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ELARD VON OLDENBURG - JANUSCHAU  
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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The Second German Reich can be divided into two very distinct periods: the Chancellorship of Bismarck, which covered the years 1871 to 1890; and the personal government of William II, under the guise of several weak and subservient men (Caprivi, Hoehnlohe, Bülow and Bethmann-Hollweg), which lasted from 1890 to 1918.

With the dismissal of Bismarck, the magic touch which had been the sign of his Chancellorship disappeared. His "young master", somewhat intoxicated by the taste of power, decided to put into practice his own ideas about government. These ideas took many forms, embracing everything from social legislation to foreign policy. As regards the latter, Caprivi in 1892, and Bülow in 1902-1904, signed various commercial treaties with the new large grain producing countries: Austria-Hungary, Canada, the United States and Russia. There was a twofold purpose behind these treaties: to provide markets for the expanding German industries, and to forestall social unrest by providing cheaper foodstuffs.

While the treaties accomplished the purposes for which they had been signed, there were some serious domestic repercussions which neither William II nor his ministers had fully expected. For, in lowering the tariffs on grain and other agricultural products, they damaged the most vital



interests of a very articulate class: the agricultural class. Included in that category, and the most vociferous of all, were the Junkers.

The name "Junkers", certainly brings to mind no loving thoughts, but rather visions of leering, ruthless German militarists, responsible for two World Wars, whose sole interests seemed to have been aggression abroad and reaction at home. But no human being is totally evil, no matter how prejudiced, egotistical or narrow-minded he may be. An attempt shall be made, in this work, to bring out a fuller picture of one of the prominent members of this class during the rule of William II.

First of all, what does the word "Junker" itself mean? To what class of people does it apply, and what was the setting in which they lived during the early 20th century?

The word "Junker" comes from medieval German, 'junc' - or 'Junkherr', and means 'young nobleman'. The term thus applies really to the younger sons of noble families. In time, it evolved semantically, and came to mean any person claiming noble status, who resided in Prussia, and more specifically, in the area of Prussia situated east of the river Elbe.

In this sense, usually reserved to members of the East Prussian landed nobility and their relatives in the Prussian Army and bureaucracy, the word implies, above all, the provocative display of social arrogance and intellectual narrowness, blended with a materialistic conception of ethics based on the principle that might supersedes right and reasoned discussion. It also meant adherence to political and social reaction aiming at the preservation or restoration of noble privileges in various spheres of public life.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Hans Rosenberg, "The Rise of the Junkers", American Historical Review, XXXIX, p. 2. Hereafter referred to as: Rosenberg, "The Rise of the Junkers".

This is the description usually applied to the Junkers, prescind- ing from any personal qualities which would have changed the picture. In order to be impartial, it is only fair to quote Friedrich von Oertzen, one of their number, who wrote about them:

[The Junkers] showed precisely in their quality of big landholders and their care for their people, that the real attachment to the land made them consider as natural the social obligations attached to it, and they saw in it the oldest and most important prerogative of true Prussian Junkerdom. All the more indicative of the inner cleavage which ran through these men is the fact that they felt obliged to distinguish between their personal attitude and the supposedly necessary political attitudes as members of the 'landed gentry'. This distinction in their minds, was quite unwitting.<sup>1</sup>

The Junker, as a rule, was the possessor of a rather small estate--around 100 acres--called the Rittergut, upon which he exercised both administrative and judicial functions. He was the Landrat, which can best be translated as district president, and acted both as mayor and justice of the peace. This position of local ruler betrayed one of the characteristics of the Junker: he like to rule, and rule absolutely. He brooked no interference with his power, thus preserving his independence and self-sufficiency. In 1918, there were approximately 18,000 Junker families, who owned 20 per cent of all German farmlands.<sup>2</sup>

Since the Junker's holdings were usually small, they did not provide him with an income sufficient for a life of

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<sup>1</sup>Friedrich W. von Oertzen, Junker - Preussischer Adel im Jahrhundert des Liberalismus (Oldenburg im Osten: G. Stalling, 1930). p. 322. Hereafter referred to as: F.W. von Oertzen, Junker.

<sup>2</sup>Karl Brandt, "Junker to the Fore Again," Foreign Affairs, XIV:122.

luxury on his estate, and much less so in the city; he therefore found it expedient to live on his land, mingling freely in his habitat with his servants and tenants. As one can readily imagine, this circumstance led to a rather limited intellectual horizon. But it also had a distinct advantage. By living on his own estates, he accustomed himself to hard work. Unlike the nobility in many other countries, he never became a parasitical city dweller. The result was that the greater part of Junkerdom was endowed with great physical strength, tireless energy and good health, coupled with imperturbable patriotism.<sup>1</sup> Life was frugal for him, and the fare monotonous but plentiful. Guests and house parties relieved, to some extent, the monotony of his rather secluded life.<sup>2</sup>

Since the Junker had to live among those whom he considered his social inferiors, he was strongly conscious of his hereditary privileged position, and was prone to insist on his prerogatives. This consciousness of his own station in life made him careful not to marry above or below his rank, though there were notable exceptions to this rule.

The great landowners of Eastern Germany were convinced that a patriarchal society, based on agriculture, was the only desirable one. They could be admirable patriarchs, and

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<sup>1</sup>Gustave von Schmoller, Zwanzig Jahre Deutscher Politik (Munich: Dunker and Humbolt, 1920), p. 71. Hereafter referred to as: Schmoller, Zwanzig Jahre Deutscher Politik.

<sup>2</sup>Elard von Oldenburg-Januschau, Erinnerungen (Leipzig: Koehler, 1936), p. 12. Hereafter referred to as: Oldenburg-Januschau, Erinnerungen.

knew it; their peasants, on the whole, gave them loyal support. They would have preferred not to tolerate any other social type, but since industry had "insisted" on expanding, they felt that the great industrialists should adopt the Junker code.<sup>1</sup> In general, these aristocrats thought in terms of land, not money. They were unimpressed by their indebtedness.

Finally, the Junker's spirit of independence led him, during the period under consideration, to a sense of tension between his loyalty to his sovereign and his determination to put honor and ideal above obedience to his King.<sup>2</sup> His social environment exerted a strong influence on his political thoughts and achievements.

The Junker was a man of action, hardworking, disciplined, devoted to the upholding of law and order, self-sacrificing for the common good when, in his opinion, the latter coincided with his own. At the same time, he was an amazing combination of political acumen and personal brutality, self-centered politically and economically, always ready to sway with the wind in order to carry his point, or to improve his profit. The power and greatness of the State were of paramount importance in his utterances, but his enormous egotism led him at times to place his own interests

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<sup>1</sup>"Junkers' Return", New Statesman and Nation, III:789.

<sup>2</sup>For confirmation of the above statement about the Junker class, see Lizbeth Muncy, The Junker in the Prussian Administration under William II (1888-1914) (Providence: Brown University Press, 1944), pp. 34-37.



above those of his own country, identifying himself with his country by an amazing process of rationalization.<sup>1</sup>

The Junkers accepted the rule of the Hohenzollerns only grudgingly, because it subtracted from their own authority, and they were at first the passionate defenders of localism and a smaller Germany. One of their leaders did not hesitate to write later: "We did not hide the fact that the Kaiser was also criticized in our circles....."<sup>2</sup> But the gradual importance of Germany's role in the affairs of the world finally brought them to a better understanding of the problems of the hour and, by the time of the fall of Bismarck, they had been converted to a policy of limited unification, grudging imperialism, and Weltpolitik.<sup>3</sup>

Even though the Junkers' loyalty belonged to their ideal of a monarchy--Christian, patriarchal and feudal in character--their sense of duty to the masses (mistaken though it was), led them at times to take up the fight both against a bureaucracy devoted to the King, and against Liberalism. They were the proponents of a sound egotism in politics, both to preserve their own privileges and to save Prussia from

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<sup>1</sup>Rosenberg, "The Rise of the Junkers", p. 14. See also Oldenburg-Januschau, Erinnerungen, pp. 156-157.

<sup>2</sup>Kuno von Westarp, Konservative Politik im letzten Jahrzehnt des Kaiserreiches (Berlin: Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1935), p. 662. Hereafter referred to as Westarp, Konservative Politik.

<sup>3</sup>Andreas Dorpalen, "The German Conservatives and Parliamentarization of Imperial Germany", Journal of Central European Affairs, XIV (1951), p. 242.



ruin which they thought was threatening her!<sup>1</sup> It was, moreover, an egotism which had its roots less in a narrow materialistic point of view, or plain self-centering of interests, than in an honorable shortsightedness. The majority of them thought seriously that by furthering their own mode of living, they would provide the best means of advancement for all.<sup>2</sup>

For the Junker considered himself to be a bulwark ordained by God and Right to uphold government and order, and he thought of himself as honor-bound to perform paternalistic duties towards his subordinates. This duty was not a subject of discussion, for it came to him naturally, as something which belonged to him by the very fact that he was born a Junker.

As one of them declared quite frankly, "thus it came to pass that while Prussia and Germany have to be governed, they are unable to do so themselves."<sup>3</sup> This attitude on the part of one of the leading Junkers was the natural result of this sense of duty and paternalistic obligation which is one of the distinguishing marks of the medieval ideal of the knight. In many respects, the Junker class was an anachronistic survival of the Middle Ages, which had managed by sheer endurance

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<sup>1</sup>Schulthess' Europäischer Geschichtskalender (Munich: Beck, 1867-), p. 74. Hereafter referred to as: Schulthess' Geschichtskalender.

<sup>2</sup>Wilhelm Massow, Die Deutsche Innere Politik unter Kaiser Wilhelm II (Berlin: Verlagsanstalt, 1913), p. 159. Hereafter referred to as: Massow, Deutsche Politik.

<sup>3</sup>Stenographische Berichte der Verhandlungen des Reichstags, (Berlin, 1867 - ...), CCXC, 5691. Hereafter referred to as: Verhandlungen.

and political sharpness to weather the crises which had destroyed or blunted the nobility of Europe, and to bring before the wondering eyes of the world the picture of the lost knightly class.

However, during the period under consideration--the Empire of William II, from 1890 to 1918--the Junkers, while still professing allegiance to their King, were progressively drifting away from his banner. One of the leading independent newspapers of the period wrote in 1910:

What difference does it make to the Junkers--who were for centuries the most tenacious and hateful opponents of the Hohenzollerns, and whose loyalty to the King dates only from the time when he started to do their bidding--what difference does it make that the King wants to have peace with his people? The Representative has thus expressed one of the more naked forms of offense to the King!<sup>1</sup>

The reason the Junkers gave for their defection was that the policies of the German Government no longer coincided with the interests of their class, that therefore they no longer satisfied the needs of the German people as a whole. How was this momentous shift accomplished? What brought it to pass, and how did the leaders of this movement rationalize it? The best answer to these questions can be found by examining the personality and political activities of one of their outstanding members, Elard von Oldenburg-Januschau.

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<sup>1</sup>Frankfurter Zeitung, January 30, 1910.

## CHAPTER II

### YOUTH AND WELTANSCHAUUNG

When, after eighteen years' absence from the parliamentary scene, Elard von Oldenburg-Januschau was elected to the Reichstag of the Weimar Republic in 1930, the official newspaper of the Democratic Party, the Vossische Zeitung, made the following comment on his maiden speech:

An interesting anachronism! Looking at this spry old man, one would scarcely believe he is 75 years old. But if one listens to him, it is hard to realize that he was born only in the middle of the 19th century!<sup>1</sup>

Though one can always say of a 75 year-old deputy that he is an "interesting anachronism", there is more than that involved in this remark by a political opponent. The explanation can be found in the life of von Oldenburg-Januschau, as well as in his opinions on the political and social events of the German Empire.

Born March 20, 1855, he was promptly christened Elard, Maria, Kurt, Fuerchtegott von Oldenburg. He was the third son of his father's second wife, and therefore a very junior member of the family. His father owned a big farm at Beisleiden, Kreis Eylau, in East Prussia. A somewhat progressive agriculturist, the older von Oldenburg had been the first to introduce the

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<sup>1</sup>Vossische Zeitung, October 19, 1930.



cultivation of clover as cattle feed, as well as the first to introduce artificial fertilizer into East Prussia. So efficient was he as a farmer that he had succeeded, at the time of his death, in lifting a 150,000 mark mortgage on his farm, in addition to leaving a dowry of 150,000 marks to each of his two daughters.<sup>1</sup>

For his primary education, young Elard and his older brothers (the eldest had died as an infant) had the services of a private tutor. Though the latter tried his best to instill some learning into the minds of the rebellious youngsters, he was not very successful.

In 1868, when Elard was barely thirteen, his mother died. His father remarried promptly, and still another sister was born. Thus there were nine children altogether in the family. Only four, however, two boys and two girls, reached adulthood.

In the year of his mother's death, Elard and his brother were sent to the Gymnasium at Königsberg, but neither of them distinguished himself as a scholar. In 1869, they were sent to Wernigerode in Harz, where, to his great disappointment, young Elard von Oldenburg was confined to bed with typhus during the stirring days of the Franco-Prussian War. None of the schools he attended could hold his attention very long, and he usually was expelled either for scholastic deficiencies or as the ringleader in some student riot. The latter fate terminated his scholastic career at the Ritterakademie in

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<sup>2</sup>Oldenburg-Januschau, Erinnerungen, p. 10.

Berlin in 1875. In that same year his father, despairing of ever making a scholar out of his son, secured an appointment for him in the Imperial Guard. Young von Oldenburg was shipped to Berlin, where he entered the crack 2nd Regiment of Guard Uhlans. Thus, in 1875, Elard von Oldenburg became a Second Lieutenant in the service of the Emperor. For eight years, he was to enjoy the life of a gay young blade, a careless spendthrift, and fancy-free. In later years he recounted, with great amusement, how one of his friends and he raced down Unter den Linden, in the fashion of Roman charioteers, just to win a bottle of wine. On another occasion, he and three of his companions, most likely drunk, gave the incorrect address of the residence where they were going to attend a party. The cab dropped them in front of a strange house.. Undaunted, they rang the bell, and were admitted into a splendid palace, but quite unlike the one they had expected. Realizing a little belatedly that some mistake had been made, they were ready to make a quiet exit, when the door of the living room opened and Prince Bismarck appeared. Amid embarrassed excuses on their part, he invited them inside, and offered them some beer. A few minutes later, they proceeded to their rightful destination.<sup>1</sup>

In 1883, tragedy struck the family. His elder brother became very ill and died. Von Oldenburg's father decided that it was time for the young man to learn how to manage an estate,

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<sup>1</sup>Oldenburg-Januschau, Erinnerungen, p. 24.



and bought him 'Januschau' in West Prussia. Elard had to resign his military service, something which he regretted all his life. 'Januschau' was a big affair for a beginner. It embraced 3,000 acres, and had a net income of 30,000 marks per year. It contained 10 remounts, 20 cows and around 3,000 sheep. It was worked by two farmhands and an overseer, the income from wheat alone amounting to 33,000 marks per year. However, the manor house contained only three furnished rooms. To help him get a start, his generous stepmother gave him silverware for 12 and dishes for 24 settings.<sup>1</sup>

To prevent his son from engaging in ruinous activities, the father wisely kept a large mortgage on the farm.

In 1884, Elard von Oldenburg-Januschau - for such was his full name now, in accordance with the custom of adding to the family name the name of the estate - married Agnes von Kanitz, the sister of the famous parliamentarian, Count Kanitz.

In 1885, the estate of Brausen and the forest of Zollnich were added to Januschau, bringing von Oldenburg's total landholdings to around 7,000 acres.

When his father died in 1888, von Oldenburg also took over the management of Beisleiden for his young nephew. He carried out this additional task willingly and with dispatch.

At this turning-point of his career (1890), it might be well to mention some of the personal characteristics and political thoughts which were to exert a great influence on

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<sup>1</sup>Oldenburg-Januschau, Erinnerungen, p. 33.

his life.

In the course of his long life, von Oldenburg-Januschau was to become a big landholder, and this enabled him to achieve financial independence, and permitted him to pay attention to national affairs. In this respect, he differed from the majority of the Junkers who could not afford to live in the city or engage in parliamentary life.<sup>1</sup> His holdings, which were constantly augmented throughout his life, eventually amounted to about 17,000 acres, quite an estate indeed. In 1905, and again in 1910, he rounded out his estates by buying Sardinein and Lichterfeld, outside of Berlin.<sup>2</sup> The total area of his holdings then reached 17,000 acres, with an income of 70,000 marks per year. The interests on his mortgages came to 35,000 marks, leaving him a sizable amount of money for his personal use. Heavily mortgaged at first, he succeeded in clearing it rapidly of any encumbrances. He himself set an example for others as an agricultural expert. He was helped in his experimentation by the varied soil conditions prevailing on his lands, which were scattered over the eastern portion of Prussia.

The Junkers were forced to resort to the latest methods of intensive agriculture in order to keep pace with falling prices of agricultural commodities and rising wages for their farm workers. Thus they were caught in an economic squeeze which at times induced them to take extreme measures,

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>2</sup>When he bought Lichterfeld, he had already become a famous parliamentarian. It prompted one of the opposition newspapers to remark: "Oldenburg ante portas!"

as will be pointed out later.

Von Oldenburg was of medium height, in later life quite rotund, and endowed with an iron constitution. There is only one illness mentioned in his Memoirs, typhus, as we have already observed. During World War I, he joined the Army in the field as a reserve officer, and even commanded a regiment in action at the age of 61, an experience he enjoyed tremendously.

He was endowed with a great sense of humor, and was very witty. This most refreshing part of his character was to serve him well in life, although it was to make him an exception among his peers, who were not exactly quick-witted as a rule.

Von Oldenburg's character, however, was typically Prussian. He related how, when he was a small boy, he would ask his relatives who had served in the army to tell him about their war experiences.<sup>1</sup> Very early, he realized that his whole life, dependent on the income from his estates, was going to fluctuate with "the two basic elements worrying every farmer: the weather, and the prices of agricultural commodities."<sup>2</sup>

He was naturally authoritarian and disregarded other people's opinions as worthless when they did not agree with his own. But he never allowed the correctness of his own

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<sup>1</sup>Oldenburg-Januschau, Erinnerungen, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

opinions to be questioned: "I am still right; the others are the blockheads."<sup>1</sup>

Living on the land, among his people, he firmly believed he knew what was best for their needs and concerns.

....I am a friend of the German people, and I know exactly what its needs are. I spent my whole life living with the German people - [gales of laughter among the Social Democratic benches]. I will explain it to you: I grew up on the land, I played with the children from the village; I was a soldier, and I trained the sons of the people; I have lived for 22 years with the people on the land and in the cities, not with the people that you [the S.D.] have filled with hatred, but with the monarchical, God-fearing people which are still the majority in Germany, thank the Lord.<sup>2</sup>

Like other Junkers, von Oldenburg believed that the primary duty of a nobleman was to protect the little people, in fulfillment of an "age-old prerogative". When he tried to implement what to him had seemed right, he did it with the firm conviction that his long acquaintanceship with the German people at large made him their friend and protector. He once fired one of his field hands because he had dared to vote for a Social Democratic candidate, for "he wanted to be the only one who made politics on his estates".<sup>3</sup> When he himself could not fulfill his duties, he strongly advocated that the State take part in this paternalistic approach to government. He felt, however, that this selfless attitude

<sup>1</sup>Schulthess' Geschichtskalender (1910), p. 90.

<sup>2</sup>Verhandlungen, XI Leg. Per., II sess., IV, p. 880.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., XI Leg. Per., I sess., III, p. 2147.



had gone too far under the Empire.

Bismarck and William I had a twofold program against the Social Democrats: repression and social legislation. We shall agree to more social legislation only if the people get off the Social Democratic bandwagon upon which they have been chased by the fear of losing their jobs.<sup>1</sup>

The correct measure to be attained is indicated by the very motto of Prussia's "Suum cuique" which "does not mean, in the last analysis, that the State should forthwith give each one his own; no, it also means that the State should receive his own for it!"<sup>2</sup>

Consequently, von Oldenburg felt that labor unions were unnecessary, if the workers were treated right. He asserted that "the agricultural journeymen spit on the right of coalition." The solution of the relationship between workers and employers was not to be found in the unions, but in the just wage and in the employer's interest in the living conditions of his employees.

....I above all hope and wish that unemployment insurance shall be repealed by this House with flying colors.<sup>3</sup>

Thus he advocated the transfer of the old social relationship between landowner and hired farm workers to the field of industry. He failed to realize that the relationship between employer and employee in an industrial society is different from that prevailing in an agricultural society. He

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., CCXXVIII, 1299.

<sup>2</sup>Oldenburg-Januschau, Erinnerungen, p. 93.

<sup>3</sup>Verhandlungen, XI Leg. Per., I sess., III, 2245.



said: "the difference is that, in industry, the relationship is only one of money, whereas on the land, it is also a personal one."<sup>1</sup> He perceived the cause, but not the remedy.

In spite of its faults, the German government was almost ideal in its present form: Germany had "the most liberal constitution in the world!" For, in what other country was there provision for a single Chamber, elected by universal suffrage, with no Upper House to control it?<sup>2</sup> But this Constitution had not been sworn to by the Emperor; it was the gracious grant of the All-Highest and of his brother-Kings, a grant which had met with their sanction. It could always be revoked, and was by no means to be considered permanent. The 'rocher de bronze' foundation of this Constitution was the authority of the Hohenzollerns, who had "stabilized conditions in Germany by the means of the drum and a big stick." Thus did he show his contempt for the brother-Kings, who had to be coerced into unification!

The German people, however, had taken advantage of 'Bismarck's mistake' - namely, the democratization of the Reich by means of a constitution applying equally to all. Democracy, as it had 'degenerated' in Germany, was a 'poison' second to none in destroying the minds and the virtue of the German people! He bore no particular love for the 'bourgeois society' either:

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 448.

<sup>2</sup>Oldenburg-Januschau, Erinnerungen, p. 202.

The bourgeois society is determined to save its skin in the most ruthless fashion...the bourgeois society shows, in its overwhelming majority, the will and the strength to resist the hateful provocation (of the Socialists) but it also expects the allied governments to lead unified resistance.<sup>1</sup>

Von Oldenburg consistently and most energetically fought the 'encroachments' of the constitutionally-minded Socialists. The whole Social-Democratic movement gave him the impression of "being a speculation on the stupidity of the masses." It was for the Social Democrats that he reserved his most pointed barbs, it was towards their representatives in Parliament that he exhibited his greatest verbal brutality: "one should take the most stringest measures against the Social Democrats: one should send them to Africa, and if they are successful there, it would always be time enough to have them take over Germany."<sup>2</sup> One of the weaknesses of the German Empire is that it continues to tolerate unnecessarily the Socialist agitation, that it tolerates the Socialists at all. Towards the elected representatives of the hapless Socialists, he was no more considerate. When the aged Bebel once permitted himself to make a remark which von Oldenburg found offensive, he did not hesitate to tell him so: "One can see that you and I have a different conception of the meaning of the word 'honor'; if it comes to a test, my concept of it will seem superior to yours."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Verhandlungen: XI Leg. Per., II sess., IV, 2879.  
Underscoring for emphasis mine.

<sup>2</sup>Verhandlungen: XI Leg. Per., I sess., III, 1676.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., IX Leg. Per., I sess., II, 403.

Sarcasm was not spared either:

When one listens to Representative Bebel speaking with such authority on foreign affairs, one must regret that he never will be in a position of becoming Chancellor. For then we all would witness his colossal discomfiture!<sup>1</sup>

Von Oldenburg declared that "it is a wonderful delusion among our parliamentary circles that Germany can be governed by a parliamentary regime."<sup>2</sup> His contempt for democratic processes knew almost no limit, and when pressed about his record at an electoral meeting in his district, he calmly announced that, as far as he was concerned, "he was more interested in knowing how many sucklings one of his sows at Januschau would have than what was in the speech Representative Richter gave yesterday."<sup>3</sup>

When he was a young officer, it "seemed (to him) somewhat preposterous to see that 400 men felt themselves obliged to want to govern alongside with my grand old King and his great Chancellor!"<sup>4</sup> His loyalty belonged to the Kaiser, rather than to the country. "We stand for....a strong monarchy...Thereby only shall we have a sure basis in life and in death."<sup>5</sup> He further declared: "we think that the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., XI Leg. Per., II sess. III, 2352.

<sup>2</sup>Oldenburg-Januschau, Erinnerungen, p. 199.

<sup>3</sup>Oldenburg-Januschau, Erinnerungen, p. 65.

<sup>4</sup>Verhandlungen, CCXXX, 2913.

<sup>5</sup>Oldenburg-Januschau, Erinnerungen, p. 201.

present task of the German people is to make itself strong enough to bash in the skulls of anybody--be he inside or outside of Germany--who dares attempt to tarnish the halo of the Imperial throne."<sup>1</sup> In another of his speeches, he turned toward the Socialists, and told them that "if for you the Emperor is an institution, for us he is a person. And we shall serve His Majesty personally, as long as we live, fearlessly and to our last breath, according to the old tradition!"<sup>2</sup>

The House of Hohenzollern must be a strong foundation for Prussia, and Prussia must be strong enough to enable her King to protect the other feeble member-states of the Empire. "A weak Prussia would lead to unity, and unity in turn would only lead to a German Republic."<sup>3</sup> What an unwitting display of foresight! Thus, in the German Empire of 1871, the Junkers saw nothing more than an enlarged Prussia. The old Emperor himself had said so, and even if, according to the Constitution, the other States were independent, they still in fact "depended upon the Prussian bayonet!"<sup>4</sup>

For no other group of people ever so brazenly thought that "might makes right" than the Junkers. In this respect, von Oldenburg-Januschau was no exception,<sup>5</sup> and to him the embodiment of this theory was the Prussian Army. The German State was founded on the two strong pillars of a healthy agriculture and a strong army. The two went necessarily hand

<sup>1</sup>Verhandlungen, XI Leg. Per., II sess., I, 30.

<sup>2</sup>Kreuzzeitung, November 12, 1908.

<sup>3</sup>Oldenburg-Januschau, Erinnerungen, p. 201.

<sup>4</sup>Schulthess' Geschichtskalender, (1906), p. 117.

<sup>5</sup>Oldenburg-Januschau, Erinnerungen, p. 93.



in hand: for only the invigorating life on the land could provide good, strong men capable of forming an army large enough to give adequate protection to Germany.<sup>1</sup> In this he was supported by his Emperor, who declared:

I laid emphasis on the fact that East Prussia, being chiefly an agricultural province, must above all support and maintain an energetic peasantry capable of being the pillar and mainstay of my monarchy.<sup>2</sup>

Oldenburg underscored this, maintaining that the safety of the Imperial crown depended mainly on a large number of independent small people, rather than on the "big fortunes".

Very early in life, von Oldenburg became a staunch advocate of the idea that there was no higher ideal for a Prussian nobleman than to serve his King. He "belonged to his King and to his country heart and soul, and had no other objective in life as a young man than to become a soldier."<sup>4</sup>

Any attack whatsoever on the Army, no matter how justified the point of criticism might be, always was the starting signal for a diatribe against its author. Most of von Oldenburg's speeches, both in and out of the Reichstag, were devoted to that subject, and one of the leaders of the Conservative Party in the Reichstag once remarked that:

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<sup>1</sup>Oldenburg-Januschau, Erinnerungen, pp.63, 198.

<sup>2</sup>W. H. Dawson, "The German Agrarian Movement", Contemporary Review, LXXXVII:73.

<sup>3</sup>Verhandlungen, XI Leg. Per. I sess., III, 2148.

<sup>4</sup>Oldenburg-Januschau, Erinnerungen, p. 14.



We defended above all the tradition which bound us, the Prussian nobility, to the Army. The Prussian kings had brought the nobility into the Army - and this von Oldenburg never tired of emphasizing in his effective way. It was his assignment to defend these priceless values against democratic equalization, party politics and anti-militaristic internationalism.<sup>1</sup>

As the head of the Army, the Emperor enjoyed an indisputable constitutional right to command it. This power was the link between the throne and its main instrument, and a necessary prerogative in order to avoid excesses.<sup>2</sup>

The relationship between Kaiser and officer was purely personal, so much so, in fact, that nothing and nobody - press, public opinion or Reichstag - could influence the mind of the War Lord against one of his officers.<sup>3</sup> The Officer Corps of which von Oldenburg was a reserve member with the rank of Rittmeister A.D. - was frequently criticized for its arrogance and its mores. But it was "a wonderful entity, for better or for worse", and attacks against it would be construed as personal offenses! The All-Highest enjoyed irremovable rights in its management: he could appoint officers, but above all, he had to arbitrate affairs of honor and the results of courtmartial against officers.<sup>4</sup> The king had the right to name or transfer commanding officers, and

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<sup>1</sup>Kuno von Westarp, "Aus Meinen Erinnerungen", Preussische Jahrbücher, v. 235, pt. I, p. 54.

<sup>2</sup>Oldenburg-Januschau, Erinnerungen, p. 108.

<sup>3</sup>Vorhandlungen, CCXXX, 2912.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid..

the Reichstag has no power to interfere with these powers of the All-Highest. History will demonstrate what the Prussian officer corps has done by way of example not only for the Germany Army, but for the armies of the whole world.<sup>1</sup> During one of the Reichstag debates, von Oldenburg struck the note that so clearly described the attitude of the typical German officer, including its strong and weak points:

Much has been said here in the last few days about the part the Officer Corps should take in politics. Its participation has been condemned by all parties; and rightly so. We condemn it most energetically, because the Officer Corps does not want to have anything to do with politics, and should have nothing to do with politics.<sup>2</sup>

But almost with the same breath he limited his pronouncement by declaring that "if a Prussian general were to stand here (in the Reichstag) as a representative of the German Army, and somebody would attack a vital institution of the officer corps, it would be no doubt his duty to defend its rights most energetically."<sup>3</sup> In his opinion, the recent pardon of two duelling officers again established the fact that neither the Press today, nor the so-called 'public opinion' had the least influence in the decisions which came from the lawful sources of authority and dealt with the behavior of the German officers. Even though it was a sad thing that duels still took place, they were a necessity, lest the spirit of the Officer Corps suffer!<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Verhandlungen, IX Leg. Per., I sess., II, 1675.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., CCLIX, 8969.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., CCXXX, 2912.

<sup>4</sup>Verhandlungen, X Leg. Per., II sess., IX, 8965.

The 'esprit de corps' was certainly strong. Von Oldenburg also gave a good description of the qualities required of an ideal field-commander when he wrote during World War I: first thought must always be given to morale; discipline in the field should not be too severe, and fear should not be displayed in front of the men.

German citizens had one honorable duty; namely that of becoming soliders.<sup>1</sup> Naturally, the Army required discipline, for if officers were defenseless against the ranks, the natural result would be the collapse of the system. It was therefore absolutely necessary that the men, after a strenuous maneuver, should be forced to pull themselves together once more, and that they should present a decent front, quite apart from the fact that the "goose-step" was an excellent discipline.<sup>2</sup> From his experience as a soldier, "he could only say, that it is an excellent discipline and a good means for developing moral strength to straighten up in the saddle after a tiring field day and to conclude the exercises with an 'eyes right' and a formation march."<sup>3</sup> Discipline was certainly a good thing, and it proved that the German citizen had, as a rule, very steady and iron nerves! The old ways of dealing with delinquents were unquestionably better than the new ones. In the old days, one knew only "oral proceedings", that is to say "bawling out" - and there was never any "injustice"!

<sup>1</sup>Verhandlungen, CCXXVIII Leg. Per., II sess., IX, 1069.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 1070.

<sup>3</sup>Verhandlungen, IX Leg. Per., I sess., II, 1675.

The Army was a necessary means to inculcate discipline into the average German citizen, to teach him the value of obedience. "If we did not need an Army and a Navy to defend our Fatherland, which is open on all sides, then they would have to be invented, as the best educational method for Germany."<sup>1</sup> Thus, war, or the threat of war, was absolutely necessary; in peace times, the greatest qualities of a nation or of a person did not manifest themselves. This last opinion is very similar to the one that had been formulated by Treitschke during the crisis of the unification of Germany, when he maintained that "peace is but a pipe dream".

The Army must naturally be one of compulsory service. Bebel once proposed that, in order to cut costs, the German military command ought to explore the possibilities of a militia army, as it was customary in Sweden and in Switzerland, but von Oldenburg rejected his proposal with the two following arguments:

- a) We do not like the way in which this matter is handled in these two countries.
- b) After all, it does not make any difference whether these two countries have an army or no army at all!<sup>2</sup>

Even while holding some of these opinions, von Oldenburg remained a deeply religious man. He stated his convictions as follows: "I am an Evangelical Lutheran by birth, upbringing and conviction. I belong to that class of people who cannot be budged from their convictions."<sup>3</sup> Even

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<sup>1</sup>Verhandlungen, CCXXVIII Leg. Per., I sess., II, 1071.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., CCXXX, 2914.

<sup>3</sup>Oldenburg-Januschau, Erinnerungen, p. 89.



in religion "he was right!" He did not hesitate to urge that German universities take positive action on religious questions, since the German people as a whole were deeply religious.

## CHAPTER III

### GRAIN FOR GAIN (1893 - 1902)

With the death of his father in 1888, the politically inactive part of von Oldenburg's life came to a close. By sheer coincidence, of course, William I, the "grand old Emperor", and Frederick III, the ill-fated "Emperor for 100 days", died during the same year. Less than two years later, Prince von Bismarck, the founder of the Second German Reich, the Iron Chancellor, was ungraciously dismissed by his 'young master' William II. If Louis XIV was purported to have said: "L'Etat, c'est moi", one could very well ascribe to the new German Emperor an apocryphal: "Moi, je suis l'Etat". For Bismarck's dismissal marked the beginning of the personal government of the German Emperor. The Reich had been created by the Iron Chancellor, and had been tailored to his measure. It would have taken a man of his political stature to continue his work successfully. The very intricate system of alliances, as well as the delicate balance which had been struck at home, required great deftness, coupled with good knowledge of the forces at work. Unfortunately, neither William II nor his advisers possessed either one. From this time on, it was to be a policy of trial and error, in foreign as well as in domestic affairs. And the result was to be mostly error.

The separation of the offices of Chancellor of the

Reich from that of Prussian Prime Minister was, altogether, an unfortunate solution to the existing difficulties. Bismarck himself had said that the Constitution was not designed for such a separation of powers.<sup>1</sup> By 1892, the existing grievances swiftly came to the surface because harmony was lacking in high places, and thus the germs of a crisis were always at hand. Even though the goal was desirable in itself it seemed to many people that the right standards of action were not correctly applied. As a result of this, criticism itself went out of proportion for it became fashionable to criticize everything, and to see failure, pettiness, false appearances everywhere. Every event was scanned with mistrust in order to extract from it a reason for criticism which, unfortunately, did not stop short of the Kaiser. Even the latter's severe warnings that he was not going to give in though his new policies were criticized, could not quiet down the wave of distrust that also swept monarchical circles and made itself even felt in the Conservative Party.

At the same time, the opposition between agricultural and industrial economy became ever sharper. Its cause could be traced to the commercial policy which, in the politics of the Reich, had occupied the dominant position during the period of legislative reform. Bismarck's concept of anchoring German economic life on moderate protective tariffs met with increased support. Those who understood German political economy advocated rightly, therefore, that Germany should try

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<sup>1</sup>Massow, Deutsche Politik, p. 128.

to reach an economic understanding with those countries which pursued similar tariff policies. Such an understanding should take the form of long-term trade treaties. Caprivi, the Iron Chancellor's successor, adopted this point of view, thereby performing a great service to the German economy.<sup>1</sup> He had always distrusted agrarianism, and went so far as to assert that, together with anti-Semitism, it should be ranked with Socialism as one of the anarchical elements in the country.<sup>2</sup> Thus, in the course of 1891, economic treaties were signed with Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Italy and Switzerland. The agricultural interests interpreted the new tariff policy to mean that they had been sacrificed to help industry overcome a serious economic situation. For the first time, a purely agrarian opposition raised its head: the Junkers, and their Conservative allies, were forced to switch from a general leadership, according to their political theories, to a pure defense of their agrarian interests.<sup>3</sup>

The reason for the struggle is evident. Large landowners were faced with the specter of insolvency and disaster, for they were caught in a tremendous fall in agricultural prices,<sup>4</sup> at a time when they had overcapitalized their estates to modernize their methods in the hope of meeting higher standards

<sup>1</sup>Massow, Deutsche Politik, p. 133.

<sup>2</sup>W. H. Dawson, "The German Agrarian Movement", Contemporary Review, LXXXVII, p. 72.

<sup>3</sup>F. W. von Oertzen, Junker, p. 318 ff.

<sup>4</sup>A few examples will tell the story: wheat declined from M a ton in 1890 to M 135 in 1894; rye, from M 208 a ton in 1890 to M 118 in 1894. Every single agricultural commodity had a similarly disastrous decline in those four years.



of living. The income from their investment was so small that in many cases it failed to cover the interest on their mortgages.<sup>1</sup> Thus, they had to resort to violent methods in order to obtain relief. Though the fault did not lie with them, this situation brought to full flower their selfishness and their materialism.

At this time, the average Junker enjoyed an income equal, in most cases, to between 1 percent and 2 percent of his investment. A return of 3 percent was a rarity.<sup>2</sup> Simultaneously, there was a growing movement of rural workers to the urban centers, caused by the rapid industrialization of Germany. As a consequence, wages of the remaining farm workers steadily increased. The reaction of the Junkers, caught in the economic vice, was swift and violent.

The effect of the economic treaties signed by Caprivi was to lower the tariff on agricultural products, thereby enabling Germany to obtain more favorable conditions for her industrial exports. It led von Oldenburg to remark later:

You have been spoiled during the Caprivi regime....for you have come to believe that the German peasant is forever obliged to deliver foodstuffs to you cheaper than it costs him to produce them in Germany. The German landworker lived miserably, his wife worked herself nearly to death, and miracles of work and effort have been accomplished; all with the net result that within the last 15 years [1890-1905] the indebtedness of the German landholding class has increased by hundreds of millions of marks....Any endangering of the [agricultural] capital

<sup>1</sup>Pauline Anderson, Background of Anti-English Feeling in Germany (1890-1902) (Washington: American Univ. Press, 1939), p. 41. Hereafter referred to as: Anderson, Background of Anti-English Feeling.

<sup>2</sup>Oldenburg-Januschau, Erinnerungen, p. 74.

would mean endangering the food supplies in the cities, and also endangering a great proportion of our national patrimony.<sup>1</sup>

A protective tariff for German agriculture became more urgent, not only because of the threat to agrarian capital, but because the national food supply might be endangered. Therefore, said von Oldenburg:

I think this is just the right moment to strengthen German agriculture: for it is alone capable of feeding...the German people in critical times.<sup>2</sup>

That this last statement proved to be a fallacy was not fully understood at the time.

Why was von Oldenburg able to make such a statement in the Reichstag in 1905? What provided him with a springboard into politics strong enough to insure his election?

His first appearance on the political scene began when a call to arms was issued in 1893 for the formation of a strong pressure group to support the interests of the landholding classes in Germany. This appeal, innocently buried in the columns of a dull agrarian newspaper, was to revolutionize the Junkers' course in politics. It was written by a Thuringian landlord, Rupprecht -Pansen, who was not a Junker. But the East Prussian landlords seized upon it as the occasion of awakening the agrarian class as a whole to the danger of extinction to which it was exposed. The article read in part: "We must cease to win elections for the Government in our districts....we must strive to apply a ruthless 'Interessenpolitik'"

<sup>1</sup>Verhandlungen, XI Leg. Per., II Sess., I, 29.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., XI Leg. Per., I Sess., I, 30.



...for only in that way can present-day agriculture be saved!"<sup>1</sup> What precipitated such a shift in the allegiance of the Junkers? While the reasons for it have been discussed, the result should now be examined.

In 1893 - the same year in which the appeal had appeared - a pressure group was organized. It was called the 'Bund der Landwirte', which had a phenomenal growth. Its immediate aims were to "unite all agrarian interests, draw the small peasants into their [the Junkers'] orbit, and act as a pressure group in the Landtag." How well it succeeded at this can be measured by the fact that in 10 years, it enlisted close to 250,000 members. Four-fifths of this number, or approximately 200,000, were small landholders whose interests did not always coincide exactly with those of the big Junkers.<sup>2</sup> The latter nevertheless quickly seized control of the organization by infiltrating the top-level Council. In 1903, eight out of the twenty-three members of the Executive Council, were big landholders.

This new group, vociferous and powerful in the extreme, gave von Oldenburg an opportunity to use his many political talents. As one of the big proprietors of West Prussia, he was made a member of the founding council, and was rewarded for his activities by being named vice-president, and later president, of the organization in his province. Henceforth,

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<sup>1</sup>Johannes Ziekursch, Politische Geschichte des neuen Deutschen Kaiserreiches (Frankfurt -am-Main, 1930), III, p. 59

<sup>2</sup>Anderson, Background of Anti-English Feeling, p. 135.

he was to be in the forefront in promoting the Bund's policies. His well-known talents as an orator, for example, were utilized to their fullest extent by making him deliver the annual keynote address at the Bund's meeting in the 'Circus Busch', in Berlin. This general meeting was usually quite an affair, with anywhere from two to three thousand members attending.

The implementation of these long-range policies was entrusted to their representatives in the Reichstag. Once there, a handful of ultra-agrarians led by Wangenheim, Hahn, Rösicke, Oertel, Lucke, and later, von Oldenburg-Januschau, by the violence of their language, their uncompromising attitude, by their unmeasured demands and their skillful tactics, contrived to attain a degree of importance far out of proportion to their actual strength.

They made their allies, the Conservatives, Centrists and National Liberals, believe that they represented in their mode of thinking a much more considerable part of the rural electorate than was actually the case, and thus they succeeded in imposing their will on the rest of the agrarian army in the Reichstag.<sup>1</sup>

They organized a system of terrorizing the great body of the 'Moderates'. These agrarian fire-eaters, small in number though they were, misled also completely the Imperial Government itself, including Prince Bülow, by their strategy. Under these conditions, the Imperial Government honestly believed that their excessive demands for protective duties on every kind of agricultural product really represented the

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<sup>1</sup> Wilhelm von Schierbrand, "Results of the German Elections," North American Review, CLXXVII, p. 194.



wishes of the great bulk of the farming class, and was finally persuaded to frame a new bill. In the period from 1893 to 1914, von Oldenburg wielded a great influence in the framing of the goals of the Bund, and his voice was always listened to with great deference by the Council.<sup>1</sup>

The objectives of the Bund were varied, but all of them sought to obtain higher prices for the foodstuffs produced by its members. It called for adequate customs duties for the protection of agricultural products. It opposed the reduction of existing duties, and requested that no commercial treaties such as those signed by Caprivi, which might have as their result the reduction of German agricultural tariffs, be offered either to Russia or to other countries. It demanded more protection for agriculture and its allied industries, as well as the prohibition on the importation of cattle; this prohibition should be achieved by sanitary regulations preventing the entry of any cattle into Germany, whose supply in cattle was already abundant enough. In order to obtain cheaper money with which to pay off their debts, the Junkers of the Bund der Landwirte advocated a policy of bi-metallism, much in the same way as the 'Silverites' did in the United States at that time.

To encourage agriculture and the use of the newest agricultural processes, the Bund demanded legislation to promote the formation of Chambers of Agriculture. To keep

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<sup>1</sup>Willy Kremer, Der Soziale Aufbau der Parteien des Deutschen Reichstages von 1871-1918 (Köln, 1934), p. 6.

a plentiful supply of cheap labor on the land, legislation upon domicile, free migration and breach of contract by the laborers was added to the list. Revision of labor insurance legislation, whereby the burden would be transferred from the employers to the whole community, was requested. Finally, to curb the profits of the grain intermediaries, the Bund asked for State control of the grain exchanges, revision of the land laws, and redistribution of taxation.<sup>1</sup>

As far as foreign policy was concerned, the Bund was not silent. It promoted the support of a strong Army and a moderate Navy, the latter step being a conciliatory move towards their allies, the National Liberals. It favored a colonial policy which would not conflict with their own interests by providing cheap agricultural produce for German markets.<sup>2</sup>

That the Bund der Landwirte was a gigantic pressure group, devoted to a single purpose, cannot be denied. No wonder that William II, speaking on September 6, 1894, a few weeks before Caprivi's resignation, complained that:

The word 'opposition' has come to my ears! Gentlemen, this opposition of Prussian nobles against their King is a monstrous thing! Opposition is justifiable only when the King himself stands at its head.<sup>3</sup>

As it was, the Bund obtained some measure of relief

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<sup>1</sup>W. H. Dawson, op. cit., pp. 70-71. See also Ludwig Bergsträsser, Geschichte der Politischen Parteien in Deutschland (Mannheim, 1928), p. 128.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>3</sup>W. H. Dawson, op. cit., p. 73.



for its members by working within the framework of the existing laws. One of the very clever ways in which this was done was the manipulation of the 'Identitätsscheine'. This document, necessary to obtain a rebate on duties on grain imported into Germany in exchange for grain previously exported, was modified to include only tonnage, and not quality of grain. This enabled the Junkers to export their harvest and then sell the 'Identitätsscheine' at a discount to grain brokers, who then imported grain from abroad at cheaper prices, and duty-free. The extent of this traffic can be appreciated by stating that in 1911, out of a total consumption of seven billion marks, five hundred million marks of duties alone were thus evaded. If the war of 1914 had started in September, Germany would have been left without enough breadstuffs to carry her to the next harvest.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the effect of the 3 mark 50 duty which had been provided for in the Caprivi treaties, coupled with the alteration of the 'importation certificates' in 1893, was more effective from the Junkers' point of view than the 5 mark per ton duty under Bismarck. This, however did not satisfy von Oldenburg.

The Bismarckian Wheat Tariff of 5 Mk per ton was even then no longer sufficient to stop the decline in prices, because the freight rates of the American shipping lines fell in an unpredictable manner, and if one really wanted to make up a just tariff, which would equal in value the old 5 Mk tariff, this fact would have to be taken into account.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>F. W. von Oertzen, Junker, pp. 331-332.

<sup>2</sup>Verhandlungen, XI Leg. Per., I sess. III, 2146.

Nothing short of the moon would have satisfied him! He ascribed the decline of East Prussia to the collapse of the wool prices, which forced the Junkers to give up their profitable flocks, and to take up 'unprofitable' cattle.<sup>1</sup> Anyway, tariffs would not provide a cure to the marasmus, for the middle-men and the city taxes were to blame for most of it.<sup>2</sup>

But, unless the Bund could get representatives elected to the Reichstag, it would find itself at a disadvantage in its fight for survival. The creation of a party machinery was a long and difficult task at best, and the simplest solution to this problem was to have a working arrangement with one of the existing right-wing parties. The logical choice was the Conservative Party, for it had always had a rather large proportion of Junkers among its members.

This arrangement proved to be advantageous to both sides of the bargain. The Conservative Party acquired a devoted following in a class it had not conquered before, and the Bund received the adequate parliamentary support, necessary for the passage of its measures by the Reichstag.<sup>3</sup>

How did the Conservative Party, the hesitant supporter of Bismarck and the Empire, accomplish the shift in allegiance necessary for its new role? The best way to answer this question is to examine the path taken in national politics by

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<sup>1</sup>Verhandlungen, XI Leg. Per., I sess. VI, 4706.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., XI, Leg. Per., II sess. III, 31.

<sup>3</sup>Ludwig Bergsträsser, Geschichte..., p. 128.



von Oldenburg, for his rise and fall in the Reichstag are closely linked with the decisive influence of the agrarian elements in the Conservative Party.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE JUNKER AND BÜLOW (1902 - 1909)

The attempt to rule with the present system of Chambers must be regarded as having entirely failed. Constitutionalism for Prussia is an absurdity; we can only manage with one form of government, that of an absolute governing authority, whether exercised by a Monarchy or a republican dictatorship. When I first became a Minister, I was a radical constitutionalist, in comparison with my attitude nowadays. I believe now only in absolutism for Prussia.

Bismarck, (1865)

Since the dismissal of Bismarck in 1890, and until von Oldenburg's arrival in the Reichstag in 1902, three Chancellors had already attempted to fill Bismarck's shoes: Caprivi, from 1890 to 1894; the Prince Hohenlohe, from 1894 to 1900; and, since 1900, Prince Bülow. The latter's accession to 'power' was marked by a continuation of the vacillations which had distinguished the reigns of his predecessors. If Caprivi had believed that the "only way to retain the rapidly increasing population in Germany itself was to export products and not people,"<sup>1</sup> Bülow, seeing that this policy had not been altogether successful, decided to try another approach to the same problem. However, this decision had been aided by the appearance on the Reichstag scene of several very voluble gentlemen of the Conservative hue, who bore a marked resemblance

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<sup>1</sup>Oldenburg-Januschau, Erinnerungen, p. 38.

to the Executive Council of the Bund der Landwirte. Some of them had been elected before Bülow's accession, but the majority, riding on the crest of a reactionary wave to the right, arrived in the Reichstag after the 1903 elections.

Among the newcomers, but hardly a newcomer to politics, was Elard von Oldenburg-Januschau. Bravely ignoring his distaste for parliamentary doings, he had consented to let himself be elected to the Prussian Landtag in 1901. In 1902, he was persuaded to run for the Reichstag, in the electoral district of Elbing-Marienburg, in West Prussia. In spite of the fact that he undertook to serve his mandate "only against my will, and only to defer to the wishes of the people of West Prussia",<sup>1</sup> this extreme modesty did not prevent him from seeking re-election until his defeat in 1912 retired him from the political scene of pre-war Germany.

His appearance did not fail to create disturbances! He had been chosen in a by-election, the national elections having taken place in 1900. The absolute majority in the Elbing-Marienburg district, - which it was necessary to obtain in order to win in the first round, - consisted of 9200 votes. Von Oldenburg gathered 9205. One could imagine the opposition was not going to let the matter rest there. Several irregularities were detected: he had failed to send in his acceptance of the mandate within the prescribed limit; he had failed to submit proof that he was an eligible candidate; and there had been some rather high-handed methods employed to 'persuade' rural voters to put his name on the ballot.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 61.



Furthermore, ballots bearing the name of his leading opponent had, in many mysterious ways, been disqualified. The net result of the inquiry into the validity of his mandate led the Reichstag commission to recommend, on February 17, 1903, that:

..the election of Representative Ritter-gutsbesitzer Elard von Oldenburg-Januschau in the first electoral District of the Danzig Province be declared invalid.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, after his 'election', von Oldenburg had arrived in Berlin, declaring that "after all, his constituents had also a right to see some fireworks in the Reichstag."

He proved himself to be very useful to the Conservative Party, which was just engaged in providing an unconditional opposition to the Imperial Government. His gift as a speaker, his wit and his fearlessness, made him the point of the Conservative spear. When he asked to be recognized in a debate, his friends always feared that his highly 'colorful' and lively speeches would endanger their position on the problem at hand. But it was precisely this plastic expression, this gift for parliamentary jousts, this deftness with a bon mot which made him a "main party workhorse and a well-known politician", always a "ready expert on military affairs".<sup>2</sup> Friends and foes alike would appreciate his explosion, and even the Social Democrats would sometimes be provoked into gales of laughter by his repartees. On other occasions, however, the hapless Socialists did not fare so well. On the

<sup>1</sup>Verhandlungen, X Leg. Per., II Sess., Aktenstücke VI, 5819.

<sup>2</sup>Westarp, Konservative Politik, pp. 196, 243.



1st of May 1906, for example, the May Day celebrations ran afoul of the police, and there was some bloodshed. Two days later, in the Reichstag, von Oldenburg had the following solace to offer:

The elements which have compromised themselves politically on the 1st of May, let them be thrown out! Our domestic supply of revolutionaries is ample enough, so much so in fact, that we could make an article of export thereof!<sup>1</sup>

This solicitous remark drew the following commentary from the Freie Presse, which called him the "bloodthirsty stable-hand from Januschau".<sup>2</sup>

If some controversial measure was being discussed, and the heads of the party did not know exactly what course to take, the Januschauer went into the fray, bravely holding his own. One of the leading German newspapers, the Münchener Allgemeine Zeitung, remarked, a propos the weight of his words:

[Herr von Oldenburg] does not speak as a visionary, nor as a 'wildman'. He speaks as one of the best-known spokesmen of his Party, the Conservative Party; he speaks as one of the men who are sent out, in difficult spots, to say more clearly than Herr von Heydebrand can, or wants to, what the Conservatives' position is. Thus Hr. von Oldenburg is the unmolested representative of his Party, and what he says is important, not because it is what Hr. von Oldenburg alone thinks, but what the Prussian Conservatives think.<sup>3</sup>

If he was substantiated by later votes, all the better; but his Party was not above disowning his opinions publicly, once

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<sup>1</sup>Verhandlungen, XI Leg. Per., II Sess., IV, 2879.

<sup>2</sup>Die Freie Presse, May 5, 1906.

<sup>3</sup>Münchener Allgemeine Zeitung, February 5, 1910.

he had served his purpose as a trial balloon.<sup>1</sup>

The main objection of the Junkers up to now had been Caprivi's reduction of the agricultural tariffs in his long-term commercial treaties. These treaties, signed between 1892 and 1894, were to be valid for 12 years. Thus, von Oldenburg arrived on the scene at the very crucial moment when the question of their renewal was before the Reichstag. Their renewal, and further reductions in the tariffs, was the objective of the Social Democrats. The Conservative Party, now fully under Junker control, was naturally violently opposed to such policies. Not only should the treaties be allowed to lapse, and the duties be maintained at their present levels, but the tariffs should be raised, so that the agricultural class may once more reap some profits. Bülow was now willing to meet them halfway. The change in governmental position was brought about by two factors: Bülow wanted to secure the adherence of the Agrarians to the imperial military and the naval programs; he also wanted to check the "American invasion".<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, of course, he was aware that as long as agriculture did not come out of its very real slump, he would obtain nothing but unconditional opposition from the Conservative Party. In governmental circles, it was realized that only too many of the Agrarians' complaints against Caprivi's treaties had been justified in

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<sup>1</sup>Edwin Maxey, "The Political Situation in Germany", Gunton's Review, XXV; 227.

<sup>2</sup>Oldenburg-Januschau, Erinnerungen, p. 93.



point of fact. It was further understood that it was no longer possible to obtain foreign tariff reductions for German exports in exchange of an unequivocal sacrifice of Germany's agricultural population.<sup>1</sup> This was the situation which had prompted von Oldenburg to remark that the "agricultural population had quite naturally lost all confidence in governmental leadership, since among the successors of Bismarck, there had not been one who had led it to victory; it had been engaged in a continuous rear-guard action!"<sup>2</sup> Bülow could not simply renew the commercial treaties, as they had originally been signed. In the following year, this realization provoked bitter fights in the Reichstag. Both sides attacked the proposed revisions: on the Left, the Socialists did not want any revisions at all; on the Right, the Conservatives did not think they were enough. Among the latter, von Oldenburg gave the best expression to their thoughts. If the old tariff of 5 marks per ton were reinstated, as Bülow proposed, it would no longer be enough. Even an additional 50 pfennigs per ton for wheat would not cover adequately the decline in freight charges, and would not put the cultivation of food-stuffs in Germany on a "paying basis".<sup>3</sup> And yet, the fact that Bülow had provided for minimum tariffs was held up as a sort of heroism! Von Oldenburg went on to explain the

<sup>1</sup>Massow, Deutsche Politik, p. 212.

<sup>2</sup>Verhandlungen, XI Leg. Per., I Sess., III, 2147.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 2146.



Agrarians' objections to the new tariff. The cattle tariffs, for instance, would not bring an appreciable increase in the prices paid. For, instead of a head tax, provision was now made for a weight tax.<sup>1</sup> What a pity, he said, that agriculture and industry had to quarrel. Under Bismarck, both obtained what they needed. Nowadays, he maintained, though their interests were identical, one had to be careful that the industrial tariffs did not take away what the agricultural tariffs had provided.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, and this must have made the Chancellor slightly uneasy,

The honorable Prince Bülow would be mistaken if he thinks he can get the Navy and Army budgets passed next year with the help of the Center alone, and without at least assuring us of decent agricultural conditions by raising the minimum tariff!<sup>3</sup>

The Conservatives now resorted to unadulterated blackmail to attain their objectives! Bülow, hoping to abate the storm to some degree, declared that "Germany would no longer be known as an industrial State, but rather would it be called from now on an 'agricultural and industrial State'." All this, however, was to no avail. After remarking that "the Chancellor has done something for us: he made wonderful speeches, and he was very nice to us,"<sup>4</sup> but that it was a "legend" he had done anything for agriculture, von Oldenburg calmly voted against the new tariff schedules designed to protect wheat and cattle!<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Verhandlungen, XI Leg. Per., I Sess., III, 2146.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., italics mine.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 447.

<sup>5</sup>Verhandlungen, CCLXVI, 5991.

Thus Bulow was made to regret his bold words, and all he could hope for now was to be buried under the following epitaph:

"Here rests an agricultural Chancellor". At least he had a sense of humor! But he could not resist making a parting shot at the Bund der Landwirte:

The interests of agriculture were certainly taken more seriously at heart by the federated governments and by the majority of this House than by the Bund der Landwirte.... As far as those members of the Bund who voted against the tariff are concerned, the 'services' they rendered to agriculture stand as far behind those which the federated governments and the Majority performed as Negation and Criticism stand behind positive work.<sup>1</sup>

Von Oldenburg had the last word, however: "graduated next to last" was his answer to the Chancellor!<sup>2</sup>

For the Bund did not deem the results satisfactory enough, and the Conservatives now entered upon a policy of deliberate and cynical obstruction, still claiming to be the die-hard supporters of the 'misguided' Emperor.

Meanwhile, von Oldenburg had gone home, shortly to be re-elected. In the election of June 18, 1903, he succeeded without trouble, and his seat was awarded him by the Reichstag commission.

Occasional support for Bulow was provided by von Oldenburg. Later, he admitted that "it must be admitted Bulow knew how to master political forces."<sup>3</sup> And when the crisis of

<sup>1</sup>. Verhandlungen, X Leg., Per., II Sess., VII, 7742.

<sup>2</sup>Oldenburg-Januschau, Erinnerungen, p. 70.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 85.



December 1906 developed with the Center Party, he did not hesitate to say: "Tell Bülow that we shall shout 'Hurrah!' if he dissolves the Reichstag". This prompted his friend, one of the leaders of the Conservative fraction, Ernest von Heydebrand und der Lasa, to ask pointedly: "Oldenburg, what is it that you know?" Oldenburg answered that he knew nothing more than anybody else, but that the Center's proposal [to recall troops from the colonies] was an attack upon the right to command of the Emperor, and that Bülow could not let this pass.<sup>1</sup> This is truly what did happen. The Reichstag was dissolved, and new elections were held. The Parties of the Right were victorious in these elections, the Center Party held its own, and the Social Democrats lost almost half their seats. The year 1907 proved to be the high-water mark for both the Conservative Party and Bülow. For the last time in the Germany prior to 1914 was a Chancellor to have a working majority: the Bülow Bloc, or 'Blue-Black Bloc'. Composed of a coalition of Conservatives, National Liberals and the Center, this Bloc was to hold together until 1909. Oldenburg had correctly gauged the temper of the country, when he had told Bülow before the elections of 1907: "You can rest assured that when the Prussian gets a tug on the reins, his tail will fly in the air!"<sup>2</sup>

On yet another occasion, von Oldenburg supported the Chancellor. Strong controversies raged in the Reichstag from

<sup>1</sup>Oldenburg-Januschau, Erinnerungen, p. 87.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 89.



1905 to 1907. They were caused by Bülow's introduction of an expropriation and resettlement Bill directed against the Poles in Prussian Poland. Von Oldenburg himself was not in favor of the Bill as it was framed:

I was no 'Hakatist', because I was reconciled with the thought that we did have Prussian citizens in our State who were of Polish nationality. It sufficed, as far as I was concerned, that these members of the Polish people discharge loyally their duties as Prussian citizens. I was not of the opinion one had to exterminate these people. They supplied our Army with valuable manpower.<sup>1</sup>

If, however, they refused to comply, and were disloyal to Germany, then "we must have their lands". The policies of the Chancellor found full approval in East Prussia, for "we must keep the Province of Posen in the German Reich and in the Kingdom of Prussia; if possible, we would like to Germanize it."<sup>2</sup> When Bülow presented the measure in the Prussian Herrenhaus, von Oldenburg was the only one to support it there.<sup>3</sup> However, when the Bill was presented in the Reichstag, there occurred one of those amusing incidents with which his parliamentary career is replete. Recalled suddenly from a vacation at Januschau by a telegram from Heydebrand, von Oldenburg was briefed in Berlin about a speech which the leader of the faction wanted him to make.

You live in West Prussia, are a member of the Executive Committee of the 'Landwirtschaftskammer'; furthermore, you belong to the same body in the Bund der Landwirte,

<sup>1</sup>Oldenburg-Januschau, Erinnerungen, p. 90. Italics mine.

<sup>2</sup>Verhandlungen, XI Leg. Per., I Sess., VII, 5349.

<sup>3</sup>Rosenberg, "The Rise of the Junkers", American Historical Review, XXXIX, (1944), p. 552.

and you represent a West Prussian District in the Reichstag, which entitles you to a seat on the Resettlement Commission. You must therefore speak for the Conservative Party. We cannot commit ourselves now about our vote in the second and third readings, because the Bill can still be altered. Consequently, you must leave all issues open. At the same time, you must express your astonishment that the Government could differ with us on such an important question. You must finally point out that the loyal Poles have nothing to fear from us. Terminate your speech on a patriotic note. You will have to speak last.<sup>1</sup>

Understandably, Oldenburg asked why Heydebrand could not say these things himself. "The situation is too delicate. If I take a firm attitude, then the Party will have to take the same. But if you do so, we can always disavow you. We could then discuss the wording of our disavowal, and you'll laugh it off!"<sup>2</sup>

That von Oldenburg's speech was effective can be seen by the results that were obtained. The law was passed, but in such an emasculated form, and with so many of the offensive provisos toned down, that it never really became effective. But the Chancellor had "a cool head and a conqueror's heart. May he long be spared for the Fatherland!"<sup>3</sup>

This occasional support of Bülow did not deter him from his obstructionist tactics. In 1909, a financial reform became necessary in Germany in order to meet the increased expenses incurred by re-armament and the building of the Navy. To provide additional funds, Bülow introduced a Bill to establish an estate-duty tax.

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<sup>1</sup>Oldenburg-Januschau, Erinnerungen, p. 92.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Verhandlungen, CCXXXVIII, 1280.



But von Oldenburg sensed that the Chancellor had lost the Emperor's confidence because of the Daily Telegraph episode. He felt that the measure would be defeated, if the Chancellor's bluff were called. In a speech to the yearly Conservative Convention in West Prussia, he said in part:

The speech of the Reich Chancellor....will result in an appreciable shift of political allegiances, and an equally appreciable change in the Conservative Party's attitude towards him.....It would mean the end of the Blockpolitik, and the passing of the Conservative Party into the opposition. The estate-duty tax is unacceptable to the Party.....Threats of resignation will succeed no longer in changing our opinion.....We will stand protectively before the King, and retreat before no one.....<sup>1</sup>

Von Oldenburg vigorously opposed the Bill, and introduced an amendment providing for a graduated income tax as a fairer means of providing the needed revenue.

Meanwhile, taking the very ground from under both Bülow's and his own measures, he denied that the Reichstag had the right to establish direct taxes;

We stand on the grounds that indirect taxation belongs to the Reich, while direct imposts are the preserve of the various States and cities. To try and give the Reich the right to impose direct taxes would mean a breakdown of the system. The Bund der Landwirte sees an enormous danger to the existence of the States in the projected increase of direct taxation, and foresees even the destruction of their independence.<sup>2</sup>

To preserve their economic position, the Junkers were willing to resort to a States' Rights attitude. Of course,

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<sup>1</sup>Vorwärts, January 22, 1909. Italics mine.

<sup>2</sup>Verhandlungen, CCXXXVI, 7874.



the main reason behind their opposition was that the proposed tax would hit them the hardest, for land is always easily taxable. Furthermore, they were opposed to it because it would act as a 'publication tax', that is to say, every time someone died, an inventory of the estate would have to be made, which could then be used both as a basis for further taxes, or as a check on the exactness of previous declarations.

The Bund der Landwirte suddenly realized that Bülow was not going to yield on this important issue. It decided that no concessions would be made to the Blockpolitik, that pressure would be applied in the State Landtags against the measure. Of course, it instructed its representatives in the Reichstag to vote against the measure, come what may.<sup>1</sup> Enough support was mustered to defeat Bülow's Bill, and, as a result, the Chancellor was dismissed by the Emperor. Thus, von Oldenburg, the Junker, the main pillar of Law and Order, was instrumental in bringing about the fall of a German Chancellor! This was really quite a 'shift of allegiance': from the throne to the portemonnaie. As Count Westarp, the parliamentary Whip of the Conservatives put it: "we did not want to surrender the wallet of the landholder to the Reichstag!"<sup>2</sup>

In spite of the fact that von Oldenburg did not believe in democratic government and in parliamentary power, one must

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<sup>1</sup>Bund der Landwirte Conference, February 22, 1909; Dr. Hahn was the speaker. For a more complete report on this Conference, see the Berlin newspapers of February 23, 1909.

<sup>2</sup>Westarp, Konservative Politik, p. 272.

admit that he showed a remarkable grasp of parliamentary tactics, and that he knew astonishingly well how to maneuver for advantage under their complicated rules. For once the Bulöw Bill had been defeated, he calmly engineered the death of his own substitute;<sup>1</sup> it had achieved its purpose very well indeed! This somewhat unprincipled procedure did not strike him as such, because, as was pointed out earlier, the Junker identified his own interests with those of the country at large, and what seemed best to him was to be attained by all means, fair or foul. Naturally, he offered no advice for covering of the mounting deficit in the Reich's finances, other than that "we shall never agree to appropriations without cover".<sup>2</sup>

The parting shot towards Bülow, that he "should behave according to custom: take it, shut up and go" was justified by the fact that, after all, the Chancellor was "no Prussian!"<sup>3</sup> Political friendship is such a fickle thing, and it never survives a threat to wealth.

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<sup>1</sup>Westarp, Konservative Politik, p. 126.

<sup>2</sup>Verhandlungen, CCXXXVI, 6230.

<sup>3</sup>Oldenburg-Januschau, Erinnerungen, p. 102.

## CHAPTER V

### "A LIEUTENANT AND TEN MEN"

The King of Prussia, Emperor of Germany, must be able at all times to tell a lieutenant: take ten men, and close the Reichstag!

Elard von Oldenburg-Januschau

Von Oldenburg's opposition was not limited to Bülow's Chancellorship. It continued unabated under his successor, Bethmann-Hollweg. The latter did not lack courage, and one of his first remarks in the Reichstag was to the effect that "[he] did not wait on the Parliament; as little did he wait on the Junkers, and on the Socialists!"<sup>1</sup>

There was indeed one piece of unfinished business which Bülow left to his successor. This was the electoral reform for Prussia promised in the speech from the throne. This reform was a concession to the liberal elements of the Bloc and was certainly overdue in Prussia, where the three-class suffrage was still enforced, with its attendant abuses. But since the principal beneficiaries of these abuses were the Junkers, one can understand that von Oldenburg would oppose the reform with all the resources at his command. The first volley was fired on February 22, 1909, at the Bund der Landwirte Convention in the Circus Busch. It was carefully

<sup>1</sup>Verhandlungen, CCLXII, p. 3544.



explained by von Oldenburg that Prince Bismarck, the creator of our national Constitution, had counterbalanced the right to vote with the payment of indirect taxes. He had thus provided a counterweight to the Reichstag in the conservative constitutions of the federated States. But it had been the unfortunate truth that when one of the States started a constitutional revision, all others followed. This would also happen if Prussia at this time would give the example. Two years ago, the so-called "small constitutional amendment" had been passed. "At the time, I stupidly agreed to it." Ten more seats were created, and the Social Democrats immediately grabbed seven of them. "Now, the cry is raised again that 'the Prussian Constitution has outlived itself; it must be changed.' If the Prussian Constitution falls, the dyke that guarantees a smooth operation of the governmental machinery, that binds a quiet population to a strong monarchy, will break. Then we shall witness a flood of the first magnitude, which shall wash away the pillars. The Throne will crash, and the 'Einheitsstaat' will emerge from the rubble, the first step in the direction of the German Republic."<sup>1</sup>

With these constitutional views to buttress him, von Oldenburg undertook, in his own inimitable way, to torpedo the proposal. He admitted in the Reichstag that "it was a very difficult step for me to approve the measure."<sup>2</sup> When howls of disbelief arose, he quietly re-ascended the podium,

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<sup>1</sup>Frankfurter Zeitung, February 23, 1909.

<sup>2</sup>Verhandlungen, CCLXVII, 7055.

to put the finishing touch to the sentence:

As I was an opponent of the law - [aha! cries on the Social Democratic benches] - as I was an opponent of the law, I voted for these particular paragraphs, after the federated governments had expressed their opinion that the law would be unacceptable to them!<sup>1</sup>

It was as simple as that. All one had to do was to think it out. The real reasons, of course, were quite different.

Prussia should rid herself of the domination of this small group of East Elbian landholders, who are so backward. This was to be the goal, which the electoral reform was supposed to have attained. It did not.<sup>2</sup>

In the Polish resettlement question, the estate-duty bill, and the electoral reform proposals, the Junkers felt their very existence threatened. And it was! These bills had been a three-pronged attack to weaken their grip on the Prussian government and land. It was designed, as von Oldenburg very aptly remarked, to bring the Prussian Constitution up-to-date, to correct some of the more glaring defects in a document which had endured essentially unchanged from the middle of the 19th century to the first decade of the 20th. The readjustment which the Conservative Party and the Junkers refused to authorize in Prussia in 1909 - 1910, Lloyd George was to push through the English Parliament one year later, against the bitter opposition of the House of Lords. But there was no such check on the lords' power in Germany. Only one way remained open to bring about the necessary change:

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<sup>1</sup>Verhandlungen, CCLXVII, 7060.

<sup>2</sup>Schmoller, Zwanzig Jahre Deutscher Politik, p. 65.



revolution. And this is the tragedy of the Junkers' stubbornness and blindness, that they could not adjust themselves to the new conditons, but that they rather tried to adjust conditions to suit themselves. They truly tried "to push the clock back", a herculean effort in which they very nearly succeeded, but in which they were ultimately fated to fail.

But von Oldenburg realized that some lip service was due the Emperor. This prompted him to make his most famous speech in the Reichstag, January 29, 1910. At the time, the debate was raging over some of the more excessive aspects of the Army's discipline. The 'Januschauer', taking it as a personal offense, took to the rostrum and delivered a diatribe against the Parliament's interference into the affairs of the Army, and proceeded to show what esteem he had of their rights.

What happens nowadays? When a lieutenant is coughing audibly somewhere in a corner, he has always to fear that somebody might mention it in a Reichstag session. That does not matter too much in itself; but what we have to see to, is that he should never have to fear that any kind of importance be attached to an opinion uttered by the Reichstag, for this was not customary in former times.

Gentlemen; the officer corps is harmed by such occurrences! It necessarily has to suffer from them, because of its being a class that is personally closely linked to the Supreme Commander and which, on the other hand, is not at all concerned with public opinion!

[shouts on the left]

Yes, gentlemen, this, too, is an old Prussian tradition, with which you do not agree, as I well understand.

The King of Prussia must at any time be in a position to say to a lieutenant: 'Go, and take ten men, and close the Reichstag!'

We discussed this case already once before, gentlemen, therefore let us be brief now; all I wanted was to please you! After all, there is only one thing one should wish for: that the very same tradition, which made our Army



great, may survive in future times in our officer corps. We from the right wing do hope that the Honorable Minister of War in Prussia will be willing to maintain this tradition as far as the composition as well as the unity of the officer corps is concerned: the old, the royally Prussian Tradition! Goodbye, gentlemen.<sup>1</sup>

The Reichstag was so astonished by this 'counter-attack' that it was speechless for a few seconds. Then, the storm broke. And for once, there was unanimity. From Left to Right - with the exception of the Conservatives, who politely applauded their hero - cries of "Shame", "Revolution", were the immediate reaction. Speaker after speaker ascended the rostrum to denounce this offense to the dignity of the Assembly. The President was attacked for not having called von Oldenburg to order, for not having expelled him from the session. He replied that he had seen nothing untoward in this expression, "that the Representative had only, as it seems to me, given the utmost example of discipline which could be found in the Army."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the "Bramarbas from Januschau" had tapped his pocket, and shouted: "Look here, look at the bomb we carry with us!" The Conservatives were by now frankly alarmed at the reaction that had been produced. They hurriedly held a council of war, and decided the best thing to do was to call von Heydebrand on the telephone and tell him what had happened. He was a leader with enough stature to calm the public, and the only one with enough influence on von Oldenburg to prevent him from aggravating

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<sup>1</sup>Verhandlungen, CCLIX, 899.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

the situation. But Heydebrand could not be reached, and the fraction had to suffer through the debate which followed, during which von Oldenburg spoiled what was left to be spoiled.<sup>1</sup>

But even von Oldenburg, rarely disturbed by others' opinions, thought it advisable to make himself "unavailable" until the furor had subsided. This was to take a long time.

On the following morning, the Press was unanimous in chastising von Oldenburg for his **lack of respect**. **From the Vorwärts**, which naturally sensed this as an occasion 'to get even', came the following comments:

Impertinent words....delivered with the tone of a lieutenant of the Guard.....Impertinence of a Junker..... If the Prussian officers showed no more courage than their boasting spokesman in the Reichstag, then the Prussian war spirit would be in sad shape.<sup>2</sup>

The Berliner Tageblatt wrote:

The most impertinent word ever spoken in the Reichstag..... This man is finished....He will never again, we hope, be able to produce himself on the tribune of the Reichstag as the 'Prussian clown'!<sup>3</sup>

The moderate Frankfurter Zeitung said it was:

....an offense to the Reichs Constitution, and to the federative spirit of the Reich....He who says such things is unworthy to represent the people, he is unworthy of his mandate!<sup>4</sup>

The semi-liberal Kölnische Zeitung probably expressed the opinion of the majority of the people:

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<sup>1</sup>Frankfurter Zeitung, January 30, 1910.

<sup>2</sup>Vorwärts, January 30, 1910.

<sup>3</sup>Berliner Tageblatt, January 30, 1910.

<sup>4</sup>Frankfurter Zeitung, January 31, 1910.



Mr. von Oldenburg is a very peculiar person, who never 'makes a sepulcher out of his heart' but always fires from the hip, and who does not care what other people will think of his speech....He always speaks in shirt sleeves....he is the 'enfant terrible' of the party, but this does not mean he cannot be taken seriously.... for he expresses the opinions which his companions dare only say among friends. He is endowed with the bad tone of the non-com and the impertinence which is so often, and wrongly, ascribed to our officers in the funny papers.<sup>1</sup>

Even the Free-Conservatives could not dare to express approval. The Post said that "while Mr. von Oldenburg is sympathetic as a person....utterances of this sort will only help the Social-Democrats."<sup>2</sup> The Reichsbote, also a Conservative newspaper, was of the opinion that "a few more such speeches, and voters will be driven in flocks to the Social-Democrats."<sup>3</sup>

The Conservative Press waited two full days before making a comment. Then, the Kreuzzeitung tried to smooth the troubled waters.

When the manner of speaking of the orator is understood, his parable will be taken as such, even as it was meant, and as he himself later explained he had meant it; that is to say, as the utmost consequence of the fact that the military oath is taken to the sovereign alone, and not also on the Constitution, as the civil-service oath.....This was the general understanding given to his words!<sup>4</sup>

Events, it seems, belied this last sentence. But the Kreuzzeitung went on to say that "it was an example intended to

<sup>1</sup>Kölnische Zeitung, January 31, 1910.

<sup>2</sup>Post, January 31, 1910.

<sup>3</sup>Reichsbote, January 31, 1910.

<sup>4</sup>Kreuzzeitung, January 31, 1910. Italics are mine.



produce a comical effect.....But, right away, the Socialists were startled, and rightly so. For they do not operate on constitutional grounds, but work towards the overthrow of the government." The best defensive still resided in the offensive! The Konservative Korrespondenz struck the high note of the 'official reaction':

Mr. von Oldenburg, as well as the whole Conservative Party, stands strongly on constitutional grounds. He is far removed even from merely suggesting acts of violence such as were described in his speech....He only wanted to express, unfortunately in a drastic and humorous fashion, the utmost duty of a soldier and officer.<sup>1</sup>

This was perhaps so, but the country as a whole was unimpressed by such arguments. The phrase became a household word; it was even paraphrased on a music-hall stage.<sup>2</sup>

A further repercussion of this speech was the disavowal of von Oldenburg by the local Conservative Party branch, which, at the same time, denounced the alliance between the Party and the Bund der Landwirte, terming the latter an "egotistical and demagogic organization."<sup>3</sup> Von Oldenburg resigned his seat in the Landtag.

Such outspoken utterances of the sort mentioned above obviously did nothing to heal the widening breach between the Emperor and his vassal. Von Oldenburg, by privilege, served as chamberlain of West Prussia. His duties, which

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<sup>1</sup>Konservative Korrespondenz, February 1, 1910.

<sup>2</sup>Oldenburg-Januschau, Erinnerungen, p. 111.

<sup>3</sup>Schulthess' Geschichtskalender, (1910), p. 361. See also Verhandlungen, CCLXII, 3553.

were anything but strenuous, consisted in attending upon the members of the imperial family when they passed through his province. The position was purely honorary, but performance of its duties usually carried with it a reward in the form of a decoration. However, when the Crown Prince had had the pleasure of von Oldenburg's attendance, and wanted to reward him in the customary manner, Bethmann-Hollweg strenuously objected to giving any imperial favor to a member of the 'loyal opposition'.<sup>1</sup>

One of the stumbling blocks the Conservatives put into Bethmann-Hollweg's path was their opposition, in 1911, to the proposed Constitution for Alsace-Lorraine. The most offensive aspect of that document, in the eyes of von Oldenburg, was the provision requiring that the representatives of that province, once seated in the Bundesrat, would only be able to cast their vote against that of Prussia. This feature had been included at the insistence of the other federated States, who feared that the balance of power would otherwise be shifted too much in Prussia's favor. Von Oldenburg rose, once more, to speak against the measure. It was to be his last speech in the imperial Reichstag:

We [the Conservatives] consider the matter to be a blow against the honor and the respect of Prussia  
 .....I speak here as a Prussian, and not as a German.....  
 We cannot barter with the Social Democrats about the limits of the Emperor's power in Alsace-Lorraine.....  
 Our respect for the position of our Imperial Lord, our conscience, the history of our country and of our party forbids us to make this deal.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Oldenburg-Januschau, Erinnerungen, p. 113.

<sup>2</sup>Verhandlungen, CCLXVII, 7056.



This time, however, the Conservatives had passed the zenith of their power. They could no longer muster majorities to defeat offensive Bills. The Constitution for Alsace-Lorraine passed the Reichstag, in spite of the intensely chauvinistic opposition of the Junkers.

What were von Oldenburg's opinions on foreign affairs? His membership in the Reichstag gave him first-hand acquaintance with the foreign policies of the German government during a crucial period of pre-war history, and it is not astonishing that we find mentioned in his writings and speeches some rather strong convictions about what ought to have been done.

He favored a moderately strong fleet, powerful enough to challenge England's in case of a conflict.<sup>1</sup> He always voted credits for the Navy without registering any dissent. His case for a big Navy was based on Germany's necessity to play power politics in view of her increasing population. Of course, an Army large enough to wage war simultaneously on two fronts was essential. At the same time, however, he took the paradoxical stand that a very strong understanding with Russia should be maintained, to keep that country's support in case of war!

When a conflict with France threatened over the disputed territory in Morocco, he opposed going to war, for "undeveloped countries are a burden".<sup>2</sup> But a preventive war

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<sup>1</sup>Schulthess' Geschichtskalender (1906), p. 77.

<sup>2</sup>Oldenburg-Januschau, Erinnerungen, p. 123.



to break up the Triple Alliance would have been advisable around 1905 or 1908! Its effect would probably have been to throw England back into her 'splendid isolation', thereby again freeing Germany's hands in Europe. This point of view betrayed a somewhat elemental lack of understanding of the forces at work in European diplomacy! Unfortunately, this position was shared by the German Foreign Office.

As it has been noted above, the fall of Bülow marked, ironically enough, the beginning of the Conservative Party's decline in power. It no longer kept pace with the mood of the time, and its reckless opposition alienated many of its formerly faithful voters. Furthermore, the Junkers' iron grip on the Conservative Party made itself felt more and more. Thus, in 1912, the Conservatives were to leave many of their trusted warriors on the electoral battlefields. One of the casualties was Elard von Oldenburg-Januschau. His otherwise docile electorate offered an unusually stiff resistance to his arguments. A 'conspiracy' was afoot to defeat him. "Money played a big role." The Elbinger Neueste Nachrichten, which was in the ownership of a Radical, took the field against him. It accused him of lacking patriotism, of making false income-tax declarations, of crass egotism, and maintained that he was loyal to the King as long as the royal will coincided with his own. A denial of these charges brought a suit of libel from the newspaper, and Oldenburg was condemned to pay a fine of 480 marks or spend 32 days in jail.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Oldenburg-Januschau, Erinnerungen, p. 119.

Von Oldenburg's utterances during the campaign did not help his cause,<sup>1</sup> and he was defeated in the second round by a Free Conservative. For another person, this would have been a serious blow. But von Oldenburg gladly retired to his estate at Januschau, busied himself with counting his sows' sucklings, and confidently awaited the failure of parliamentary government. He could not resist one last witticism. A Jewish member of the Radical Party sent him the following greeting upon learning of his defeat:

The Chamberlain now feels at ease  
He stays home, and plants his peas.

Von Oldenburg replied:

With the peas I shall eat pork filet,  
Which Moses to your faith prohibited!

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<sup>1</sup>It was during this campaign that he uttered the famous dictum: "Vox populi, vox Rindvieh." On another occasion he remarked blandly that the questions directed at him did not interest him, and that, furthermore, he had to go home because his wife had cooked him his favorite dish, and it would grow cold!

## CHAPTER VI

### FOR PRUSSIA, AGAINST THE WORLD

If his electoral defeat retired him from the political scene, von Oldenburg still faithfully attended the meetings of the Bund der Landwirte's Executive Committee. It was at one of these meetings that Heinrich Class, the leader of the Pan-German League, came to plead the cause of his organization. And thus it was that:

[Von Oldenburg] now heard, to his great astonishment, that [the League] had existed for twenty years. He had never heard of it, did not know it existed. He expressed his joy at the existence of such a non-partisan organization, and was unconditionally favorable to a joint policy with the Bund der Landwirte.<sup>1</sup>

The rather bewildered Class ascribed this ignorance to the 'secularization' of the public opinion!

At the outbreak of the war, in 1914, the elderly gentleman jumped on a train to Berlin to offer his services to his country. Since he was less decrepit than some of the other members of his generation, he was given various assignments on both fronts from 1914 to 1917. With the rank of Rittmeister (Major), he was first attached to the staff of the Crown Prince, that of the Fifth Army. In September 1914, he was transferred to the XVII Corps in East Prussia, where he served under Hindenburg. It was then he met the Marshal for

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<sup>1</sup>Heinrich Class, Wider den Strom (Leipzig: K. F. Koehler, 1932), p. 271. Italics mine.



the first time. Their friendship lasted until Hindenburg's death in 1934.

From 1915 to 1916, he served as an Ordnance officer of the XVII Corps on the Western Front. In 1916, he commanded the 341st Infantry Regiment on the Eastern Front. This Regiment was engaged in front-line activities, and von Oldenburg was decorated with the Iron Cross First Class for bravery. In November 1917, he resigned from the service to organize the food supply.

From the outset of the war, von Oldenburg became more and more outspoken in his opposition to Bethmann-Hollweg. The poor Chancellor was made the scape-goat for everything that went wrong, from the invasion of Belgium, which he "handled wrong", to the hesitating policy pursued concerning the U-Boat warfare on a large scale. In that respect, von Oldenburg introduced a motion in the Herrenhaus in 1917, praising the Government for its decision to resort to unconditional submarine warfare.<sup>1</sup> "There never has been a minister who did such strong and lasting harm to his sovereign and his country as he",<sup>2</sup> was the merciless appraisal of the Chancellor's activities during the war. Everyone knew, of course, that the war had been forced upon his peace-loving Emperor by aggressive neighbors, even if Bethmann-Hollweg, by his clumsiness, made it appear otherwise.

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<sup>1</sup>Oldenburg-Januschau, Erinnerungen, p. 178.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 193.

Sometime in March, 1916, von Oldenburg became personally convinced that the Chancellor was no longer worthy of leading the Reich's policies. Consequently, after consultation with - of all people, Bülow and Tirpitz, he proposed the latter as Chancellor, first to Hindenburg and Ludendorff, then to the Crown Prince and the Kaiser. This attempt met with failure, for Tirpitz, blamed for the failure of the German Navy, was dismissed by William II.

In spite of all the glorious promises of self-sufficiency advanced by the Junkers as the reason for higher agricultural tariffs, the food situation in Germany was rapidly deteriorating. What were the remedies proposed by von Oldenburg?

As the representative of the Bund der Landwirte on the Food Council, von Oldenburg stated that the objective of the Bund was not "to hold the balance of power in Germany." It was understood from the beginning that the State had to have a hand in the regulation of agricultural production, but this invasion had to be held within reasonable limits. As a matter of fact, the government had already gone a little too far. In the first of a series of three letters, published from August 1916 to August 1917, he wrote:

As soon as something still shows a sign of life, a society with monopolistic powers descends upon it. It rents a floor in a building, buys some swivel-chairs, has its picture taken, obtains 40,000 mark salaries and soon thereafter, the object either disappears completely from the market, or is obtainable only at prices which would make black-marketeers blush!<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Deutsche Tageszeitung, September 2, 1916.



One wit stated that "the government would as soon have regulated the weather." However, von Oldenburg's tolerant attitude towards government interference had its limitations. According to the Bund's own admission, profit was still the Junkers' paramount objective: low prices kept much of the food supply from the official markets! Consequently, von Oldenburg, with the approval of the Bund's Executive Committee, made the following recommendations for improved food supply:

- a) no ceiling on fowl, malt and pork;
- b) no interference with private slaughtering, nor with the raising of cattle;
- c) prevention of profiteering.<sup>1</sup>

That the profit motive was still uppermost in the Junkers' minds can be seen from the following letter, which von Oldenburg sent to the then Home Secretary, von Loebell, on April 15, 1915:

Your Excellency, Dear Fritz,

About to return to my job in Poland, I thank God I shall be free of all these rows about foodstuffs and with civilian officials. It is now really unbearable in the country with these constantly changing regulations. I am going to let 500 acres go out of cultivation, and lots of others are doing the same, because of the uncertainty of the crops, and the fixed prices are far more than I can stand. Potato prices are now comparatively reasonable; half of the pork will get rotten in the brine casks. Disaffection in the country is rife, and will break out seriously after the war; in addition to that, confidence in the Supreme Command of the Army is dwindling; confidence in the Supreme Civil Administration went long ago. You know that! Finis.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Oldenburg-Januschau, Erinnerungen, pp. 156-157.

<sup>2</sup>Philip Scheideman, The Making of New Germany (New York, 1929), p. 270. Italics mine.



After all, 30 million tons of potatoes would have been available, if only the producers had been let alone, and the government had been prepared to pay 5 marks a ton for them!<sup>1</sup>

These words were uttered in the face of a starving people. They expressed the complete selfishness of the great Prussian landholder, to whom "the right price" was the only incentive for feeding his hungry fellow-citizens. The sacrifices of the fighting men and of the civilian population were ignored for a small margin of profit.

But another, and albeit larger, threat loomed on the horizon of von Oldenburg's Junker serenity in the spring of 1917. Bethmann-Hollweg, realizing that the unjust three-class franchise demoralized troops and civilians alike, thought to forestall any thoughts of revolution. He introduced in the Herrenhaus an electoral reform Bill, known as the Easter Message of 1917. The Bill called for universal and equal suffrage, to be granted in Prussia immediately after victory was achieved. To the Junkers, this appeared as a resurrection of the vital threat of the years 1909 - 1910. For "who wanted to control Germany had first to control Prussia."<sup>2</sup> And the Junker rule of Prussia, maintained only by the undemocratic three-class franchise, would collapse if the reform were successful.

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<sup>1</sup>Oldenburg-Januschau, Erinnerungen, p. 171.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 184.

Naturally, this was considered as a coup d'etat by the Conservatives. Countermeasures were swift and violent: von Oldenburg first persuaded the Crown Prince to oppose the measure and then he attacked it himself in the Prussian Upper House. Far from considering the three-class franchise as ideal, he considered it, on the contrary, to be only the lesser of two evils.<sup>1</sup> The problem could not be solved on the English pattern, for England was an island, and its population had a "national instinct". Even though there were grumblings deep in the mass of the people, "my friends and I could not consider giving ground, but rather had to make our stand firmly, whatever the cost might be!"<sup>2</sup> Blindness, arrogance and lack of touch with the people were betrayed in that last sentence. The "friend of the people" had certainly travelled a long way. But von Oldenburg was willing to "compromise": after the war, plurality could be granted. This, combined with the removal of the Emperor's power to pack the Herrenhaus, would still leave the Junkers an effective way to block controversial legislation.

The first step in defeating the Bill seemed to be simple enough: obtain its author's dismissal! Ever since his intrigues of 1916, von Oldenburg had attempted to provoke the Chancellor's 'resignation'. During the weeks immediately preceding and following the resignation in July, 1917, the urgency of such a step was first expressed, then relief at the event's happening. The resignation, he wrote, "reminded

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 184 ff.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 187.



*one of the March days of 1848*". The Junkers had teamed up with the High Command into pressuring *the Emperor to dismiss* his Chancellor. Von Oldenburg made the cryptical, and yet cynical comment, that this was "highly revolutionary, and bound to bring about the Republic!"<sup>1</sup> He, von Oldenburg, washed his hands of the whole affair.

His comments on the political situation of these stormy days in the summer of 1917 are revealing. "It is a scandal....The spineless political leadership which let itself be influenced in everything by the other States and Social Democrats." But more astonishing even is the exclamation that "the ways of God are wonderful....the Prussian spirit embraces the world, and the King of Prussia is losing his crown."<sup>2</sup> Whether von Oldenburg and his friends realized that this impending loss was their own fault, is a debatable point!

On the occasion of the last convention of the Bund der Landwirte, February 18, 1918, he delivered a speech that was to prove the swan song of the organization, and of his own ideals. It read in part:

If our diplomatists have failed, this will be found to have been due to the instructions given them by Herr von Bethmann..... Bethmann has made it as difficult as possible for the Army to conquer. His statement about the wrong done to Belgium is one that no rain can wash away. We did not need to know that Prussia was justified in occupying that fortress, but he was bound to know it.... [The Reichstag] has stabbed our Army in the back with this abominable Peace Resolution.....One of the many confused ideas of Bethmann was his wish to make the Social

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to his wife, dated August 2, 1917. Quoted in: Mantis, "Brief des Januschauers", Der Türmer, October 19, 1917.

<sup>2</sup>Oldenburg-Januschau, Erinnerungen, p. 184.



Democrats competent to govern.... This war is a war for world domination, and though it may be hard to wage, it must be fought out to victory, and the victory must be exploited..... It is asserted that Hindenburg and Ludendorff have interfered in politics. No, their gigantic responsibility gives them the right to assure themselves that the Kaiser and the King still decides. The German heart beats....at Great Headquarters.<sup>1</sup>

This, then, was the true von Oldenburg: militarist, expansionist, favoring a military dictatorship. In the invasion of Belgium, for example, the fault had not been to invade the country, it had been Bethamnn's "blundering";

In the late fall of 1918, von Oldenburg realized that the worsening military situation, coupled with the unrest created by the repeal of the electoral reform Bill in July, would result in the fall of the House of Hohenzollern.

Queried about his own readiness for quelling a revolution, he replied:

When the people are starving, and one lets them be shot, then it is wrong. But if they are well-fed, and just want to play at revolting because they refuse to pay the prices necessary for production, it is justifiable to shoot them!<sup>2</sup>

The German people were starving to death; von Oldenburg and his Conservative friends had to look for a more peaceful solution to the impending revolution.

On October 26, 1918, with Germany's allies collapsing, or already out of the fight, the military situation was deemed hopeless, even by Ludendorff. A speedy armistice was the only hope of salvaging what was left of the Empire. But the

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<sup>1</sup>Ralph H. Lutz, Fall of the German Empire, Vol. II, Hoover War Library Publications - no. 2 (Stanford, Stanford Univ. Press, 1932), pp. 321-323.

<sup>2</sup>Oldenburg-Januschau, Erinnerungen, p. 158.

Emperor stood in the way, for the Allies would never negotiate as long as he was on the throne. Therefore, the staunch stalwarts of the Junker class did some plotting of their own to persuade the hesitating Emperor to abdicate, and thereby shore up the tottering building. First, as a measure of desperation to stave off the revolution, the equal suffrage Bill was passed. Then, von Wangenheim-Kleinspiegel, accompanied by von Oldenburg,<sup>1</sup> went to Army Headquarters in Berlin, to persuade Hindenburg to take over the reins of government as a dictator. But the 'Old Gentleman' refused the job, partly because of his loyalty to his Emperor, and partly because of the hopelessness of the situation. Now, even von Oldenburg was willing to try his hand at saving the system for the Junkers.<sup>2</sup> But it was too late. They who had sown the wind had reaped a storm. For once, no amount of reed-like riding with the storm would at this time save the plant from being uprooted. Negative opposition always ends by turning against its authors, and the recent development proved to be no exception.

The Emperor abdicated on November 9, in the face of mutinies and revolution. The plot had failed, and von Oldenburg faded from the public scene, a defeated man. He returned home to Januschau, to rest and recuperate from the fatigues of the war. He was now 63 years of age, and could look back on a life rich with experience. He had seen the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 205.

Empire at its zenith, he had helped hold it there for a while, then had worked very hard at bringing it down, unwittingly perhaps. And down it crashed, in the bleak November days of 1918.

Upon his return home, he discovered there had been some loose revolutionary talk about sharing the wealth, on the part of one of his field-hands. Authoritarian to the last, still the "only one who could make politics on my estate", he sought out the fellow in the fields, and made him retract his statements by threatening him with a public caning.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 209.



## CONCLUSION

What historical conclusions are to be derived from von Oldenburg's life? This study has sought to accomplish a two-fold purpose: to give a sketch of a Junker's life in the Empire of William II, a life which, with its many humorous sides, it is hoped was not too dull reading; and secondly, to show what one of the big East Elbian landholders thought, politically and socially, during one of the crucial periods of Germany's history. For it was a time just as important for the German people as Bismarck's era of unification. The years 1888 to 1914 indeed destroyed most of Bismarck's herculean effort to build the German people into a nation. The struggle between a rising industry and a powerfully entrenched agrarian party led to great bitterness and internal squabbles. It would have taken stronger personalities than those of William II and his Chancellors to promote a reasonable amount of understanding between the two contending parties. Sacrifices on both sides should have been evenly distributed, and not assessed fully on the one, and then on the other.

But one of the main failures of the politicians of the period was to make the Junkers understand that they, too, could play an important role in the affairs of State. By antagonizing them with low-tariff trade-treaties, and providing them with no help against formidable foreign competition, one cannot help blaming the German government and sympathizing

to some extent with the agrarians in their opposition to it. Embittered, and feeling persecuted, they resorted to pressure politics to achieve their end. And this is where one's sympathy must leave them. That the aristocratic leaders of a people never realized that their mission was more than just a preservation of the status quo, that they failed to let progress take its course in political and social areas, this must be recorded to their eternal discredit. Though the Junker did not follow the pattern of the vast majority of the European nobility, and stayed on their lands instead, their way of life had nevertheless become outmoded in a modern State. The very pride they took in "personal service" showed how far they were behind times. The twentieth century is not one in which one performs "personal services", but it is rather one in which privileges are abolished, and equalization made necessary. By fighting this movement, by failing to gauge its strength, the Junker made of himself an "anachronistic curiosity".

The main failure of von Oldenburg and his fellow-Junkers is that they never did realize that a shift had taken place, from an agricultural to an industrial State. On the contrary, they stole the very weapons forged to accomplish it, and turned them against the realization of a new Germany on a more popular basis. Their use of parliamentary procedure was masterly, but unfortunately applied to the wrong purpose. One cannot discuss the use of the means employed to attain an end, if the end itself is wrong.

What better parting shot could be delivered by the

old Januschauer himself than this advice to a would-be dictator, Kapp, who proposed that he join him in a march on Berlin:

You must take riding lessons, for the one who wants to conquer Berlin must ride through the Brandenburger Tor.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Oldenburg-Januschau, Erinnerungen, p. 212.



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