutions from Conservative groups were even sent to the National Liberals' Reichstag caucus: BA Koblenz, R 45, I/9, Nationalliberale Partei, Sitzungen der Reichstagsfraktion, f. 206, 242, 394. Other memoranda, publicity materials, press clippings, and state ministry protocols are found in the Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, W. Berlin, Rep. 90, 1345.

One example was a letter from a top-level chancellory figure, Arnold Wahnschaffe, to an influential judicial official in Kiel, Dr. Andrae.⁸⁰ Andrae planned to resign from the Conservative Party over the finance reform issue. Wahnschaffe, still hoping in early June that the Conservatives would have a change of heart, was intent to inform Andrae that his dissent was not unique. If the DKP destroyed the Block, he wrote, it would set itself "in the sharpest opposition to the feeling of the nation's best elements." One heard that, Wahnschaffe continued, "not only from Conservative circles in the Berlin suburbs . . . [but also] from our old constituencies, from Mecklenburg, from Further Pomerania, and from the west." Wahnschaffe was even more concerned to make the best possible use of Andrae's willingness to speak out. He counselled him not to resign from the party; instead, he asked, "Could you not somehow state your opinion in the *Kreuzzeitung* or, if this refuses to accept, in the *Reichsbote*? It is still not impossible that your voice will elicit an echo."

Bülow and Loebell pursued a similar strategy with the leader of the Saxon Conservative Party, Karl Mehnert, who admitted that his pro-finance reform position was explicitly calculated not to jeopardize Conservative popularity in Saxony.⁸¹ Mehnert was (rightly) fearful of the results expected from upcoming Landtag elections in Saxony, to be held for the first time under an expanded voting franchise. He believed his first Conservative duty was as a regional party chairman, not as a follower of the agrarian program. Mehnert also made no secret of his dislike for the BdL leaders who had travelled to Saxony and "left no stone unturned" in their efforts to head off a defection to the government's side. True, he refused to sign a Reich Treasury declaration prepared by Bülow, Loebell and Halle, since he feared that would disrupt his campaign to engineer a pro-government resolution from all Conservative associations in his state. Yet Mehnert encouraged Bülow's hopes that his behind-the-scenes efforts might precipitate a full-scale defection. He reported at one point that "in the German Conservative caucus, . . . formerly *sharp* enemies of the inheritance tax are *now* prepared, with certain reservations, to vote for this tax." Shortly after this report and the publication of the Saxon Conservatives' resolution, the Centre Party's *Kölnische Volkszeitung* suggested the possibility that the "backbone of the Conservatives in the tax question" could be broken.⁸² The profound fears of Roesicke and Wangenheim at this time have already been noted.

We know that, in the crucial vote of 24 June 1909, the backbone of

⁸⁰BA Koblenz, *Rkz.* 213, Wahnschaffe to Andrae, 1 June 1909; see also *ibid.*, f. 11, Wahnschaffe to (his uncle) Wangenheim, 1 June 1909.

⁸¹Correspondence between Mehnert, Loebell, Bülow, and Halle, March-April 1909, in BA Koblenz, *Rkz.* 211, f. 89-119.

⁸²*Kölnische Volkszeitung*, 7 April 1909, cited in Witt, *Finanzpolitik*, p. 278.

Conservative opposition was in fact *not* broken. Only six DKP deputies voted against the party majority, that is, for the government's tax. But once again, two other consequences of the finance reform conflict seem more significant. One was that Bülow staked his entire career on what turned out to be an exercise in self-deception. Clearly, that self-deception was supported by conflicting signals emanating from the Conservative-agrarian camp. Wahnschaffe likely reported Bülow's true opinion when he told a leading BdL editor in July 1909 that Bülow "was particularly pained and distressed that, although he had reason to believe that a great number of Conservative deputies would relent, this defection in the end was limited to such a few."⁸³ Yet Bülow's uncharacteristic inability to manoeuvre out of the crisis revealed a fatalistic attitude that the Conservatives were beyond reach — beyond reach in that they could not be won to the government's side, but also beyond reach in that they could not save themselves from political suicide. This second aspect of Bülow's critique of the party emerged most clearly in his last major Reichstag speech of 16 June 1909, and in the notorious interview he gave a Hamburg newspaper the day before his resignation from office. But it seems that Bülow was not alone in identifying a new phase in Conservative radicalism and new difficulties in the Conservative-government relationship.

Loebell, the former member of the DKP's executive committee, felt the same exasperation he had experienced during the canal crisis. He claimed the Conservatives' "extremely unclever and irresponsible tactics" had made the inheritance tax into a political question.⁸⁴ And in the draft for an angry letter to Dohna-Finckenstein after the fate of Bülow's reform had been sealed, Loebell wrote of a Conservative-government "test of strength" (*Kraftprobe*), though this was later crossed out.⁸⁵ Wilhelm, despite his ambiguous and unconvincing support for Bülow since the *Daily Telegraph* affair in late 1908, was equally alienated by the Conservatives' opposition. Wilhelm read a *Pester Lloyd* newspaper account on 6 July, which reported that Conservative deputies had returned "in great consternation" from their home constituencies, which they had visited during a brief Reichstag recess.⁸⁶ The account claimed: "Many of [the Conservatives] — one could name very good names — now throw up their hands and proclaim that they did not want this end, that they were left in the dark by the leaders, that they did not recognize the possibility

⁸³Meeting between Wahnschaffe and P. Baecker of the *Deutsche Tageszeitung* discussed in ZStA I, Wangenheim Papers, 4, f. 70-76, Roesicke to Wangenheim, 23, 28 July 1909 and Wangenheim to Roesicke, 26 July 1909.

⁸⁴BA Koblenz, Rkz. 213, f. 217, Loebell to Rudolf von Valentini, 19 June 1909.

⁸⁵*ibid.*, 213, f. 266f., Loebell to Dohna-Finckenstein, 29 June 1909.

⁸⁶Clipping in BA Koblenz, Bülow Papers, 35.

of the present consequences." In the margin the Kaiser wrote: "Then they are incapable and unworthy as deputies." In the margin of another article discussing the DKP's contribution to Bülow's fall, Wilhelm referred to the "so-called loyal Conservatives."⁸⁷

The DKP leader, Heydebrand, implicitly agreed that the DKP was now profoundly estranged from the government. In his Reichstag speech of 10 July 1909, Heydebrand suggested that now no one could claim that the Conservatives had sacrificed their convictions to retain favour with the government. The party leadership had overcome "doubt, lack of courage, dissatisfaction [and] defection"; it had taken its path "to the end," and there it would "stand firm." In this course, the DKP had preserved its independence. Therefore Conservative parliamentarians had no reason to believe that they had lost touch with the mood of the people. ". . . [Our] good conscience," Heydebrand declared, "will maintain us when we go before the country and the voters to justify what we aimed for and what we have done."⁸⁸ Little was Heydebrand to know that he would be continuing this campaign of self-justification before the people five years later.

Still, it was Bülow who most forcefully painted the picture of Conservatism "digging its own grave." Oddly enough, Bülow's most revealing comments here were included in his marginalia to some memoranda from Loebell in April 1909.⁸⁹ Significantly, Bülow headed his musings about the Right's motivation for a possible destruction of the Block with two different questions: "What will the Conservatives achieve?" and "What will the agrarians achieve?" To the latter question, Bülow replied that the agrarians would be labelled "base egoists." Bülow painted the DKP's prospects even more darkly:

Confusion, bitterness, [and] depression among wide circles of Conservatives, especially in middle-Germany, in the cities, among officials, lower-middle classes, etc.; . . . real (not imaginary) compensations to the liberal-democratic idea in Prussia, in order to defend the party against the odium of a "reactionary" rule by Junkers and priests. The Conservative Party will experience a set-back similar to [the one] in the '70s.

In his speech of 16 June, Bülow repeated this motif, that "a victory in the present is often the way to defeat in the future." And then in 1911, in correspondence with one of the Conservatives who broke party ranks in 1909, he offered the same view yet again.⁹⁰ On the DKP

⁸⁷*ibid.*, marginalia to the *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten*, 30 June 1909.

⁸⁸Heydebrand's speech was later printed as Conservative propaganda material: BA Koblenz, *Zeitgeschichtliche Sammlung*, 70/1 (7).

⁸⁹Marginalia (8 April) to Loebell notes of 6 April 1909, cited in Witt, *Finanzreform*, p. 275f.

⁹⁰See BA Koblenz, Loebell Papers, 7, ff. 23ff., Bülow to Axel von Kaphengst and Bülow to Loebell, both 31 March 1911.

leaders' shoulders would rest the responsibility for a "sharpening of conflicts between Conservatives and liberals, the awakening of dangerous resistance against the Conservative Party, above all a restrengthening of radicalism." In the view of all principal figures in this crisis, then, the Conservatives seemed to have chosen a political course which repudiated DKP ties with the Kaiser and his government; instead, they had chosen to appeal to radical opposition sentiments among "the people."

As noted at the outset, a full history of the vicissitudes and complexities in Conservative-government relations between 1871 and 1914 would be a chronicle, not an essay. Hence the aftermath of the finance reform crisis and the onset of new conflicts under Bülow's successor, Bethmann Hollweg, cannot be studied here.⁹¹ Even in the period 1890-1909, one might have chosen to focus on the Conservatives' intermediate position between kings and demagogues during the Anti-Revolution Bill debates of 1894-95 or the conflict over Bülow's tariff legislation in 1902. These subjects must await a larger study which can provide the contextual information necessary for a properly differentiated view. Such a study could also address a subject treated only tangentially in this essay: the government's reaction to the larger pattern of aristocratic decline in each of the social, economic, and political spheres. But first the threads of the present, narrower argument must be pulled together. Three tentative conclusions present themselves.

First, it seems one can hardly over-estimate the degree to which the Conservative-government relationship was shaped by personal ambition, factional disputes, breakdowns in communication, and divergent philosophies of political negotiation. The mutually reinforcing effect of these factors was as great on the government side as on the Conservative. Miquel was only the most prominent among a number of Prussian state ministers who, with different mixtures of cynicism and idealism, resisted the efforts of chancellors and other bureaucrats to accommodate some measure of liberal reform in the Kaiserreich.⁹² In fact it was precisely in the realm of "personal" politics where men like Miquel and Bülow once excelled that the DKP-government relationship became most opaque and unpredictable. Hohenlohe in 1899 had to consider how he could possibly

⁹¹I plan to examine these conflicts in my essay, "The Road to Philippi: The Conservative Party and Bethmann Hollweg's 'Politics of the Diagonal', 1909-1914," forthcoming in Fout (ed.), *Politics, Parties and the Authoritarian State*.

⁹²Besides Witt's work one will soon be able to consult G. Bonham's forthcoming study entitled "Bureaucratic Modernizers and Traditional Constraints: Higher Officials and the Landed Nobility in Wilhelmine Germany, 1890-1914" (diss., University of California at Berkeley.)

conduct an election campaign against the Conservatives, but he also had to include in his calculations Wilhelm's ability to work personally with liberal ministers. Eulenburg thought he might buy off the "ambitious" Heydebrand, yet Wangenheim and Roesicke, in discussing a leadership change for the DKP, considered Heydebrand "the only one who would lead the cause energetically and along agrarian lines"; all other possible candidates "would be devoutly governmental."⁹³ Karl Mehnert was condemned by hard-line agrarians in 1909 for his dissenting position, yet his face appeared on page one of the *Konservative Kalender* in 1916. And Bethmann Hollweg, entering office with the express intention to "help the Conservatives overcome the errors they made" in 1909, concluded by late 1910 that his task was probably impossible while Heydebrand led the DKP:

Day by day they [the Conservatives] are losing the sympathy, conscious or unconscious, of all moderate non-Junker circles. Instead of nurturing the roots of Prussian Conservative power — unconditional allegiance to the monarch and trustful dependence on the government, he [Heydebrand] seeks to save his party with dictatorial party politics on the parliamentary model.⁹⁴

Bethmann expressed the same confused but decidedly pessimistic outlook in 1911, when he wrote that the Conservative leadership was leading the Reich "down the democratic path."⁹⁵ But after years of personal polemics hurled across confused battle lines by Conservatives, agrarians, and the government, exactly who and what Bethmann meant to condemn with the word "democratic" was anyone's guess.

The second point is that the questions of governmentalism and reform had large implications both for the party and for the Reich as a whole. On the one hand, one might argue that without the prospect of co-operation with the moderate Conservatives, the government would have abandoned hope of reliable support on the Right, either in the wake of Tivoli, during the Canal Bill crisis, or at other moments when compromise with the liberals seemed more attractive than continued support of a declining socio-economic group inclined to extremism. If demagoguery had indeed overwhelmed traditional Conservatism, the

⁹³ZStA I, Wangenheim Papers, 1, f. 74, Wangenheim to Roesicke, 8 July 1905.

⁹⁴ZStA II, Rep. 90a B III, 2 b, 6, vol. 158, f. 200f., state ministry protocol of 14 July 1909; Political Archive of the German Foreign Office, Bonn, Eisendecker Papers, 1/2, f. 20-21, Bethmann Hollweg to Carl J. G. von Eisendecker, 27 December 1910. On 23 March 1913 Bethmann wrote to Eisendecker that the Conservatives were "irredeemable" (*heillose*), but then added that he could never legislate taxes to cover his Army Bill with a Grand Block majority of National Liberals, left liberals, and socialists.

⁹⁵Bethmann Hollweg to Bülow, 14 July 1911, cited in W. Gutsche, *Aufstieg und Fall eines kaiserlichen Reichskanzlers* (Berlin, 1973), p. 91.

government might have been forced to seek a leftist majority and to move towards parliamentary government. However unlikely that development was, the paradox of this case is that moderate Conservatives may have actually perpetuated the old system and prevented the final break with unyielding political elites. On the other hand, one might argue that if the moderate Conservatives had not continually pressed for compromises from their popular auxiliaries, and if these moderates had not provided alternative parliamentary support on government bills the activists could not sanction, the government would have been forced to accept more of the radically reactionary plans of the *Kreuzzeitung* group or the Farmers' League.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of both these cases is that they prompt further speculation about the question of "system maintenance" in Imperial Germany. Clearly neither radical Conservatives nor the government wanted revolution. Yet both sides were willing to contribute to significant conflict between the DKP and the state, conflict that always threatened to benefit the Social Democrats directly. Certainly contemporaries refused to identify precisely when "insignificant" differences of opinion became (or might become) significant. This has undoubtedly contributed to a lingering vagueness among historians about whether — and if so, in what instances — the Reich government was willing to oppose Junker interests.⁹⁶ Nonetheless, these remaining doubts cannot remove from the record the radical Conservatives' threats to mobilize artisans, anti-Semites, and peasants against the government. Nor do they negate evidence that the government was willing to proceed with reforms that threatened to undermine the Junkers' power and exclusivity. Certain parallels between the collapse of the Imperial and Weimar systems make even more compelling the problem of how Conservatives defended or undermined anti-democratic regimes. In the period 1912-18, there appeared a kind of unity on the German Right, supported not only by shared anti-democratic assumptions but also by strong anti-establishment sentiment. As events in 1932-33 proved, this was not the last occasion on which radical demagogues seemed to offer the means to dismiss a troubled and unreliable government.

The major confrontations between the Conservative demagogues and the government in 1892, 1899-1905, and 1909 revealed how irreconcilable these questions of system maintenance and domestic conflict became. Since contemporaries had such difficulty describing

⁹⁶See the thoughtful discussion in P.-C. Witt, "Konservatismus als 'Überparteilichkeit'. Die Beamten der Reichskanzlei zwischen Kaiserreich und Weimarer Republik 1900-1933" in Stegmann, Wendt, and Witt, *Deutscher Konservatismus*, pp. 266-67.

the Conservative-government relationship, it is not surprising that present-day observers also continue to grope for metaphors to explore these twin problems. One historian, for example, recently echoed Bülow's remark about a "man and woman in marriage" by comparing the "family disputes" between Conservatives and the government to the conflicts on the Dallas ranch of television soap opera fame.⁹⁷ Like Kaiser Wilhelm's apparent love-hate relationship with the DKP, this metaphor draws attention to the complex institutional foundations and the personal idiosyncrasies that helped determine whether the relationship would in fact "work." Yet at the same time it prevents us from considering more fundamentally how contemporaries viewed their options should this relationship fail.

When a family partnership dissolves, divorce holds the promise of a new life. For the Conservative-government relationship in the Second Reich, however, total estrangement was seen as an option that could lead only to mutual annihilation. Survival, not just happiness, was at stake. Again and again Conservatives and government figures alike spoke of the "dangerous consequences" or the "fatal situation" that could follow a full-scale conflict between party and state. The fear of revolution, therefore, compelled Conservatives and government ministers to infuse their rhetoric with ambiguity and ambivalence, in order that the domestic battle between these two more or less "establishment" groups not escalate too far. In fact, neither meaningful parliamentary reform nor a *coup d'état* from above was very likely, given the ebb and flow of sympathies between the DKP and the Reich chancellery. As long as neither partner had the confidence to proceed with either progressive or reactionary initiatives independently of the other, each possible course of action presented too fearful a step in the dark for any "conservative" to take.

This leads to the third point, that the Conservative-government relationship — like that between popular mobilizers and Conservative leaders — was itself a process, not an institution.⁹⁸ Therefore, rather than speaking of a feudal-military bloc that governed Germany before 1914, one might better speak of a set of blocks that was repeatedly built up and torn down again.

Yet in order to show further the inadequacy of statements about the "hegemony" of Conservatives in Imperial German decision-making, the martial heritage of the German Junkers suggests a third,

⁹⁷From Jürgen Doerr's commentary to a paper I presented to the Canadian Historical Association in June 1984.

⁹⁸See Blackbourn, "Peasants and Politics," p. 70. Eley has written that one of the "beguiling" features of Puhle's analysis is the completeness of the BdL's alleged victory over the Conservatives; he adds that ". . . it is less the conclusion than the process itself that is interesting." ("Radicalism and Containment," p. 53).

perhaps even more appropriate metaphor with which this process can be apprehended and this discussion concluded. This metaphor presents an image of the Conservative Party and the government in a state of latent warfare. This paper can be said to have illustrated many of the features of this sort of warfare, complete with forays into the enemy camp, offers to defect, palace revolts and the overthrow of old generals, occasional truces, deadlock, and a final siege mentality. After 1871, the universal Reichstag franchise worked in an analogous way to universal conscription: an expanding theatre of war forced all combatants toward an unprecedented mobilization of resources, enlisting raw recruits and employing crude tactics to gain the upper hand. Whenever either side faced a third, more determined enemy on the left flank, hostilities ceased and bilateral talks began anew. But this diplomacy broke down again and again. In 1914 a crumbling front was shored up for a time. Five years later both armies had withdrawn from the field.

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