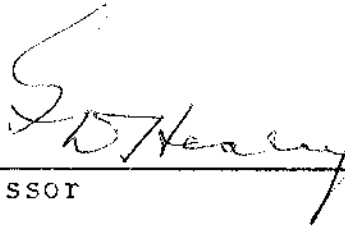


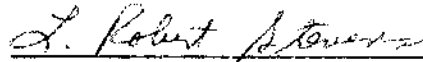
THE GERMAN OFFICER CORPS AND THE SOCIALISTS,

1918-1920: A REAPPRAISAL

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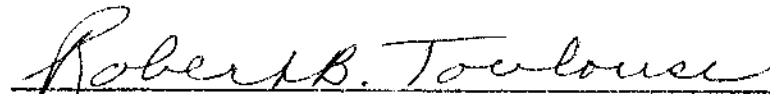
Major Professor



Minor Professor



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Pierce, Walter Rankin, The German Officer Corps and the Socialists, 1918-1920: A Reappraisal. Master of Arts, (History), May, 1973, 117 pp., bibliography, 73 titles.

This work attempts to examine the relationship shared by two ideologically opposed groups during the post-World War I period in Germany. The officer corps is viewed as a relic of the traditional imperial state while the socialists represented the harbinger of the modern, democratic, industrialized state. Although it should seem evident that these two factions of society would be natural enemies, the chaos of World War I pushed these ideological opposites into the same corner.

Chapter One, "The Prussian Army: Organization and Opposition," deals with the development of a strong military clique first in Prussia and later throughout all of Germany. Opposition to this oligarchy of power arose from the ranks of the working class parties. The German Social Democratic Party, after the dismissal of Bismarck, became the largest and most powerful party not only in German politics but also in international socialist circles. Although Marxist in theory, the German Socialists were heavily influenced by the revisionist works of Eduard Bernstein, and allowed evolution

to replace revolution in practice. This moderation, however, did little to weld a bond between the military and the socialists.

Chapter Two, "War and Division" traces the disintegration of the socialist unity and the officers power. The socialists, torn between defense of Marx and defense of Mother Country, chose the latter when the war began. Since most socialists viewed the war as one of defense this attitude created few problems. As the war aims of the Imperial government became more pronounced however, small segments of the socialist party began to criticize both socialist and government policy. This action led to a split in the Social Democratic Party in 1917.

The power of the officers began to disappear as the war became more fruitless. Although, on the surface, it appeared as if military authority reigned supreme, there was unrest among large portions of the armed forces. This ground swell of unrest broke through to the surface in 1918 and the German revolution began.

Chapter Three, "Collusion and Collision," describes the enormous problems that confronted the leaders of the Social Democratic Party when they assumed power in November, 1918. With hostile armies at her borders and revolutionary

agitators in her cities, Germany seemed destined to follow the same pattern that had engulfed Russia one year earlier. That this pattern was not copied is the result of an alliance between the officers and the socialists. The accord reached by Ebert, leader of Social Democrats, and Groener, representative of the General Staff, began to produce results, in January, 1919 when the first large scale leftist rebellion was crushed.

Chapter Four, "The Freikorps in and Out of Germany" illustrates how the weak socialist government with its new alliance was able to gain control of Germany and keep the eastern border areas from being overrun. The development of the Freikorps as an internal police force and a border patrol added greatly to the power of the government. As conditions in Germany began to stabilize, however, some of the Freikorps began to show displeasure at government policies. The Baltic adventure turned many Freikorps members into reactionaries who insisted upon a change in government.

Chapter Five, "The Versailles Army and Kapp" shifts the scene of events to the Paris Peace Conference, where the fate of Germany was being decided. The Versailles Peace Treaty in its final form unleashed a storm of protest throughout Germany. Leaders of the reactionary elements utilized this

unrest to create internal tension that culminated in the Kapp putsch of 1920. Once again the army, now under Hans von Seeckt, had to decide which road to take. Von Seeckt, by choosing not to engage his infant army against the mutineers, was able to save the army while the German people saved the Republic. The role of the army in the Kapp putsch, as this author views it, is not that of reaction but rather of reason.

In conclusion this paper states that the alliance of the army and the socialists did not doom the Weimar Republic, as many believe, but guaranteed the existence of the German state.

THE GERMAN OFFICER CORPS AND THE SOCIALISTS,
1918-1920: A REAPPRAISAL

THESIS

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PREFACE

The role of a professional military, in any state system of government has always presented problems to political theorists. Few deny the necessity of a permanent armed force, but the power and position of this warrior class has created immense controversy. While some scholars have produced many works advocating strict control over the military; others have defended the military, arguing their cause to be sincere and their objectives within the bounds of authority and the interests of all the people.¹

Historically, the primary duties of the armed forces are the protection of the state and its inhabitants. Although the military does not usually make initial decisions, its implementation of state policy can have favorable or disastrous results for the entire citizenry. This tremendous power that the military possesses leads to a dichotomy of respect and fear that perplexes every democracy. Since

¹For some of the general works covering military-civilian relationships see Michael Howard, ed., Soldiers and Governments: Nine Studies in Civil-Military Relations (London: Eyre and Spattiswoode, 1957); David B. Ralston, ed., Soldiers and States: Civil-Military Relations in Modern Europe (Boston: S.S. Heath and Company, 1966); Alfred Vagts, A History of Militarism: Civilian and Military (New York: Free Press, 1967).

democracy is a relatively new concept, one must look into the past to discover the relationship the medieval officer caste shared with the evolution of the modern state.

In viewing the world of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century no country symbolizes the military orientation more than Germany. The German state, with its Prussian tradition, was never quite able to separate the role of the army from the goals of society. The Hohenzollern princes still relied heavily on the advice of their military men in matters that had long ceased to require military opinions. Thus the protectors of the state simply became the repressors of progress.

As the German nation became more centralized and industrialized, broad opposition to the status quo mounted from inside the German socialist movement. The pre-war years witnessed many struggles between the class-conscious workers and the caste-conscious army. The fiery denunciations of the military and its composition led most army leaders to expect a bloody struggle if the workers were ever given a chance to gain control of the state. The socialists likewise expected that the archaic officer corps would never aid or support any attempts by the workers to seize and retain power.

When the fateful hour struck for the workers to advance and the soldiers to retreat a surprising chapter was written in German history.

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CHAPTER I

THE PRUSSIAN ARMY: ORGANIZATION AND OPPOSITION

Until the nineteenth century, leadership of the European armies was limited almost exclusively to the upper classes. The army, tied firmly to the leadership of the country, served as a respectable vocation for the sons of the gentry, and a showcase for the wealth and power of the state. The advent of the French Revolution, with the levée en masse and the citizen armies of Napoleon, seriously challenged the performance and credibility of the traditional armies. Warfare began to change drastically, pitting large portions of the population and resources of one country against the other. The end of the Napoleonic era destroyed the threat of French hegemony on the continent, but in the process of achieving this goal, several countries emerged quite powerful. The north German state of Prussia was one of the most noticeable of these new forces.

Prussia had erupted on the European scene in sporadic outbursts of strength in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, sending shock waves through the capitals of Europe. During the Napoleonic period, Prussia emerged from

the ashes of total defeat at Jena to share in the victors cup at Waterloo. Victory over Napoleon allowed most countries to return to the status quo, and even Prussia, who enjoyed its new position chiefly because of the revolutionary tactics developed by its young generals, began a slow decline. Once again the officer corps began to mirror the aristocracy of the country served, be it Russia, Austria, or Prussia.¹ Even the once republican French army reflected the upper strata of French society.² In 1848, another force shook the foundations of the European thrones. The ideas of nationalism, democracy, and socialism threatened to overturn the ruling monarchs of Austria, Prussia, and France. Although only France went through a serious dynastic alteration,

¹For studies on the armies of Russia and Austria see: M. Lyons, ed., The Russian Imperial Army: A Bibliography of Regimental Histories and Related Works (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968); Hugh Seton-Watson, The Russian Empire 1801-1917 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 386-390 and 699-703; Oscar Jaszi, The Dissolution of the Habsburg Empire (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1929), pp. 141-148; Edward Crankshaw, The Fall of the House of Habsburg (New York: Viking Press, 1963), pp. 90-110.

²For information on the French army during the Restoration see: Paul-Marie de la Gorce, The French Army: A Military-Political History (New York: George Braziller Inc., 1963), pp. 17-30; Pierre Chalmin, L'Officier Français De 1815 A 1870 (Paris: Libraire Marcel Rivière et Cie, 1957); Gordon B. Turner, ed., A History of Military Affairs Since the Eighteenth Century (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1956), pp. 64-118.

the Habsburg and Hohenzollern monarchs were severely threatened. Utilization of the army in each country was necessary in order to save the throne. A situation of intense animosity between the soldiers of the king and the citizens of Rousseau and Marx seemed to stifle any progressive growth for a strong, united, Prussian state. Twenty-two years later, however, Prussia was to appear the dominant nation on the continent, with a large, well-trained army and a prosperous, growing, working class. That Prussia was able to accomplish this seemingly impossible task was the result of both superb political and military planning.

Under William I and his able chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, the Prussian state took the initiative in shaping a German state. In three crushing wars, Denmark, Austria, and France were defeated and a German nation appeared on the map of Europe. Opposition to the mighty Prussian juggernaut seemed impossible as countries were literally rolled over. The leaders of the new German state were highly praised for their achievements and the officer corps shared in this adoration. As in most countries, victory proved a unifying factor in closing the gap between the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy, but in Germany the bond between the middle class and the nobility became stronger

with time. The internationalist ideas of Marxism took a back seat to the nationalist aspirations of the middle classes. The German Constitution, drawn up in 1871, contained the medieval officer's oath to the emperor, as the Supreme War Lord, instead of to the constitution or the state.³ The army, shielded from the infighting of parliamentary politics, owed allegiance only to the emperor. The military reforms of General Albrecht von Roon, Prussian War Minister, 1858-1866, allowed many non-aristocratic elements into the military, and instead of some liberal middle class ideas filtering into the military, the reverse took place. Expansion of the reserve officer corps also aided in the formation of a staunchly conservative middle class.⁴ The army of the emperor, once viewed as a hotbed of reaction, became the exaltation of a large part of the nation. Under William II the military inundation of society took on a more expansive and grotesque form.

William II ascended the German throne in 1888, after the four-month reign of his father, Frederick III. The

³ Edwin H. Zeydel, ed., Constitutions of the German Empire and German States (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1919), p. 24.

⁴ Gerhard Ritter, The Sword and the Scepter: The Problem of Militarism in Germany, 2 vols. (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1965), 2:99.

young emperor was much admired by his people. His youthful manner and appearance, however, hid a deep seated militarism that was to thrust the Reich into one crisis after another. William's close ties with the army were well known throughout Germany, and many feared the young monarch would be controlled by his military advisers. Evidence to confirm this belief was illustrated when William gave his first official pronouncement. On June 15, 1888, William, still the heir apparent, spoke not to his subjects, but to his army, stating "So are we bound together--I and the army--so are we born for one another, and so shall we hold together indissolably [sic], whether, as God wills, we are to have peace or storm."⁵ The Kaiser's court was permeated with military figures. The Military Cabinet, General Staff, and War Ministry were given first priority in consulting the emperor and influencing decisions of state.⁶ All candidates seeking civilian positions in the German government had to have good military records.⁷ William did not have to be

⁵Christian Gauss, The German Emperor: As Shown in His Public Utterances (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), p. 28.

⁶Gordon Craig, The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), p. 240.

⁷Karl O. Bertling, "The Military System of Germany," Outlook June, 1907, p. 330.

influenced by his military attaches, for his appetite for military affairs was insatiable. He often took the lead in examining details of the army and its personnel.⁸

William also examined every facet of German life with a definite military perspective. Holidays were celebrated with martial pomp and show.⁹ Even such an innocent event as the arrival of the Barnum and Bailey Circus was inspected by William's generals in order to view loading methods that could possibly aid in speeding up German mobilization.¹⁰

According to one defender of this system, "Military life takes the place of athletics--from football up to a Marathon race--not only for those who are or have been actively engaged in service, but also for the public at large."¹¹

⁸For two examples of William's interest in the day-to-day affairs of the Army see Appendix 23; Circular by General von Eichorn, Inspector-General to the Chief of the Military Cabinet on the general education of Prussian Officers, Berlin, March 8, 1909, pp. 289-290. Appendix 27; Minute by the Emperor William II to the Minister of War on the Maltreatment of Subordinates, Potsdam, September 17, 1892, p. 348. Karl Demeter's, The German Officer Corps in Society and State, 1650-1945 (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965).

⁹Ritter, Sword, 2:99.

¹⁰Barbara Tuchman, The Proud Tower: A Portrait of the World Before the War, 1890-1914 (Toronto, New York and London: Bantam Matrix, 1966), p. 356.

¹¹Bertling, Outlook, p. 330.

If the military orientation of Germany had stopped on the parade ground or in the Kaiser's private councils, the effects would probably have been minimal. That this was not to be the case is one of the great tragedies of modern times. As already pointed out, the rising middle classes were deeply affected by the military traditions of Prussia. With the chauvinistic writings of Heinrich von Treitschke and Freidrich von Bernhardi, the glorification of arms was passed on to the general public for mass consumption. Treitschke, a historian, lauded the army as "a popular school for manly virtue in an age when business and pleasure cause higher things to be forgotten."¹² Bernhardi, a retired general and writer, took the analogy one step further in praising the business of the army. In his work, Germany and the Next War, he stated "The desire for peace has rendered most civilized nations anaemic and marks a decay of the spirit and political courage"¹³

The constant glorification of Germany's military stature was not enough for William. Since Germany had expanded to her most logical limit in Europe, William became

¹²George Borrow, ed., Treitschke: His Life and Works (London: Jarrold and Sons, 1914), p. 139.

¹³Freidrich von Bernhardi, Germany and the Next War (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1914), p. 17.

convinced that the German navy needed expansion in order to compete with the other European powers for overseas dominions. The Alldeutsches Verband, (Pan-German League), composed of industrialists, financiers, and naval advocates, distributed propaganda to all levels of society so that the German people would support an expansive naval and colonial policy.¹⁴ By the turn of the century, William was convinced that Germany was fated to become a world power. In October, 1899, at the launching of the Kaiser Karl der Grosse, the emperor stated: "We feel its lack, and bitterly do we need a powerful German Fleet."¹⁵ Many rationalized a large fleet as a necessity for defense, but William shattered this illusion in 1901 by stating

In spite of the fact that we have no such fleet as we should have, we have conquered for ourselves a place in the sun. It will now be my task to see to it that this place in the sun shall remain our undisputed possession, in order that the sun's rays may fall fruitfully upon our activity and trade in foreign parts, that our industry and agriculture may develop within the state and our sailing sports upon the water.¹⁶

Committed to the role of a world power, Germany had to pay the price. As in most countries, the brunt of this expenditure

¹⁴Ritter, Sword, 2:109.

¹⁵Gauss, Emperor, p. 150.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 181.

fell on the working class. Opposition to the military and naval policies began to mount quickly during the early twentieth century. The leading party of this opposition was the German Socialist Democratic Party.

German socialism was born out of the chaos of 1848. The success of the counter-revolution was able to keep the socialists divided and quiescent until the Franco-Prussian war. The suppression of the Paris Commune caused the socialists to unite temporarily and condemn the action of Prussia. On May 25, 1870, August Bebel, president of the Social Democratic Workingmen's Party admonished the Prussian military and political leaders, stating,

Be assured that the entire European proletariat, and all that have a feeling for freedom and independence in their hearts, have their eyes fixed on Paris. And if Paris is only a small affair or outpost, that the main conflict in Europe is still before us, and that ere many decades pass away, the battle-cry of the Parisian proletariat, war to the palace, peace to the cottage, death to want and idleness, will be the battlecry of the entire European proletariat.¹⁷

By 1875 the German socialists stood united, but Bismarck seeing the potential of a strong working class movement, suppressed most socialist activity.¹⁸ The German Social

¹⁷August Bebel, Speeches (New York: International Publishers, 1928), p. 12.

¹⁸For the text of the Anti-Socialist Laws see Appendix C; Law Against the Publicly Dangerous Endeavors of Social

Democratic Workingmen's Party, formed at the Gotha Congress of 1875, however, managed to hold together and voice opposition to the policies of Bismarkian Germany.¹⁹ The advent of William II and the decline of Bismark marked a historic point in the development of the labor movement. William II, realizing that the repressive laws fostered by Bismark had not stemmed the growth of the working class movement, decided that he could control the socialists by his personal charm and charisma. In a speech to the Reichstag, William outlined his programs of social legislation stating, "I hope to eliminate unhealthy social distinctions, and I cherish the hope that in fostering our internal welfare I shall receive the harmonious support of all true subjects of the realm without division of party."²⁰ The anti-socialists laws were dropped and the SPD began to grow with geometrical swiftness.

Democracy, Berlin, October 19, 1878 in Vernon L. Lidtke's, The Outlawed Party: Social Democracy in Germany, 1878-1890 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), pp. 339-345.

¹⁹The German Social Democratic Workingmen's Party was actually a fusion of two organizations. The oldest group, founded and until 1864 led by Ferdinand Lassalle, was called the Universal German Workingmen's Association. The most powerful group was led by August Bebel and after 1869 called the Social Democratic Workingmen's Party. The Lasalle Faction drew most of its strength in Prussia while the Bebel organization was dominant in Saxony and South Germany.

²⁰Gauss, Emperor, pp. 36-37.

By 1913, the SPD held 111 of the 397 Reichstag seats. But socialism was more than a political party; it was a way of life. By 1914, there were 93 socialist newspapers and journals read by 1,800,000 subscribers. Socialist libraries, social, and sports clubs sprang up all over Germany.²¹

The growth of the SPD paralleled the rapid upsurge in industry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Between 1870 and 1914, the number of people working in agriculture declined from 50% to 34%. With the growth of population from 41 million in 1870 to 65 million in 1914, these figures represented some dramatic alterations in the social composition of the country.²² The most important facet of this growth for the SPD was the shedding of the revolutionary concepts of Marxism for a more moderate program that would be acceptable to the rank and file. The revisionist theories of Eduard Bernstein, publisher of the main SPD paper, Social Democracy, offered the socialists an honorable and practical solution to their problem of maintaining themselves within the existing capitalist

²¹Godfrey to State Department, Munich, February 24, 1914, Records of the Department of State relating to the Internal Affairs of Germany, 1910-1929 (hereafter cited as R.D.S.), Index No. 862.00/31.

²²Felix Gilbert, The End of the European Era (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1970), pp. 69-70.

structure.²³ Although the SPD was severely criticized for Bernstein's heretical ideology, the success and prominence of the party still made it very influential in determining socialist strategy on a world-wide basis.²⁴

The mellowing of the German socialists did little to ease tensions between the trade unions and military. Although the SPD had altered its views toward the state, opposition to the military remained adamant. The Erfurt Program drafted in October, 1891, was still the party policy toward the Kaiser's army. The Erfurt Proposals recommended "Universal military education. Substitution of militia for a standing army. Decision by popular representatives of questions of peace and war. Decision of all international disputes by arbitration."²⁵ The military retaliated by forbidding political discussions in the barracks and introducing Education Officers in order to shield the troops from the

²³For an excellent study of the theory of revisionism see Peter Gay, The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism: Eduard Bernstein's Challenge to Marx (New York: Collier, 1962), pp. 85-252.

²⁴Richard Watt, The King's Depart: The Tragedy of Germany, Versailles and the German Revolution (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), pp. 115-116.

²⁵The Erfurt Programme of the Social-Democratic Party of Germany, Erfurt, October 14-20, 1891, G.A. Kertesz (ed.), Documents on the Political History of the European Continent, 1815-1939 (hereafter cited as D.P.H.E.C.), (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 276.

principles of Social Democracy.²⁶ Kaiser William, as Supreme War Lord, never perceived the idea of making the army responsible to the Reichstag. The army was the property of the crown alone and no one other than the emperor could direct it. The constant friction between the army and the SPD was viewed by William as a direct attempt to undermine his authority. In one of his more pompous speeches in 1891, William tried to threaten the SPD. He stormed to his troops, stating,

Think of the famous history of your fatherland; remember that the army must be armed against the internal as well as the external foe. More and more unbelief and discontent raise their heads in the Fatherland, and it may come to pass that you will have to shoot down or stab your own relatives and brothers.²⁷

William's threats did not stop the SPD from agitation against the military. When the naval budgets for Germany were introduced into the Reichstag the SPD presented a formidable road block for the military to break through.²⁸ The main fear of the military, however, was not the parliamentary

²⁶Demeter, Officer Corps, Appendix 23; Circular by General von Eichorn (G.O.C., 18th Army Corps) to his officers on the subject of lecturing to their men, Frankfurt Main, September 19, 1909, pp. 339-342.

²⁷Gauss, Emperor, p. 74.

²⁸Phillip Scheidemann, The Making of a New Germany: The Memoirs of Phillip Scheidemann, 2 vols. (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1929), 2:156.

pressures that the SPD exerted but the direct action that the socialists could induce if a general war erupted. As the Stuttgart Congress of the Second International, the SPD had joined with the workers of other countries, declaring,

If war threatens to break out, it is the duty of the working class in the countries concerned, and of parliamentary representatives, with the aid of the co-ordinating activity of the International Bureau, to do all they can to prevent the outbreak of war by whatever means seem to them most appropriate, which will naturally vary with the intensity²⁹ of the class war and the general public situation.

A speedy mobilization of Germany's armed forces was essential in order to conduct a two-front war. If the socialists utilized their ultimate weapon, the general strike, the German war machine would be crushed between France and Russia.³⁰

²⁹The Second International: Stuttgart Resolution on Militarism and International Conflict, August, 1907 D.P.H.E.C., p. 226.

³⁰Germany's war plans are discussed thoroughly in Craig, Politics, pp. 237-298; Gerhard Ritter, The Schlieffen Plan (London: Oswald Wolff, 1958).

CHAPTER II

WAR AND DIVISION

August, 1914, witnessed the first real test between the socialists and the army. The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, on June 28, 1914, precipitated a month-long crisis leading eventually to World War I.

Although few expected a general war to culminate from the Sarajevo incident, precautions were taken throughout Europe to head off a major crisis. The socialists of all countries took to the streets in order to emphasize worker solidarity, in the face of growing war fever.¹ By July 28, when Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia, all national efforts to halt the spreading conflict had failed. On July 29, the International Socialist Bureau met in Brussels. There representatives from all the major Powers of Europe confirmed their stand favoring a localization of the war. A resolution was drafted "calling upon proletarians to

¹A good description of the action taken by the Socialists is given in Merle Fainsod, International Socialism and the World War (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1969), pp. 35-39; Scheidemann, Memoirs, 1:201-202.

organize demonstrations against war and to exert pressure to avert armed intervention by Germany and Russia."²

The SPD leaders were placed in a precarious situation vis-á-vis Russia. Tsarist Russia, historically, was viewed as a dangerous threat to socialism as well as Germany. The Russian Social Democratic Party was so small and ineffective that a socialist sanctioned general strike would have little effect on Russian mobilization while Germany would be completely crippled. If Russian troops occupied Germany, then the world's largest and most powerful Socialist party would be destroyed. Another problem for the German labor leaders stemmed from the fact that the rank and file was being heavily influenced by the war leaders. If the party was truly democratic, should it not be responsive to the demands of its members?³ In order to appease the workers and prove to the German nation that the SPD was not traitorous, the Socialist daily Vörrwarts published an article illustrating a less adamant stand toward peace. The article, published on July 31, read,

Our minds are not conscious of any enthusiasm for war but shudder at the thought. But when no sacrifice

²The Times (London), July 31, 1914, p. 7.

³William H. Mechl, German Militarism and Socialism (Omaha, Nebraska: Wesleyan Press, 1968), pp. 143-144.

avails to stop the march of fate: when we recollect the unspeakable atrocities Tsarism has inflicted on its people and further imagine the myrmidons of barbaric power entering our own country drunk with victory, then the cry comes to our lips--surely not that.⁴

This crack in the Socialist anti-war policy soon widened, and coupled with party bickering, events soon began to outpace any SPD action. On July 30, Russia ordered a general mobilization. Germany reacted on August 1 by mobilizing her armies. On August 4, fearing an immediate Russian invasion, the German SPD voted in favor of financing the war effort. In a statement from the floor of the Reichstag, Hugo Hasse, co-chairman of the party, proclaimed, "Now we are facing the grim fact of war. We are threatened by the horrors of hostile invasion. Today we do not have to decide whether for or against war, but solely about the question of means necessary for the defense of our country."⁵ This one action reversed all previous socialist plans and policies for international cooperation in the event of general hostilities. The unity of the German Social Democratic Party, which historically had given the SPD such strength, was never to be

⁴ Scheidemann, Memoirs, 1:207.

⁵ Hasse's Speech in the Reichstag, August 4, 1914, Ralph H. Lutz (ed.) Documents of the German Revolution: Fall of the German Empire, 1914-1918 2 vols., (hereafter cited as D.G.R.) (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1932), 1:15.

reclaimed. The leaders of the party were thrown into the arms of a government they had always opposed, and as the Socialist soldiers began their march toward France and Russia, the Socialist hierarchy moved closer into the inner sanctum of the governing circles of Imperial Germany. On September 30, 1914, Vorwärts was allowed to resume publication, thus sealing the union between the two long and bitter enemies--the military and socialists.⁶

The bridge between the military and the SPD proved far too hazardous for either to control. The early victories in France and Russia were supplanted by an attritional war which demanded the utmost of the entire population. The Entente blockade of Germany, although not felt for months, began to have disastrous effects on the German population by 1916.⁷ As in most wars, the generals began to penetrate into areas where the military had never ventured. The magnitude of the war, however, was simply too much for a few men to even attempt to control. The advent of Field Marshal Hindenburg and General Ludendorff to the General Staff in 1916 marked the last attempt by the military to oversee the

⁶General von Kessel's Order Concerning Vorwärts, Berlin, Spetember 30, 1914, D.G.R., 2:12.

⁷Pierre Renouvin, War and Aftermath 1914-1929 (New York, Evanston, and London: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 11.

German war effort in its totality. Hindenburg, the hero of Tannenberg,⁸ was the figurehead of German ability and resourcefulness. He was much respected by the people, and was expected to give Germany the military victory needed to break the bloody stalemate in the west. Ludendorff, the master planner behind Hindenburg, visualized all sorts of schemes to improve the war machine. He conceived plans to increase the birth rate, decrease desertions, recruit female and foreign labor, resettle returning veterans, stop venereal disease and subversion, and to train those youths not yet old enough for military service.⁹ As Ludendorff's policies began to unfold, opposition to the General Staff's usurpation of power grew more vociferous. The harbinger of this opposition was once again the Social Democrats. The most striking feature of the socialist opposition was that the leaders of the movement were not the leaders of the SPD.

After the first war credit vote, the SPD could no longer control the bitter internal struggle. As the months dragged

⁸Tannenberg, located in East Prussia, was the area where the Russian forces made their initial move in September of 1914. The German armies, under Hindenburg, destroyed two Russian armies and released the pressure of a Russian advance into Germany.

⁹Walter Gorlitz, History of the German General Staff, 1657-1945 (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1953), pp. 182-183.

into years, three distinctive factions evolved from the old party. The largest group, under Fritz Ebert and Phillip Scheidemann, retained the confidence of the generals and the emperor. Ebert was the story-book example of proletarian self-sacrifice and devotion to party. A saddler by trade, Ebert had worked for the party most of his life. In his youth, Ebert traveled and spoke for the party. Later he became editor of the Bremer Burgerzeitung and served on the city council. The election of 1912 sent Ebert to the Reichstag, where his organizational abilities were praised by the party leaders.¹⁰ Scheidemann's career was almost a carbon copy of Ebert's. Reared in poverty, Scheidemann chose the printer's trade for his profession. Shortly after joining the party, he became the manager of the Mitteldeutsche Sonntagszeitung in Marburg. After serving on the town council, he was elected to the Reichstag in 1903. By 1912, he was a Vice-President of the Reichstag and a member of the Executive Committee of the party. His phenomenal rise in the party and government was the result of Scheidemann's brilliant oratorical abilities and his method of advancing issues thought too innocuous or unsafe to mention.¹¹

¹⁰Dresel to State Department, Berlin, March 17, 1920
R.D.S., No. 862.00/830.

¹¹Ibid.

The Ebert-Scheidemann clique was composed of many of the older members of the party who had worked hard to build up the strength of the SPD over heavy opposition. Most of Ebert's followers had lived under the shadow of the Bismarkian repression and had weathered the storms of abuse hurled at them from the left and the right. In prospering, however, the SPD allowed the revolutionary tendencies of Marxism to be replaced with organizational and procedural dispositions. Added to this dialectical conservatism was a patriotic love for their homeland. Some of the Majority Socialists, as they were to be called after the split of 1917, had served in the Kaiser's armies during the period of unification. They took great pride in knowing that they had helped in the creation of Germany. This nationalistic pride was one of the main reasons why the Ebert group refused to disentangle itself from the machinations of the Imperial Government.

In opposition to the Majority Socialists arose the Haase-Ledebour faction. Hugo Haase, a barrister by profession, formed part of the intellectual core of the party. The outbreak of the war had forced Haase to seriously question the role of party discipline versus individual conscience. This indecision would have been of little importance except

for the high position held by Haase.¹² Georg Ledebour, for his part, occupied a place of importance in the party because of his writings for Vörrwärts. Haase's faction was joined by two of the old party stalwarts, Karl Kautsky and Eduard Bernstein. This old intellectual elite was combined with the other members who opposed the alliance of the SPD with the government.¹³ The Haase group did not favor an open breach with the majority, but sought to realign the aims of social democracy with existing conditions.

Another group splintering from the Haase faction was led by Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. This group, which came to be known as the Spartacist League, was a true revolutionary party favoring open class warfare and the establishment of a communist state. Liebknecht, also a lawyer, son of the famous Wilhelm Liebknecht,¹⁴ was constantly at odds

¹²Ibid.

¹³Fainsod, International Socialism, p. 69.

¹⁴Wilhelm Liebknecht (1826-1900). One of the most famous German socialists, Liebknecht participated in the 1848 revolution in Prussia. While in exile in England, Liebknecht became a close friend to both Marx and Engels. In 1861, Liebknecht returned to Prussia and after eight years of collaboration with August Bebel founded the Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei. At the Gotha Conference of 1875 the SPD was formed by a combination of Liebknecht's followers with those of Ferdinand Lasalle's. After the unification of Germany, Liebknecht served in the Reichstag until his death in 1900.

with the party because of his volatile rhetoric. His inflammatory attacks on the military had already cost him many years in exile and prison.¹⁵ Luxemburg, a Pole by birth, was well known in intellectual circles for her works on socialism. She constantly attacked the latent nationalism in the SPD, thus estranging herself from the party leadership.¹⁶

As the war continued, the break in the SPD became more verbal and open. The vote on the second war credits in December, 1914 saw more members join the opposition, especially in the party caucus.¹⁷ In June, 1915 Haase, Kautsky and Bernstein published an article advocating strong opposition to the annexationist tendencies in the Reichstag. Haase declared that the SPD should be the foundation upon which all hopes for peace could be built.¹⁸ The war credit vote of August, 1915 saw 38 of the 96 SPD members either abstain, or vote against the bill.¹⁹ On April 20, 1917, Haase openly broke with the SPD, declaring,

¹⁵Dresel to Secretary of State, Berlin, March 17, 1920 R.D.S., No. 862.00/830.

¹⁶Watt, King's Depart, p. 126.

¹⁷Fainsod, International Socialism, pp. 69-70.

¹⁸The Command of the Hour, Leipzig, June 19, 1915, D.G.R., 2:14-17.

¹⁹Attitude of the Social-Democratic Party toward the Credit Bill, Berlin, December 14, 1915, D.G.R., 2:31.

It stands in basic opposition to the ruling government system, to the war policy of the Imperial Government; and to the policy of the Executive Committee of the nominal party which is being conducted in harmony with the Government. In distinction from it the organization of the opposition carries the name; Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany.²⁰

By 1917 the tide of battle was shifting in favor of the Entente. In Germany, the disillusion and opposition to the government's policies, fermenting continually since the opening of the war, began to surface in both civilian and military quarters. In the west, desertions reached epidemic proportions. Tougher regulations to combat desertion and disciplinary breaches had a negative effect on the line troops.²¹ In the east, Bolshevik propoganda not only neutralized the combat efficiency of the German troops in other battle sectors, but also aided in the spread of defeatist and revolutionary attitudes.²² Likewise the garrison troops created problems for the military leaders. The constant friction between the enlisted men and the officers, emanating partially from poor food and the

²⁰ Proclamation of the Independent Social-Democratic Party, Leipzig, April 20, 1917, D.G.R., 2:45.

²¹ George Bruntz, Allied Propaganda and the Collapse of the German Empire in 1918 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1938), pp. 203-206.

²² Ibid., p. 150.

enforcement of barracks routine, resulted in numerous cases of insubordination.²³ This disillusionment in the armed services, although quite large, was only a reflection of the discontent within the whole of German society.

Among the civilian population, foods and fuel shortages, high prices, and war profiteering, accelerated the desire for peace. The food problem was a constant source of complaint by the German workers. Due to food riots in some of the cities in 1916, the military authorities began to regulate the opening and closing of food stores.²⁴ Moreover, after the revolution in Russia, Bolshevik propaganda began to filter into the factories and shipyards. Also soldiers returning from all fronts pictured the horrors of war so vividly that those not yet drafted became even more determined to end the conflict. The endless streams of police regulations and government propaganda crippled the people's will to carry on the struggle. And the sight of the war profiteers with all the luxuries money could buy compared to the hunger and privation of the masses, created an

²³Ibid., p. 166; For a good example of how discipline was restored in the rear areas see Order of the Sixth Army on Discipline, Potsdam, May 8, 1918, D.G.R., 1:652.

²⁴American Consulate-General to Secretary of State, Hamburg, August 23, 1916, R.D.S., 862.00/33.

atmosphere of hate.²⁵ The lack of action on the part of the workers was due mainly to their obedience to their party, the SPD. With the emergence of the USPD, a new force was created to challenge the war and the war makers.

Before the emergence of the Independents, opposition to the war was scattered and disorganized. In 1916, Karl Liebknecht was arrested for inciting a riot and given a court martial. His sentence of two and one-half years in prison²⁶ was viewed as unjust, but there was little that could be done to aid him. Liebknecht was always at odds with his own party as well as the military authorities. The USPD, however, commanded much more respect and loyalty than did the Liebknecht group. In April 1917, the Independents decided to try and show their strength through a strike in the munitions factories. The results were beyond their most optimistic calculations. Despite government knowledge and SPD condemnation, 125,000 workers throughout Germany walked off their jobs.²⁷ Although the strike was short-

²⁵Buntz, Propaganda, pp. 157-158.

²⁶American Minister to Secretary of State, Copenhagen, June 29, 1916, R.D.S., 862.00/32.

²⁷For a good description of the strike see Prince Hohenlohe to Count Czernin, Berlin, April 23, 1917, D.G.R., 2:222-224.

lived and there was little gained, the USPD knew that its strength would grow as long as the war continued. With civilian support, the USPD could agitate, but military support was also needed in order to broaden the movement.

The Independents began to make contacts with the army and navy through their propaganda leaflets. The navy was the first service to react to USPD feelers. In July, 1917 a peace proclamation was signed by four-hundred sailors aboard the battleship König Albert. In the statement the sailors declared, "The U.S.P.D. has up to now been the most determined champion of our interests in Germany and hence alone possesses our confidence as is proved by our entry into its ranks."²⁸ In August, a mutiny broke out in Wilhelmshaven.²⁹ Although the revolt was quickly crushed and the event was played down, the USPD was accused of collusion with the sailors. In a statement on the floor of the Reichstag, Admiral von Capelle, Secretary of the Navy, implicated the revolutionary sailors with the leaders of the USPD, Haase, Ditteman, and Vogtherr.³⁰ The Independents

²⁸Authur Rosenberg, The Birth of the German Republic (London: Russell and Russell, 1931), p. 185.

²⁹The New York Times, Oct. 11, 1917, p. 1:

³⁰Admiral von Cappelle's statement in the Reichstag, Berlin, October 9, 1917, D.G.R., 1:674-675.

admitted association with the sailors but denied any allegations of conspiracy.³¹ The event was finally dismissed as an isolated occurrence, with no one accepting the blame or the credit. As von Capelle dismissed the case, he stated that "A few people who forgot their honor and duty have committed grave offenses and received the deserved punishment."³²

By 1918, the concepts of "honor and duty" were dissipating as fast as the western front. On the home front, the strike movement surfaced again and in the Berlin area, 300,000 workers refused to return to their jobs. Workmen's Councils, tailored after the Russian model, sprang up to try and give direction to the various factions. The situation became so precarious that on February 1, the commander in chief of the Berlin area, General von Kessel, was forced to declare a state of siege and place the operation of the factories under military control.³³ The conditions at the front offered little hope despite the

³¹Haase's Reply to von Cappelle, Berlin, October 9, 1917, D.G.R., 1:675-677.

³²Admiral von Capelle's Statement in the Reichstag, Berlin, October 9, 1917, Ibid.

³³General von Kessel's Proclamation Concerning State of Seige in Greater Berlin, Berlin, February 1, 1918, D.G.R., 2:237.

cessation of hostilities on the eastern front. In March, the High Command launched the last large-scale German offensive of the war. Although successful initially, the advance soon came to a standstill as the German war machine began to falter. By September, even the General Staff realized that continuation of the war was useless. In an announcement to the political leaders of the Reichstag, Baron von der Bussche, the Under-Secretary of State proclaimed,

This conviction and these events have caused the General Field-Marshal and General Ludendorff to arrive at the determination to propose to His Majesty the Emperor that an attempt be made to put an end to the struggle in order to save the German³⁴ people and their allies from making further sacrifices.

The military men finally capitulated to reason, but by October, 1918, revolution transcended any rule of reason.

³⁴ Statement by Baron von der Bussche, Representative of the Supreme Army Command, to the Party Leaders of the Reichstag, Berlin, October 2, 1918, D.G.R., 2:462.

CHAPTER III

COLLUSION AND COLLISION

The German revolution began on November 3, 1918. The revolt of the sailors at Kiel was the result of an order issued by the Admiralty on October 28 to put out to sea.¹ The sailors, having been confined to port during most of the war, hoped that Germany was only days away from an armistice. An attack on the British squadron could therefore not have had much effect upon the hopeless military situation. Most of the enlisted ranks believed that the suicidal orders were the desires of the officers, who needed to satisfy their mildewed concepts of honor and heroism by destroying themselves along with the entire fleet.² The sailors refused to weigh anchor in order to insure their actions, the boilers in some of the battleships were shut down. The Admiralty after rescinding the orders, decided on a show of force.

¹Walter Gorlitz, ed., The Kaiser and His Court: The Diaries, Note Books, and Letters of Admiral Georg Alexander von Müller, Chief of the Naval Cabinet, 1914-1918 (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1959), p. 418.

²A.J. Ryder, The German Revolution of 1918: A Study of Socialism in War and Revolt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p. 140.

Troops were dispatched to Kiel and the situation quickly deteriorated as some of the troops went over to the side of the sailors. On November 3, a patrol fired upon a mob of sailors attempting to open the prison. Eight persons were killed and twenty-nine wounded, and soon Kiel became an open battleground.³

By November 4, it was apparent to most people that the insurrection in Kiel would not be crushed immediately. Representatives of the German government contacted the sailors and decided to send a delegate from the Majority Socialists to the base. Gustav Noske, the SPD expert on military affairs, left Berlin on November 4 and was received warmly by the sailors.⁴ The demands of the mutineers ranged from abdication of the Kaiser and amnesty for all disciplinary prisoners to "abolition of officers' casinos."⁵ After Noske was appointed governor of Kiel, he ordered all weapons turned

³Times (London), November 6, 1918, p. 8.

⁴Gustav Noske (1868-1947). The son of a wood workman, Noske served as a N.C.O. in the army. After his military service, Noske joined the SPD and became the editor of the party paper in Brandenburg Königsberg and Chemitz. In 1906, after serving as a city alderman in Königsberg, Noske was elected to the Reichstag. His military experience plus his writings on colonial and naval problems made Noske the party spokesman in these areas.

⁵Times (London), November 8, 1918, p. 7.

in and cautioned the government and High Command against sending in any more outside troops.⁶ As the news of the successful revolt spread, however, Workers and Soldiers Councils began to spring up, destroying the authority of the officers, and threatening the power of the socialist factions.

Meanwhile, at Spa, the High Command simply refused to believe that the revolution was underway. The Kaiser's immediate entourage advised the emperor to hold on to his throne until the field army marched home. The demand for abdication by the Imperial Government of Prince Max of Baden was received very coolly. Orders were issued banning the formation of the hated councils and forbidding large rallies.⁷ On November 7, these orders were answered by the total collapse of Bavaria. Soon the revolutionary wave was also engulfing all of northwestern and central Germany. On November 9, the Kaiser was informed by his new Quartermaster, General Wilhelm Groener, that the army no longer

⁶Scheidemann, Memoirs, 2:225-226.

⁷Deliberations of the Inner War Cabinet, November 7, 1918, Charles B. Burdick and Ralph H. Lutz (eds.), The Political Institutions of the German Revolution, 1918-1919 (hereafter cited as P.I.G.R.) (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), p. 33.

held the confidence of the emperor.⁸ Even William realized that without the support of the army, his chances of keeping the throne were almost nil. After a hasty abdication, the Kaiser fled to Holland. Eric Dombrowski, the editor of the Berliner Tageblatt, poignantly analyzed the reign of the last Hohenzollern monarch of Germany by stating,

When he ascended the throne of his father there were eleven Socialists in the Reichstag; in 1912 there were already one hundred and twenty. When he lost his throne there seemed nothing but Socialists. All the other dynasties lost their right of existence and with them the Bundesrat and the Reichstag; the whole kingdom threatened to disunite. In thirty years he had governed the German nation to pieces.

The collapse of the Hohenzollern rule left the entire nation in a state of limbo. The revolution had scarcely penetrated the Berlin area by November 9; consequently the government of Prince Max was desperately attempting to find a replacement to satisfy the nation as well as the enemy. The revolt of the soldiers in Berlin on November 9 took the problem out of the Chancellor's hands.¹⁰ At the last

⁸ Lieutenant-General Wilhelm Groener became the First Quartermaster-General and senior assistant to Field Marshal von Hindenburg on October 26, replacing Ludendorff.

⁹ Eric Dombrowski, German Leaders of Yesterday and Today (New York: Books for Libraries Press Incorporated, 1920), pp. 87-88.

¹⁰ Sturve to Secretary of State, Copenhagen, November 19, 1918, R.D.S., 861.00/370.

minute, the SPD leader, Ebert, was given the post of Imperial Chancellor of the Reich. Ebert was viewed as a moderate as compared to the Independents or the Spartacists, and he also possessed the support of the revolutionary troops. The new Chancellor realized that the revolution would soon outpace his attempts to control it unless he broadened the base of his support. Unification of the socialists, therefore, was the first order of business. Since most Germans felt the war was over, the only bitter issue between the SPD and the USPD was the establishment of the new government. Ebert's party supported the calling of a Constituent Assembly to determine what form of government Germany should build while most of the Independents and all of the Spartacists demanded a government "placed solely in the hands of responsible individuals elected by the whole working population and soldiers."¹¹ To add to the confusion already created by this debate, Phillip Scheidemann, much to the consternation of Ebert, proclaimed on November 9 that "The Hohenzollern have abdicated. Take care, that this proud day be not besmirched by anything. It will always be a day of honour in the history of Germany. Long live the German Republic."¹²

¹¹Scheidemann, Memoirs, 2:269.

¹²The German Revolution: Scheidemann Proclaims the Republic, November 9, 1918, D.P.H.E.C., p. 404.

Having thus proclaimed a republic, a working government was essential to complete the armistice negotiations. By November 10, the two disputing factions reached a tentative agreement. A meeting at the Circus Bush of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils of Berlin was called to ratify the agreement.¹³ At this meeting the Council of People's Commissars was approved. Ebert was given the posts of Interior and War; Haase, Foreign Affairs and Colonies; and Scheidemann was the Finance Commissar. A co-chairman of the Independent Party, Wilhelm Dittman, controlled Demobilization and Public Health, while Otto Landsberg, a lawyer and member of the SPD, was made the press chief. Finally Emil Barth, a metal worker and head of the Berlin Workers and Soldiers' Council, was named head of the Social Policy section.¹⁴ Although nothing permanent was really accomplished in the way of uniting the party, the Council could start issuing orders with some semblance of legality. The weakness and division of the Council was evidenced by its first proclamation two days after the Circus Bush meeting. The

¹³Erich Eych, A History of the Weimar Republic (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 1:49; Ryder, German Revolution, p. 156-157.

¹⁴Sturve to Secretary of State, Copenhagen, November 19, 1918 R.D.S., 862.00/370.

declaration stated that "the government that grew out of the revolution whose political leadership is purely socialistic sets itself the task of realizing the socialistic program."¹⁵ The conclusion of the appeal, however, seemed to reflect the tone of the moderate SPD faction. It stated that "the government will maintain the regular means of production and protect private property against attacks by private individuals, as well as protect the freedom and security of persons."¹⁶

Establishment of the new government satisfied almost no one. The SPD members realized that the Council of People's Commissars was under the control and scrutiny of the radical Executive Council, which only represented the Berlin workers and soldiers.¹⁷ The left Independents and Spartacists viewed the SPD as a blocking force to the true revolution. The various councils tended to overlap each other, thus causing mass confusion. In an attempt to alter

¹⁵Appeal of the Council of Commissars to the German Nation, November 12, 1918, Walter C. Langsam (ed.) Documents and Readings in the History of Europe since 1918 (hereafter cited as D.R.H.E.) (Chicago: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1939), p. 648.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷John Gordon, The Reichswehr and the German Republic (Princeton: Princeton University Press), p. 10.

this, the Executive Council of the Berlin Workers' and Soldiers' issued an order stating that "No proclamations except those concerning alimentation may be issued by the Workers' and Soldiers' Council without bearing Beerfelde and Richard Muller's signatures."¹⁸ Of course, orders such as these were impossible to enforce, as political agitators roamed the countryside trying to find support. Bolshevik money and propaganda began to circulate among the troops in the rear areas, and after the signing of the armistice on November 11 troops in the rear areas simply began leaving their units.¹⁹ Since they were usually ill-equipped for any type of extensive journey, pillaging and disorder frequently occurred.²⁰ The soldiers were often easy prey to the more radical orators because of their political ignorance and desperate situations.²¹ In Bavaria, Silesia, and the Rhineland, particularism grew daily.²² The allied forces also

¹⁸Proclamation by the Vollzugrat, November 11, 1918 P.I.G.R., p. 46.

¹⁹Bullitt to Secretary of State, Copenhagen, November 25, 1918, R.D.S., 862.00/363-1/2.

²⁰Stovall to Secretary of State, Berne, November 21, 1918, R.D.S., 862.00/347.

²¹Stovall to Secretary of State, Berne, November 25, 1918, R.D.S., 862.00/343.

²²Scheidemann, Memoirs, 2:277.

created vast new problems for the government. The most serious was the food situation. Although the armistice was in effect, allied warships continued the blockade of German ports. In an interview with the New York World, Scheidemann reiterated the problem of the German government. He appealed to the American government after stating,

If America wishes to help Germany establish herself firmly on a democratic basis, saving us from the autocracy of an Emperor or the proletariat, you must get food to us without delay. You say the attitude of America toward Germany is 'No Constitutional Assembly, no food': I can only reply 'No food and there may be no Constitutional Assembly.'²³

Added to the food situation was the allied demand that the three-million-man German army in the west be withdrawn across the Rhine within 31 days.²⁴ In the east, Polish troops harassed the border areas and severed the lines of communication with the remaining German forces in eastern Europe.²⁵ Due to the chaotic internal situation, very few reliable troops could be mustered to defend the government, much less the contested border areas.²⁶ Ebert realized that if

²³Bullitt to Secretary of State, Copenhagen, November 26, 1918, R.D.S., 862.00/364-1/2.

²⁴The Armistice: Terms of the Armistice with the Allied and Associated Powers, November 11, 1918, D.G.R., 2:515-516.

²⁵Cabinet Meeting: Council of Peoples Commissars, December 24, 1918, P.I.G.R., p. 114-115.

²⁶Grantsmith to Secretary of State, Copenhagen, November 24, 1918, R.D.S., 862.00/344.

the new leadership was to succeed, stability had to be guaranteed. Since the revolutionary forces could or would not restore order, Ebert called upon the High Command.

Meanwhile, the abdication of the Kaiser left the military leaders in a very confused state. In one day, the "personal, intellectual, and ideological core of its being suddenly disappeared."²⁷ In the rear areas, the authority of the officers simply disappeared as the Soldiers Councils arose.²⁸ The field armies also saw the introduction of Councils, but in most cases due to the technical difficulties arising from the retreat, the officers either kept their authority or shared it with the councils.²⁹ On November 9, Groener telephoned Ebert and offered the services of the High Command to the Chancellor. Groener calculated that the struggle between the SPD and the USPD would probably be determined by the returning field armies. From his war-time experiences Groener knew the SPD could be trusted, and the USPD's call for a government void of all bourgeois elements was a direct threat to the existence of the officer corps.

²⁷Demeter, Officer Corps, p. 187.

²⁸Cabinet Meeting in Joint Session with Zentralrat, December 20, 1918, P.I.G.R., p. 105.

²⁹Gordon, Reichswehr, p. 8-9.

The conditions required for the services of the High Command were the maintenance of the officer corps and an agreement to combat bolshevism in Germany.³⁰ Ebert accepted the offer and promised to try and restrain the more radical forces under his command. On November 12, Field Marshal Hindenburg officially placed himself and his command at the disposal of the new government.³¹ Ebert dispatched a set of directives to the High Command for issuance to the field army. These demands were as follows

1. The relations between the rank and file are to be built upon mutual confidence. Prerequisites to this are willing submission of the ranks to the officers and comradely treatment by the officers to the ranks.
2. The officers superiority in rank remains. Unqualified obedience in service is of prime importance for the success of the return home to Germany. Military discipline and army order must, therefore, be maintained under all circumstances.
3. The Soldiers' Councils have an advisory voice in maintaining confidence between officer and rank and file in questions of food, leave, the

³⁰ John Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power: The German Army in Politics, 1918-1945 (London: MacMillan & Company, 1964), p. 20.

³¹ Current Report on Morale: Germany and Austria-Hungary. Prepared by the Psychological Section: Division of Military Intelligence, General Staff, United States Army, R.D.S., 862.00/1031.

infliction of disciplinary punishments. Their highest duty is to try to prevent disorder and mutiny.³²

Although opposed by the Spartacists and left Independents, most people realized that the High Command's services were imperative in order to bring the troops home by the deadline.³³ On November 15, the Executive Council issued an order allowing the High Command to continue functioning but placed the generals under the scrutiny of the Prussian Ministry of War, which was, of course, "subject to the control of the Executive Committee of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council."³⁴ On November 29, some of the mental anguish suffered by the old Imperial officers was relieved when the deposed Kaiser's official abdication was published. From his new quarters in Holland, William issued his last command,

I release all officials of the German Empire and Prussia as well as all officers, non-commissioned officers and men of the navy and Prussian army and the Federal contingents from the oath of allegiance which they have made to me as their Kaiser, King and

³²"Documentary History of the German Revolution," International Conciliation, 137, (April, 1919) p. 16.

³³The terms of the Armistice stipulated that those soldiers not withdrawn across the Rhine by the deadline would be taken prisoners of war.

³⁴The Executive Committee of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council, November 15, 1918, P.I.G.R., p. 50.

Commander in Chief. I expect of them they will assist those who are now possessed of actual power until the new institutions of the German empire are established and protect the German people against the threatened danger of anarchy, famine, and foreign domination.³⁵

With the agreement sealed and the release from imperial duty confirmed, the High Command now believed all that was necessary was to wait until the field army returned, and the revolution would be brought under control.

While the military and the SPD waited, the situation in Germany became much worse. The Bavarian republic severed all relations with Berlin on November 26.³⁶ The mark dropped to one-half of its value by the end of November.³⁷ Strikes against some plants and attempts at socialization of others created unemployment and unrest.³⁸ Most people did not know which group in power was going to win the final struggle, so a state of tension prevailed. Finally, on November 29, it was decided that the Reich Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, due to meet on December 16, would determine the form and time for new elections.³⁹

³⁵ Garrett to Secretary of State, Hague, November 28, 1918, R.D.S., 862.00/365.

³⁶ Current Report on Morale: Germany and Austria-Hungary, R.D.S., 862.00/1031.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Minutes of Cabinet; Council of People's Commissars, November 29, 1918, P.I.G.R., pp. 77-78.

The entry of the Guards units into Berlin on December 10, set the stage for the opening of the Reich Congress. Ebert, as representative of the government, and the mourning father of two fallen sons, welcomed the war-weary troops. He praised the performance of the German army and insinuated that their services were still required at home. In closing Ebert summed up his oration by saying

You do not find our country as you left it. New things have come about. German freedom has come about. German freedom has come into being. Upon you, above all rests the hope of German freedom. You are the strongest pillars of the future of Germany.⁴⁰

Most of the troops proved unwilling to be used as the praetorian guard of the revolution or the counter-revolution. In Berlin, as almost everywhere, the majority of the front line troops simply disbanded without official demobilization.⁴¹ After four years of almost continual fighting, a clean pillow offered much more than the abstract concept of being a "pillar of the future." Neither the SPD nor the generals realized the extent of the erosion and exhaustion felt in the field army. They were overly optimistic

⁴⁰ Garrett to Secretary of State, Hague, December 10, 1918, R.D.S., 862.00/453.

⁴¹ Report on a trip into Baden and Wurtemberg by Major Ernest M. Schelling, Military Attache, R.D.S., December 23, 1918, 862.00/470.

because of the perfect order shown in the march across the Rhine. The SPD also realized that success at the Reich Congress would have to take place by political maneuvering and not military strength.

The role of the Reich Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Council was to oversee and approve the establishment of a permanent government. This body did not elect the government; it created the electoral process. The raging issue of a democratic republic versus a proletarian dictatorship would be decided by these men. To the surprise of many, the composition and climate of the Congress gave the Majority Socialists a distinct advantage over the other factions. In delegate strength, the SPD held a 3 to 1 margin over the combined strength of the Independents and Spartacists.⁴² The initial address by Richard Müller, a radical Independent, supporter of Liebknecht, and co-chairman of the Executive Council of the Berlin Workers' and Soldiers' Council, stressed the radical proposal. Muller opened the Congress, declaring that

⁴²There were 489 delegates of which 405 represented Workers' Councils and 84 represented Soldiers' Councils. Party strength gave the SPD 288, USPD 80, Democrats 25, Spartacists 10, and United Revolutionaries 11. There were also 50 uncommitted delegates and a special soldiers faction comprising 25 members.

Here in this hall, here on this site, where formerly the strongest supporters of the guilt laden, overthrown governing power assembled, the representatives of the workers' and soldiers' councils of Germany assemble today in order to lay the foundation for the German socialist republic: here in this hall, where formerly the most brutal rulers, the Prussian cabbage Junkers and smokestack barons, endeavored and unfortunately also often succeeded to enchain the German people, here on this site of the strongest former reaction you shall make safe the accomplishments of the Revolution, anchor securely for all time the political power seized by workers and soldiers, and show the German working people the way to freedom happiness, and prosperity.⁴³

Ebert, speaking for the Majority Socialists, replied:

For, honored assembly in Germany there can permanently be only one source of law: the will of the entire German people. This was the meaning of the Revolution, the rule of force hurled us to destruction; we will not suffer any sort of rule of force in the future, no matter from whom it may come.⁴⁴

Most of the decisions reached at the Congress proved disastrous for the left wing of the Independents and their allies. On December 19, the Ebert faction celebrated the approval of a measure to call National Assembly elections, which were set for January 19.⁴⁵ The Independents realized

⁴³Opening Address: The First Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, December 16, 1918, P.I.G.R., p. 212.

⁴⁴Greeting by the Government: The First Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, December 16, 1918, P.I.G.R., p. 214.

⁴⁵Deliberations: The First Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, December 19, 1918, P.I.G.R., p. 226.

they were totally defeated, so when elections for a Zentralrat or Central Committee were called, they refused to participate.⁴⁶

Although the Congress proved a victory for the moderate factions, the program of demilitarization far surpassed anything the army had expected. The Hamburg Points, adopted by all of the socialists, placed Council Representatives at the head of the armed services, stripped the officers of their badges of rank and service decorations, allowed the election of officers, and called for the eventual replacement of the army with a national militia.⁴⁷ General Groener received this news with utter dismay. After a conference with his officers, he contacted Ebert and stated that if the Hamburg Points were adopted, the High Command would resign.⁴⁸ Ebert, who still wanted the support of the army, urged Groener to come to Berlin to confer with the Council. On December 20, Groener arrived in the capital and began a series of discussions with Ebert. The general reminded

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Proposals of the Supreme Soldiers' Council for Hamburg-Altona and Vicinity, December 19, 1918, P.I.G.R., p. 176-177.

⁴⁸Cabinet Meeting: The Seven Hamburg Points, December 18, 1918, P.I.G.R., p. 99.

Ebert of their agreement of November 9, and stressed the difficulties still existing, especially demobilization and removal of the troops still in eastern Europe.⁴⁹ Ebert, hoping to placate the officers, agreed that the points were too hastily drawn up and approved, and should be presented to the National Assembly instead of the Councils.⁵⁰ Groener left the meeting partially satisfied. Ebert received severe criticism from his colleagues as well as the Independents and Spartacists for bowing to the will of the generals. By late December, however, the generals were needed much more than the critics.

As the moderate influence of the Independents waned, the radical notions of the U.S.P.D. began to dominate party sessions. The Spartacists, hoping to postpone or cancel the January elections, devised a plan to intimidate the government. Demonstrations and gunfire became everyday occurrences. The Volksmarinedivision, a naval unit that was notorious for plundering and looting, quickly joined forces with the Spartacists, and on December 23, they occupied the Royal Palace in Berlin.⁵¹ The government tried to enter

⁴⁹Cabinet Meeting in Joint Session with the Zentralrat, December 20, 1918, P.I.G.R., p. 102.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 111.

⁵¹Osborne to Secretary of State, Copenhagen, January 15, 1919, R.D.S., 862.00/475.

negotiations with the sailors, but instead of reaching an agreement, the sailors kidnapped the commandant of Berlin and demanded 80,000 marks. Ebert, against the wishes of the Independents on the Council, decided to put Groener's forces to the test. The remnants of the former Imperial Horse Guards under General Leguis were dispatched to Berlin to dislodge the sailors. At first, the soldiers gained the upper hand and forced the sailors to surrender. Mobs, however, soon surrounded the troops and disarmed them, leaving the government with no option but to compensate the mutinous sailors.⁵² The High Command had failed once again to supply the government with a reliable defense force, so a decision to recruit volunteer units, mentioned as early as December 20, was hastily approved.⁵³

The use of army troops against the sailors precipitated the withdrawal of the Independents from the Council of People's Representatives.⁵⁴ This left the government in almost the exact position it had been in November. Ebert realized that it was simply a matter of time until the Independents allied themselves with the Spartacists in an

⁵²Garrett to Secretary of State, Hague, December 24, 1918, R.D.S., 862.00/418.

⁵³F.L. Carsten, The Reichswehr and Politics, 1918-1933 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 32.

⁵⁴Joint Meeting of Cabinet and Zentralrat, December 28/29, 1918, P.I.G.R., p. 163.

attempt to overthrow the government. Gustav Noske was recalled from Kiel and appointed the new Defense Minister. Noske, realizing that civil war was only a matter of time, accepted the post, saying, "Someone has to be the bloodhound; I will not shirk the responsibility."⁵⁵ The new Minister of Defense worked closely with the High Command to form Freikorps units and coordinate activity in the event of an uprising. These efforts made by the government and military were soon put to the test.

The Freikorps movement was more a product of the unsettled times than a brainstorm of the High Command. After the armistice, millions of veterans faced the problem of readjusting to civilian life. For many of the younger men, military service was the only experience they had to offer, and the economic picture offered little hope of finding immediate employment. The political forecast also did not reflect much confidence in the new system of government. The demands of the war had created an officer corps that far outnumbered that of the old Imperial army. At the outbreak of the war, the German army contained 22,112 regular

⁵⁵Gustav Noske, Von Kiel bis Kapp: zur Geschichte der deutschen Revolution (Berlin: Verlag für Politik und Wirtschaft, 1920), p. 68.

and 29,230 reserve officers.⁵⁶ Between 1914 and 1918, the demands of war had bloated the officer corps to 45,923 regular and 226,130 reserve officers.⁵⁷ Although some of these officers were chosen from the ranks, many were commissioned after very short periods of training.⁵⁸ With the end of the war many of the wartime officers were forced to alter or totally abandon a life style to which they had grown accustomed. Many of the veterans, both officers and enlisted men, simply could not abandon the way of life developed during four years of fighting, and the idea of a routine life was shunned for the comradeship and excitement of front-line soldiering. These were the soldiers that Hermann Goering, the future Nazi chieftain, described as "fighters who could not become debilitated."⁵⁹ Added to the list of the economically despondent, socially entrapped, and psychologically wounded, was the younger generation of men who missed the war due to age or health, and who resented

⁵⁶ Robert Waite, Vanguard of Nazism: The Free Corps Movement in Post War Germany, 1918-1923 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), p. 45.

⁵⁷ Demeter, Officer Corps, p. 47.

⁵⁸ Waite, Vanguard, p. 46.

⁵⁹ Watt, Kings Depart, p. 250.

the German defeat.⁶⁰ All of these groups were easy to enlist in a crusade to save the Fatherland and restore Germany to her rightful position in the world.

Organization of the Freikorps was modeled upon the shock troops utilized during the war. The officers were young and extremely dedicated to their troops. Discipline was harsh but not on the blind discipline theory practiced by the old army officers. The units were highly mobile and equipped with weapons suited for fighting at close quarter.

The first of the Freikorps units appeared on January 4. Noske, now Defense Minister, was called upon to review these troops. The High Command, who approved the formation of these units, furnished them with supplies. Groener reasoned that since the Imperial troops proved unco-operative in the restoration of order, the generals could do little else but utilize voluntary recruitment. By January 4, however, the Freikorps was still quite small and disorganized. The troops, although they seemed well disciplined on the parade ground, were yet to face the forces that had undermined the government's security forces and remnants of the Imperial Army.⁶¹ Two days later the battle for Berlin began

⁶⁰Waite, Vanguard, p. 43.

⁶¹For information on the forces that the Ebert government controlled other than the old Imperial Army see Hsi-Huey

and the Freikorps was called into action. With the stage set for battle, a spark was needed to set off the second phase of the revolution. The dismissal of Emil Eichorn, a radical Independent and chief of the Berlin police forces, culminated in the withdrawal of the Independents from the Council of People's Commissars and released the forces of revolution once again.⁶² On January 6, Karl Liebknecht issued a manifesto to the workers of Berlin, stating,

The Ebert-Scheidemann Government has rendered itself impossible. It is hereby declared deposed by the undersigned Revolutionary Committee, the representative of the revolutionary socialist workers and soldiers (Independent Social Democratic Party and Communist Party). The undersigned Revolutionary Committee has provisionally assumed the conduct of business of government.⁶³

Immediately the Spartacists organized mass demonstrations and occupied several key areas of Berlin. With the workers armed and the buildings occupied, however, the Spartacist leaders were seized with inaction. As Phillip Scheidemann later related,

Liang, The Berlin Police Force in the Weimar Republic (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), pp. 4-52. Gordon, Reichswehr and German Republic, pp. 17-22.

⁶²Garrett to the Secretary of State, Hague, January 8, 1919, R.D.S., 862.00/432.

⁶³The Spartacist Manifesto, January 6, 1918, D.R.H.E., p. 649.

Outside the empty Alexander-platz stood the proletarians, their rifles in their hands, with light and heavy machine-guns. And inside the leaders were deliberating. At the Police Headquarters cannons were to be seen; sailors stood in every corner of the corridors . . . and inside sat the leaders deliberating.⁶⁴

While the Spartacists debated ideological tactics, Noske decided to utilize the Freikorps. He recalled some of his troops from the Berlin area and ordered his military associates to gather their forces.⁶⁵ On January 11, he proclaimed martial law in Berlin and deployed the first units of the new army.⁶⁶ For two days the streets of Berlin became a battleground as the Noske forces attempted to dislodge the revolutionaries from their strongholds. By the 13th, the Spartacists held only a few isolated strongholds, as the Freikorps proved to be an expertly led, heavily armed fighting force. On January 16, the Silesian railway station, the last Spartacist strong point, fell.⁶⁷ In the course of the fighting, both Liebknecht and Luxemburg were captured and executed.⁶⁸ Since the National elections were only a

⁶⁴ Scheidemann, Memoirs, 2:292-293.

⁶⁵ Osborne to Secretary of State, Copenhagen, January 23, 1919, R.D.S., 862.00/452.

⁶⁶ Garrett to Secretary of State, Hague, January 20, 1919, R.D.S., 862.00/434.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ There are several good accounts on the Spartacist uprising of 1919. A few include Werner T. Angress,

few days off, Noske maintained a number of Freikorps in the Berlin area.⁶⁹

The defeat of the Berlin communists and the emergence of the Freikorps as an effective weapon signalled the end of mob control of Germany. On January 19, the elections were held as scheduled, and although no party received a majority, a more moderate and broad-based government was formed.⁷⁰

Stillborn Revolution: The Communist Bid for Power in Germany, 1921-23 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 20-36; Rudlof Coper, Failure of a Revolution (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), pp. 190-215; Carsten, Reichswehr and Politics, pp. 20-24; Ryder, German Revolution, pp. 198-206; Waite, Vanguard, pp. 58-66; Eric Waldman, The Spartacist Uprising of 1919 and the Crisis of the German Socialist Movement: A Study of the Relation of Political Theory and Party Practice (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1958).

⁶⁹Garrett to Secretary of State, Hague, January 2 1919, R.D.S., 862.00/441.

⁷⁰Burdick and Lutz, P.I.G.R., p. 255.

CHAPTER IV

THE FREIKORPS IN AND OUT OF GERMANY

After the defeat of the Spartacists in January, the German leaders began to feel somewhat more optimistic about the future. The coalition of the Social Democrats, Democrats, and Centrists parties shifted the balance of the government from the left to the center.¹ The sessions at Weimar were conducted in a businesslike manner as compared to the constant turmoil of the Berlin days. The Freikorps proved loyal to the Supreme Command and the government, while their success in crushing the revolutionary forces in Berlin signalled the beginning of the end for the radicals. On February 14, Scheidemann, the new chancellor of the Reich, outlined the government's platform, and proposed a moderate program both in social and military policies. The chancellor called for

. . . the creation, for the protection of the Fatherland, of an army recruited from the people, organized on a democratic basis with a lowering of the length of military service. Every military unit chooses a Committee of Councillors to cooperate in the

¹Osborne to Secretary of State, Copenhagen, February 16, 1919, R.D.S., 862.00/498.

victualing service (Canteen), in the granting of furloughs, and in the providing of accommodations as well as in the investigation of grievances. Discharge of the soldiers now in barracks, including those of the class of 1899. Abolition of the military boards established for war purposes only, and of such peace boards as may now be regarded as superfluous. Provision for the officers that have until now been in active service. For the period of transition, confirmation of the leaders chosen by the soldiers up to the present time, in so far as they have shown themselves efficient.²

The section that confirms "the leaders chosen by the soldiers" was meant to appease the Freikorps more than the Soldiers Councils. That this was to be the case was proven two days later, when Ebert, as President of the Reich, stated that officers for the new army would be appointed by the Ministry of Defense and not chosen by any of the Councils.³ Some of the critics of Ebert and the government's army policy demanded that the Freikorps be disbanded, since they had served their purpose. In March, however, the specter of communism rose again in the streets of Berlin.

The composition of the National Assembly, plus the proposed programs of the government, forced the hand of the far left throughout Germany. With the power of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils fading, the Spartacist

²Garrett to Secretary of State, Hague, March k, R.D.S., 862.00/571.

³Tidens Tegn, February 14, 1919.

influence waning, and the revolutionary military units dispersing, the leaders of the radicals decided to strike once again. On March 3, Die Rote Fahne published another appeal for revolutionary action and a general strike. The second and third points of the appeal dealt directly with the army. In contrast to the government's program, the Spartacists demanded

Removal of the arbitrary rule of soldiers, reestablishment of the full rights of assembly, transfer of police power to Workers' Councils; dissolution of White Guards, disarming all the officers, students, citizens, etc., and formation of a Red Guard; control of all military powers by a committee elected by workmen; withdrawal of all troops from "Occupied Industrial Territory."⁴

The same old pattern of occupation of buildings, construction of barricades, and proliferation of red flags began to take place. Throughout the capital police stations were stormed and officers executed.⁵ The military forces of the rebels were reinforced when the notorious Volksmarine-division defected from the government security force.⁶

Noske and his colleagues answered the revolutionaries military demands on March 6 by issuing a law calling for the

⁴Die Rote Fahne, March 3, 1919.

⁵Gordon, Reichswehr, pp. 30-34; Liang, Berlin Police Force, pp. 43-44.

⁶Deutsche Allegemeine Zeitung, March 13, 1919.

formation of a Provisional Reichswehr. The law called for a democratically organized army comprising both Freikorps and voluntary recruits.⁷ Noske then turned on the Berlin rebels. An order was issued stating that "Every person who is taken, arms in hand, fighting against government troops, is to be shot immediately."⁸ On March 4 government troops once again began to clear the streets of Berlin. Although the radical forces were not as large as those in January, the fighting reached a ferocious tempo. By March 16, the Freikorps had managed to destroy most of the Spartacist strongholds.⁹ With order restored, the government decided not to allow units such as the Volksmarine-division and the Republican Defense Corps to continue operating. On March 14, Noske informed a relieved session of the National Assembly that the infamous Naval Division no longer existed and the unreliable Defense Corps was drastically reduced.¹⁰ The Freikorps followed upon their success in Berlin by fanning out across the country in an

⁷Carsten, Reichswehr and Politics, p. 32; Gordon, Reichswehr, p. 55.

⁸Noske, Von Kiel zu Kapp, p. 109.

⁹Craig, Politics of Prussian Army, p. 360; Gordon, Reichswehr, pp. 30-33; Waite, Vanguard, pp. 69-74.

¹⁰Craig, Politics of Prussian Army, pp. 357-358, Gordon, Reichswehr, p. 33.

attempt to bring government control to every section of Germany. During the spring Bremen, Oldenburg, Hamburg, the Rhineland-Westphalia area, Brunswick, Stettin, Gotha, Eisenach, and Mannheim were subdued.¹¹ By the summer of 1919 only one large area, the state of Bavaria, remained outside of the government's control.

After the November revolution Bavaria passed through several stages of transition. Under Kurt Eisner, an Independent, the Bavarians established a republic and severed relations with the Berlin government.¹² By April, 1919, the situation in Munich bordered on anarchy, for on February 21 Eisner was assassinated and in the ensuing chaos, the Communists took power. The Bavarian Diet was dissolved and weapons were distributed to the workers.¹³ As the Freikorps marched into Bavaria, the Communists panicked and began a reign of terror. On May 1, after rumors of massacres were confirmed, the Freikorps assaulted Munich. By the evening of May 2, the last of the red centers of power inside Germany had fallen. In retaliation for red excesses the Freikorps began a campaign of terror

¹¹Gordon, Reichswehr, pp. 34-42.

¹²See Footnote 26, Chapter III.

¹³Watt, Kings Depart, pp. 325-336.

that far surpassed Communist terror and illustrated the government's precarious hold over its military forces.¹⁴

The government and the High Command were finally witnessing the effect of the completion of their agreement. The military men, after several failures, had finally restored order. The officer corps was intact while the soldiers' councils were proving impotent. The dreaded Hamburg Points were completely negated by the government's new policies. The composition of the National Assembly also allowed the interests of the officer corps to be represented and seriously curtailed any radical attempts at altering the structure of the army. The blockade of German ports was lifted in March, thus allowing for the provisioning of the German troops not yet demobilized.¹⁵ The proposed Weimar Constitution further aided in the administration and consolidation of the new army. Article 79 of Section 6 stated that

National Defense is a function of the Reich. The organization of the armed forces of the German people shall be regulated in a uniform manner by a national

¹⁴Waite, Vanguard, pp. 88-93; Watt, Kings Depart, pp. 337-341.

¹⁵A.C. Bell, A History of the Blockade of Germany and of the Countries Associated with her in the Great War, 1914-1918 (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1937), pp. 708-709.

law with due regard to the special regional peculiarities of the population.¹⁶

This section meant that Germany finally possessed a unified command. There was to be no more of the bureaucratic duplication and regional jealousies that weakened Imperial Germany. Although Articles 46 and 47 of Section 3 placed the military under civilian control, Ebert and Noske had proved that they were most willing to heed the advice of the officer corps. Article 47 specified that

The President of the Reich shall appoint and remove national officials and military officers of the Reich, except as otherwise provided by law. He may permit other authorities¹⁷ to exercise the powers of appointment and removal.

As early as February, Ebert had pledged that officers would be selected as before, by which he meant that regimental commanders would choose their officers and the Defense Ministry would confirm their action.¹⁸ With a unified command, a pacified countryside, and governmental support, the German military leaders began to shift their priorities to the eastern border areas, where external forces presented new problems.

¹⁶Howard Lee McBain and Lindsay Rogers, The New Constitutions of Europe (New York: Doubleday, Page, and Company, 1922), pp. 191 192.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 188.

¹⁸Gordon, Reichswehr, p. 56.

After the successful return of the German armies from France and Belgium, the High Command was transferred to the Pomeranian town of Kolberg in order to try and untangle the situation in the east.¹⁹ The German military leaders were not exactly sure of how the allied powers would allow them to deal with the situation. Article XII of the armistice called for immediate evacuation of German troops in the old Habsburg states, Turkey, and Rumania, but stipulated that German troops in territories once controlled by Czarist Russia would remain "until the Allies shall think the moment suitable"²⁰ There were over a half million German troops trapped in pockets in the Ukraine, the Baltic states, Turkey, and Rumania, so the government decided to recruit Freikorps to guard the eastern borders.²¹ When Hindenburg moved his headquarters to the east, he published an appeal for volunteers. In his proclamation, the old Field Marshall urged that

You volunteers and young comrades who are determined to stake your lives for the defense of the Eastern Marches, think of the faithful ones of the year 1914.

¹⁹Wheeler-Bennett, Nemesis of Power, p. 214.

²⁰The Armistice, D.G.R., 2:511.

²¹Cabinet Meeting, January 20, 1919, P.I.G.R., pp. 200-201.

And you my old comrades who fought with me at Tannenberg and the Masurian Lakes, hasten to my aid: My appeal to Germany's sons must not die away unheard.²²

Fear of the Bolsheviks, plus the aggressive actions of Poland and Czechoslovakia, caused many men to heed Hindenburg's words. Many volunteers also viewed the east as an area where Germany might be able to salvage something from its ignoble defeat. The armistice terms seemed to imply that the Germans would be able to operate freely in the east or at least in conjunction with the Entente powers. At a cabinet meeting on January 21, Groener confirmed these overly optimistic calculations. Speaking to Ebert, the general said,

I am firmly convinced that Wilson does not have in mind a decisive alteration of our eastern border. We are certainly able to maintain our present border. I am convinced that it is child's play to preserve our eastern border at the peace conference. The French have childish naive ideas about conditions in Poland. I do not have too great a faith in the Volkwehr.²³

This underestimation of the strength and importance of Poland was Groener's first and only retreat from reality. For the Polish question was to loom as one of the major problems at the peace conference, as well as for the German military authorities. The handling of the Polish problem

²²Magdeburgische Zeitung, February 15, 1919.

²³Cabinet Meeting, January 21, 1919, P.I.G.R., p. 199.

was not on the same order as the Spartacist uprisings, because the Poles possessed the active support of the French and Americans, as well as world opinion. Woodrow Wilson's thirteenth point of the famous 14 Points provided that

an independent Polish state should be erected which should include the territories inhabited by indisputably Polish populations, which should be assured a free and secure access to the sea and whose political and economic independence and territorial integrity should be guaranteed by international covenant.²⁴

By January, 1919, when Groener made his comments on the Polish situation, the Germans had some reason for optimism. One month later, however, all hopes for restoration of the status quo were wiped out.

The state of Poland was resurrected during the chaos of the war. In 1916, Ludendorff, hoping to lure Polish troops into the German army, declared that Poland would become an independent state.²⁵ By Poland the First Quartermaster General meant only the area that was formerly under Russian control. As the war turned against the Germans, the Poles began to view an independent Poland comprising vast amounts of territory. The military and political leader

²⁴New York Times, January 9, 1918, p. 1.

²⁵Proclamation of the formation of the Kingdom of Poland, November 5, 1916, D.G.R., 1:760.

of the Poles was Joeseph Pilsudski.²⁶ When the German government collapsed in November, 1918, and the Armistice was signed, Pilsudski decided to accelerate the evacuation of the 80,000 German troops in Poland. He met with the Soldiers' Councils, and although in direct violation of the armistice, worked out an evacuation program. While most of the German forces agreed to be withdrawn on Polish trains, some units refused to obey the revolutionary councils and began leaving the country. When the policy of surrendering weapons to the Polish Volkswehr was initiated, trouble began to flourish. Soon retreating German units were

²⁶Jozef Pulsudski (1867-1935) was born and reared in the Russian areas of Poland. Pilsudski studied medicine in Kharkov but was suspended in 1886. In 1887, he was falsely arrested for plotting to assassinate Alexander III, and served 5 years in Siberia. After his return in 1892, Pilsudski joined the Polish Socialist Party and by 1894 was the leader. After his underground newspaper "The Worker" was discovered in 1900, Pilsudski was arrested again and placed in the maximum security prison in Warsaw. Seeing that escape was impossible, Pilsudski acted insane and was transferred to a St. Petersburg military hospital. In 1901, he escaped and moved to Austrian Poland, where he began to organize Polish military units. When World War I broke out the Polish Legion served with the Austrian forces on the Russian Front. After the central powers declared an independent Poland, Pilsudski tried to get them to be more specific. This led to Pilsudski's arrest in July 1917. When the German government fell, Pilsudski was released and traveled to Poland, where he was named head of state and commander of the Polish forces.

ambushed and harrassed by Polish irregulars. Pilsudski decided that after all of the German troops who had been garrisoned in Poland were evacuated, no more German troops should pass through his country.²⁷ This act meant that the 400,000 Germans in the Ukraine were practically cut off from their supply centers and their escape routes. By December, 1918, the situation had deteriorated to the point of open warfare in the provinces of Posen, Upper Silesia and all along the eastern border. The Germans were forced out of Posen, and, due to the troubles in Berlin, the Supreme Command could offer little aid. A Heimatschütz Ost or Home Guard East was established in January, 1919, in order to coordinate the tasks of withdrawing the troops from the east, quelling the leftist attempts at insurrection, and checking the Poles until something permanent could be arranged.²⁸ After the return of the troops from the west and the successful recruiting campaign in the east, the High Command began to feel more confident about regaining the lost territory. An offensive was planned for mid-February. The chances for success seemed great since the

²⁷Watt, Kings Depart, p. 355-356.

²⁸Gordon, Reichswehr, p. 50.

Poles, greedily grabbing up territory, became involved in armed conflicts with the Czechs, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, and Bolsheviks. Just two days before the planned offensive was due to be launched, however, the Germans had to renew the armistice. Marshal Foch, the Commander-in-Chief of the Allied and Associated forces, sent an ultimatum to the German Armistice Commission declaring that "The Germans must immediately desist from all offensive operations against the Poles in the region of Posen or any other region."²⁹

The Germans realized that if they persisted with the planned operation, the French would consider the armistice violated and could possibly resume hostilities. Mathias Erzberger, the head of the German Armistice Commission, signed the ultimatum but presented a formal protest from the German chancellor. In the protest, Scheidemann warned that

The agreement imposes on the Germans, in the form of orders and prohibitions marked by harshness and favoring the rebelling Poles, the necessity of evacuating a number of important places such as Birnbaum and the towns of Bentschen without any delay. These places are in German hands, their population is mostly German, and they are particularly important in regard to the intercourse with Eastern Germany. In addition to this, the Allied and Associated Powers do not even guarantee

²⁹ Minutes of a Meeting of the Supreme War Council, Paris, February 17, 1919, Foreign Relations of the United States: The Paris Peace Conference, 1919, (hereafter cited as F.R.U.S.), (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1943) 4:25.

that the Poles, on their side, will abstain from preparing or undertaking further attacks, or that they will treat the German population with humanity--a population, the protection of which we are forced to give up: or that they will release the German hostages, the retention of whom has now no objects or that they will keep up the supply of food from the west in the same way as has been done up to the present.³⁰

The Germans finally awakened to the reality that the allies were serious about the establishment of a Polish state and that Germany's eastern borders might be altered to accommodate the hated neighbor. With the Czechs also safely under the protection of the Entente, the military men hoped the Bolshevik threat would not be allowed to go unchecked.

As the Bolsheviks attempted to consolidate their hold over Russia, civil war erupted. The forces of Lenin and Trotsky faced the opposition of the allied powers, the counterrevolutionary forces, and the separatist nationalities. By 1918, the Germans were playing a major role in containing the Red forces. In the Ukraine 400,000 former Imperial German troops shored up the weak Ukranian government, while in the Baltic states, the German Eighth Army kept the Bolsheviks out and posed a direct threat to Petrograd, the citadel of the revolution. In Finland, German troops aided the Finns

³⁰Ibid., pp. 24-25.

under Marshal Mannerheim in driving out the Red forces.³¹ Although the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, signed on March 3, 1918, ended hostilities between Soviet Russia and Imperial Germany, the troops remaining in Russia were continually meeting opposition from the expanding Red Army. The armistice in November overturned the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, so Red forces began to reoccupy territories controlled by the Germans and their satellites. The Baltic area was a primary target of the Reds, not only due to the threat to Petrograd, but also because the Baltic was to serve as a bridge through which the revolution could cross into Europe.³² When news of the German revolution and the subsequent armistice reached the Baltic area, most of the German troops simply threw down their arms and marched toward Prussia.³³ The allies, hoping to use the German troops to prevent the Reds

³¹A good account of the Soviet-Finnish civil war is offered in: Richard Lockett, The White Generals: An Account of the White Movement and the Russian Civil War (New York: Viking Press, 1971), pp. 125-153; Carl Gustav Emil Mannerheim, The Memoirs of Marshal Mannerheim (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1954), pp. 130-183.

³²Stanley W. Page, The Formation of the Baltic States: A Study of the Effects of Great Power Politics upon the Emergence of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 135.

³³Waite, Vanguard, p. 100.

from retaking additional Baltic territory, complained that the Germans were not abiding by Article XII and were openly aiding the Bolsheviks by "delivering up to them arms, munitions and fortified posts."³⁴ Then, on December 24 a squadron of British warships was dispatched to the Baltic.³⁵ The English squadron refused to evacuate the remaining German forces and even insisted that the German troops not only defend the areas they occupied but regain any territory lost to the advancing Red forces. Most of the German forces ignored the orders and joined with the units heading west. The British could do little to stop the exodus of German troops or the entry of Bolshevik forces, so by January 4, 1919, the red flag flew over all of Latvia and Estonia. The non-Bolshevik national leaders of the area finally realized that immediate aid from the allies would not be forthcoming, and thus the Germans offered the only solution.

The German High Command viewed the situation in the Baltic as very serious, since the invasion by the Bolsheviks forced the large German interests out of the area. This not only destroyed the German influence in the east but

³⁴ Representative of Provisional Government of Latvia (Simson) to the American Ambassador in Great Britain (Davis), London, December 20, 1918, F.R.U.S., 2:480-481.

³⁵ Times (London), February 27, 1919, p. 9.

also created refugee problems in the interior.³⁶ The Bolshevik threat to Germany, especially Prussia, was not taken lightly since many of the officers were born or owned estates in East Prussia. A session of the Riga Soviet in Latvia confirmed the fears of the officers when it was stated that

Latvia is the gate way through which the Russian Revolution must invade Western Europe. Our duty now . . . is to reach the Prussian frontier as quickly as we possibly can An advance of the Red³⁷ Army into Germany promises to be most successful.

On November 13, 1918, August Winnig, a SPD trade union leader, was dispatched to the Baltic. Serving as plenipotentiary of the Reich for the Baltic Lands, Winnig viewed the deteriorating situation and decided to strike a bargain with Karlis Ulmanis, the Premier of Latvia.³⁸ Since the allies could not possibly save the situation, Winnig offered the use of volunteer troops from Germany. Ulmanis was desperate, and on December 29 an agreement was reached. Article I of the agreement granted "full Latvian citizenship to all men of a foreign (German) army who shall have served at least four weeks in the ranks

³⁶ Grantsmith to Secretary of State, Copenhagen, March 25, 1919, R.D.S., 862.00/525.

³⁷ Page, Baltic States, p. 136.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 114-117.

of the volunteer corps"39 Article II allowed "German officers and non-commissioned officers as instructors in the ranks of the German Baltic companies of the Landeswehr."40 The agreement was sealed with the full knowledge and tacit approval of the allied forces.41

Soon posters were distributed throughout Germany calling upon volunteers to help crush Bolshevism. The rewards offered for service were good pay and the promise of land in the Baltic. The German government, struggling for survival, had little interest in Baltic developments. As Noske later recalled,

Alas, the poor government was expected to have perfect control of everything in Germany, while large parts of the country were like a madhouse. How could we be expected to manage our business affairs in the Baltic properly when machine guns were being fired all around us? While I was absorbed with my work at Dahlem (organizing the recapture of Berlin from the Spartacists), I could not concern myself with all the little42 Wallensteins who recruited men and led them to the east.

The commander of the Baltic forces was Major General Count Rüdiger von der Goltz. Goltz was an experienced combat

³⁹ Ibid., p. 123.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Secretary's Notes of a Meeting of Foreign Ministers, Paris, May 9, 1919, F.R.U.S., 4:691.

⁴² Noske, Von Kiel zu Kapp, pp. 177-178.

officer, having led the German troops in the defeat of the soviets in Finland. Although Goltz was given orders only to stop the Bolsheviks, the cunning general seriously entertained the notion of restoring German hegemony in the Baltic.⁴³ Under the influence of the emigré Baltic land barons, Goltz envisioned the area as a vast military colony for his Freikorps. Shunning both the instructions of the Latvian government and the advice of the High Command, Goltz's forces began to move into Latvia, and by early spring of 1919, the Freikorps were at the gates of Riga. Ulmanis realized that the Freikorps would not heed his instructions and would probably take extreme measures if allowed to enter Riga. He also realized that the German troops were totally independent of his control, but they were the only forces strong enough to oppose the Bolsheviks. On May 23, the Iron Division of the Baltic Freikorps stormed Riga.⁴⁴ After reports from allied naval commanders on the repression of the national military units by the Germans, the allies decided to request that the Germans withdraw and the native armies be expanded and equipped to oppose the Bolsheviks.⁴⁵

⁴³Page, Baltic States, pp. 145-146.

⁴⁴Waite, Vanguard, pp. 117-118.

⁴⁵Notes of a Meeting of foreign Ministers, Paris, May 23, 1919, F.R.U.S., 4:761-762.

On June 4, British General Sir Herbert Gough was named head of the Inter-Allied Mission to Latvia.⁴⁶ Upon his arrival Gough wired back that the Freikorps presented the greatest threat to the Baltic.⁴⁷ On August 27, Marshal Foch ordered the Germans out of the Baltic.⁴⁸ An Armistice between the German and Baltic forces signed on July 3 seriously hindered Freikorps activity. Under the terms of the armistice, all German units were to evacuate Latvia as soon as possible.⁴⁹ In order to stop the German units from incorporating themselves into the pro-German Landeswehr, the armistice also provided that "all officers and men of the Landeswehr who, at any time before January 1, 1919, were citizens of the German Empire, shall resign or be discharged from the Landeswehr forthwith,"⁵⁰ This clause destroyed the

⁴⁶Page, Baltic States, p. 154.

⁴⁷General Sir H. Gough (Helsingfors) to Mr. Balfour (Paris), July 24, 1919. E.L. Woodward and Rohan Butler (eds.), Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939 (hereafter cited as D.B.F.P.) Series 1 (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1949) 3:40.

⁴⁸Introductory Note 3, D.B.F.P., Series 1, 3:1.

⁴⁹Mr. Bosanguet to Earl Curzon, Reval, July 5, 1919, D.B.F.P., Series 1, 3:9-10.

⁵⁰Directions given by the Head of the Allied Military Mission in accordance with Clause 5 and 9 of the Armistice, July 23, 1919, D.B.F.P., Series 1, 3:17.

hopes of many of the German fighters of ever gaining land in the Baltic; the prior agreement between Ulmanis and Winnig was simply overruled.

Goltz continued to procrastinate, hoping that his services would be required to stem a soviet offensive. He argued that withdrawal was impossible because his lines of retreat were severed, his wounded needed care, and his supplies had to go with him.⁵¹ Finally, the allies decided that Goltz was the wrong man to deal with and on September 27 an order was issued to the German government demanding that it relieve Goltz and evacuate the troops.⁵² The government, still stunned by the reception of the peace treaty, replied,

An order was issued, among others, to this end, under date of September 25, 1919, ordering that the soldiers' pay as well as other advantages accorded to the unit who would refuse to conform with the order of retreat, be withheld, and furthermore, in order to prevent reinforcements joining these troops, the German frontier on the Courland side has been closed. Orders were given to fire on the troops who despite this precaution would attempt to cross the line. The furnishing of munition supplies was formally forbidden. General von der Goltz has been recalled from his post. The supreme command is confided, in replacing General von der Goltz, to Major General von Eberhardt, over all troops

⁵¹Notes by Colonel Tallents of a Conference at St. Olai, July 20, 1919, D.B.F.P., Series 1, 3:34-38.

⁵²Notes of a Meeting of Heads of Delegations of the Five Great Powers, Paris, September 27, 1919, D.B.F.P., Series 1, 1:818-819.

which are not at the present time East of the frontier of the Empire until such time as the complete retreat of the troops shall have been effected. Finally, the German Government has addressed a proclamation to these troops pointing out their duty, and indicating the dangers and sufferings of which they seem to be unaware, and which they might cause for the German people if they persist in their disobedience.⁵³

When Goltz still persisted in remaining, Foch decided that utilization of Polish troops and/or a blockade of Germany might be necessary.⁵⁴

The Freikorps also realized their weakening position, but still tried to evade the allied demands. By December, however, after having been defeated by the Lithuanians, the remnants of the 30,000 man Baltic Freikorps crossed back into Germany.⁵⁵

Thus ended the last chapter of Freikorps activity outside of Germany. The widespread discontent over the peace treaty and the new army, however, offered the Freikorps another chance to pursue their reckless and dangerous policies.

⁵³Notes of a Meeting of the Heads of Delegations of the Five Great Powers, Paris, October 7, 1919, D.B.F.P., Series 1, 1:872.

⁵⁴Notes of a Meeting of the Heads of the Five Great Powers, Paris, September 17, 1919, D.B.F.P., Series 1, 1:714.

⁵⁵Page, Baltic States, 165.

CHAPTER V

THE VERSAILLES ARMY AND KAPP

While the Baltic Freikorps roamed over Latvia, the victorious Entente powers decided the fate of Germany. In the halls of Versailles the Big Three, Wilson, President of the United States, Lloyd George, Prime Minister of England and Clemanceau, Premier of France, debated, compromised and finally agreed on a treaty. The German foreign minister, Count Ulrich von Brockdorff-Rantzau, was not allowed to enter negotiations; so the reception of the peace terms was one of total surprise by the Germans. On April 14, 1919, the German delegation had been dispatched to Versailles to receive the peace terms.¹ On May 7, the Germans were handed a copy of the terms and given three weeks to submit written objections.² The terms of the treaty were beyond the wildest expectations of the most conservative German's nightmare. According to the treaty, the Germans were to cede Alsace-Lorraine, a Polish corridor to the Baltic Sea, thus separating East Prussia from the rest of Germany, Memel, a port city in

¹Eych, Weimar Republic, 1:90.

²Ibid., p. 95.

East Prussia, North Schleswig, and temporarily the valuable Saar basin and Upper Silesia. Altogether, Germany lost "six million souls and 70,000, square kilometers, or 13 percent of the prewar Reich."³ Added to the border adjustments, Germany was stripped of all her colonies. Economically, Germany was to pay huge reparations and support the occupation forces. Politically, Germany was to assume sole responsibility for the war and was isolated from international affairs by being refused a seat in the League of Nations.⁴ On May 29, the German delegation presented its objections to the treaty. By June 17, the allies had studied the objections and presented the treaty in its final form to the German plenipotentiaries. The Germans returned to Berlin, where the peace treaty became the main subject of debate.

The publication of the peace terms in May completely shocked the German nation. Many men believed that since Germany had become a democratic state and accepted the armistice on the basis of the Fourteen Points, the peace would not be severe. The reception of the peace terms was

³Ibid., p. 109.

⁴U.S. Department of State, Treaties and Other International Agreements of the United States of America, 1776-1949 (7 volumes, Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1969), Treaty of Peace with Germany, June 28, 2919, 2:59-240.

met with almost universal disapproval.⁵ Phillip Scheidemann spoke for the country as well as the government when he remarked, "What hand would not wither that binds itself and us in these fetters?"⁶ Rumors of a "general reactionary counterrevolution"⁷ began to spread throughout the country. The German government declared a state of national mourning and requested foreigners in Germany to wear civilian clothes in order to prevent outbursts of violence.⁸ The unity of the German people in opposing the treaty led to Ebert's consultation with the High Command on Germany's chances if hostilities were resumed. The military leaders were totally opposed to the treaty but reality dictated a more pragmatic position.

The military terms of the treaty were intended to cut the heart out of Prussian militarism, which many blamed for the war. Article 160 of Part 5 ordered the size of the German army reduced to 100,000 officers and men.⁹ The

⁵Grew to Secretary of State, Paris, May 13, 1919, R.D.S., 862.00/591.

⁶Scheidemann, Memoirs, 2:311.

⁷American Mission to Secretary of State, Paris, June 24, 1919, R.D.S., 862.00/612.

⁸Meeting of Reich Ministry, May 8, 1919, P.I.G.R., p. 286.

⁹Treaties, p. 115.

officer corps was not to exceed 4,000 men and the great General Staff was to be abolished.¹⁰ The number and calibre of all weapons was prescribed and manufacture of arms was restricted.¹¹ Conscription was abolished and the length of service was set at 25 years for officers and 12 years for non-commissioned officers and enlisted men.¹² Almost all of the military academies were to be closed and veterans societies were to be in no way connected with the armed forces.¹³ The fortifications of the Rhineland area were to be destroyed and all German troops were to be evacuated.¹⁴ All aircraft were to be surrendered and a German Air Corps was forbidden.¹⁵ An Inter-Allied Commission of Control was established ". . . charged with the duty of seeing to the complete execution of the delivery, destruction, demolition and rendering things useless to be carried out at the expense of the German Government" ¹⁶ Part 5 was the physical

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 115-116.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 117-118.

¹² Ibid., p. 119.

¹³ Ibid., p. 120.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 121.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 129.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 131.

destruction of the officer corps and Part 7 was supposed to be the moral capitulation. According to Article 227,

The Allied and Associated Powers publicly arraign William II of Hohenzollern, formerly German Emperor, for a supreme offence against international morality and the sanctity of treaties. A special tribunal will be constituted to try the accused, thereby assuring him the guarantees essential to the right of defence. It will be composed of five judges, one appointed by each of the following Powers: namely, the United States, of America, Great Britain, France, Italy, and Japan.¹⁷

In addition, Article 228 left the door open for the prosecution of high military officials for "having committed acts in violation of the laws and customs of war."¹⁸

With allied forces occupying, Polish troops seizing, and Entente diplomats carving up German territories, the German military leaders were furious. The Treaty was to reduce the role of the army to an internal police force while on each side of Germany large, well-armed powers stood ready to strike. The vision of the Kaiser facing a kangaroo court was too horrid to imagine, and the possibility of the great military leaders, such as Ludendorff and Hindenburg, being summoned to face the wrath of a French judge was viewed with utter contempt. The destruction of the military

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 136.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 137.

academies brought home the point that the profession of arms could not be passed on to one's sons. At first passion engulfed the military men as it did the whole country. Thoughts of continuing the war in the east were expressed and the "defeat with honor" idea began to grow, as did resentment between the army and the civilians. Noske tried to resign but Ebert would not agree.¹⁹ Instead Ebert approached the Supreme Command and ascertained Germany's ability to withstand an allied onslaught.²⁰ Groener, placing pragmatism before dogmatism again, replied that Germany could probably win in the east but stood no chance in the west.²¹ Nonetheless, on June 20, the Scheidemann cabinet resigned in protest over the treaty.²² Ebert, realizing that time was running out for Germany, elevated Gustav Bauer, a high-ranking Social Democrat and former Minister of Labor, to the position of Chancellor.²³ As the deadline for the signing of the treaty approached, the

¹⁹Eych, Weimar Republic, 1:103.

²⁰Ibid., 1:103-104.

²¹Gordon Craig, "Reichswehr and National Socialism: The Policy of Wilhelm Groener, 1928-1932," Political Science Quarterly, Number 1, March-December 1948, 63:195.

²²Scheidemann, Memoirs, 2:316.

²³Eych, Weimar Republic, 1:102.

allies became more adamant in their demands.²⁴ On June 28, with only hours remaining under the armistice, Germany capitulated and signed the treaty.²⁵ An editorial in Vörrwärts illustrated the attitude of most Germans toward the Diktat of Versailles. The editorial insisted that

The extortionary compulsion through which the German consent to sign was obtained renders the German signature in advance worthless to the Entente. It possesses significance only so long as the Allies can exercise unimpaired the power which is necessary for keeping alive this miscarriage of the peace idea. For the present the military resources of the Entente suffice for this; but it is by no means certain that their supreme preponderance of power as against German²⁶ defencelessness will last for any long period of time.

The Germans were to undergo one more humiliation: ratification of the treaty. This was accomplished on July 9 by a vote of 208 to 115 in the German National Assembly.²⁷ Before the treaty was ratified, however, the Supreme Command, as stipulated by the treaty, was dissolved. The government sent

²⁴Two events can be attributed to the allies hard stand. One was the scuttling of the German Fleet at Scapa Flow in June, 1919. The other event was the return of French war flags captured during the war. It seems that a mysterious fire in a Berlin armory destroyed the flags.

²⁵Eych, Weimar Republic, 1:105.

²⁶Hargood to Secretary of State, Copenhagen, July 2, 1919, R.D.S., 862.00/649.

²⁷Grew to Secretary of State, Paris, July 17, 1919, R.D.S., 862.00/664.

a letter to Hindenburg thanking him for his services; Ebert, speaking for the country, wrote,

In the name of the Government, I send to you Mr. Field Marshall General, once more our irrevocable thanks for all your services for the best of the Fatherland. In the days of distress you conclude your tasks. We who under compulsion of duty must remain at our posts shall always look upon the manner in which you placed your personal feelings and views as a great model for us.²⁸

Thus a chapter was closed in German military history. Many viewed the exit of Hindenburg as the end of everything that was honorable in German life. Others, of course, saw the beginning of a new era in German arms, where modern thought and ideas could strip away the feudal characteristics of the army. Under the leadership of General Hans von Seeckt, both of these ideas were fused in order to create a new German military machine.

One week after the signing of the Versailles Treaty, "The Preparatory Commission for the Peace Army" was established under the presidency of General Hans von Seeckt.²⁹ Tall and thin, with a monocle always on his person, von Seeckt characterized the world's view of a Prussian officer. Born in Schleswig of a noble Pomeranian family, von Seeckt came from a long line of military officers. His father had at one time

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Wheeler-Bennett, Nemesis of Power, p. 60.

commanded an entire army corps. Von Seeckt served as a cadet with the elite Grenadier Guards and swiftly rose to high position in the War Academy. In 1899, at the age of 33, von Seeckt was transferred to the General Staff. When the war broke out, von Seeckt saw action in Belgium and France until 1915, when he was transferred to the Russian front. After great success in crushing the Russians, von Seeckt was appointed General and transferred to the South, where he led an Austro-German army to victory over the Serbians. In June, 1916, the General was recalled to Galicia in an attempt to shore up the Austrian front. Having completed this task, he was then sent to aid the Turkish army in December, 1917. When the war was coming to a close, von Seeckt returned to Germany and began negotiations to repatriate German soldiers from Russia. After partial completion of this task, the General was dispatched to Versailles as a part of the peace delegation.³⁰

Among other things, the new army chief did not accept the stab-in-the-back theory being circulated in Germany.³¹

³⁰Hans von Seeckt, Thoughts of A Soldier (London: Ernest Been Limited, 1930) pp. i-ix.

³¹The stab-in-the-back theory was the idea that Germany had not fallen due to external enemies, but that the internal foe, namely the Jews and Socialists, undermined the morale of the country. The result of this agitation was the collapse of the home front and thus the snatching of victory from the field army, who had never been defeated.

Concerning the peace treaty von Seeckt simply stated that "the trend of negotiations is determined by military success or failure."³² Since the treaty was already history, von Seeckt believed that all efforts should be placed on rebuilding at least the core of a potentially powerful army. Von Seeckt believed that "The real effective military force of a country lies in the size of its population and in its wealth, and these forces are not susceptible to limitation."³³ In order to maintain a strong, small, army, the new chief wanted the army to stay on top of all new technical and scientific discoveries. A close relationship between industry and the military was imperative to achieve this goal.³⁴ More important than the technical advances, however, von Seeckt demanded that pride in the army be restored.³⁵ Without the ancient esprit de corps von Seeckt felt the army was doomed. Traditional companies were re-established to weld a bond between the new Reichswehr and the veterans of the Imperial Army.³⁶ In order to revive the honor of the army, the

³² von Seeckt, Thoughts, p. 45.

³³ Ibid., p. 49.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 66-67.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 87.

³⁶ Gordon, Reichswehr, p. 174.

general hoped that the Reichswehr would not be utilized to suppress internal revolts, which usually produced public hatred and scorn of the military.³⁷

In its relation to the government, von Seeckt insisted that the army was the "first servant of the state."³⁸ This did not mean, however, that the state's obligations to the army were nonexistent. The state owed the army and its "representatives their appropriate place in public affairs" and should protect the army from criticism.³⁹ The state also should not interfere in the training of officers up to the regimental level.⁴⁰ As concerned with the relation of the army to politics, von Seeckt was emphatic in stating,

The army should be "political" in the sense in which I understand the word, i.e., it should grasp the conception of the "state"; but it certainly must not be "political" in the party sense. "Hands off the army!" is my cry to all parties. The army serves the state
⁴¹

With this set of principles, the chief of the army set out to rebuild the Reichswehr. The first problem was to

³⁷Hans von Seeckt, The Future of the German Empire, (New York: E.P. Puttan & Company, 1930), p. 134.

³⁸von Seeckt, Thoughts, p. 78.

³⁹Ibid., p. 79.

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 88-89.

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 79-80.

recruit an officer corps. Since the Versailles Treaty limited the number of officers to 4,000, the problem was not one of quantity, but rather quality. There were approximately 34,000 regular and 190,000 reserve officers in Germany.⁴² In order to accept only 4,000, von Seeckt devised an eclectic method of selection. The officers were selected from

1. Senior and medium-senior command officers from the ranks of regimental-commander upwards.
2. Younger regular officers serving on the General Staff and in staff appointments.
3. A not very large number of regular war-time lieutenants who, though sometimes very young had commanded companies and batteries for two years and more or who, at the end of the war, were holding junior adjutants' appointments in the field.
4. Noske-Lieutenants numbering about 1,000 middle aged, long-service, non-commissioned officers.⁴³

This method, of course, left out many of the Freikorps officers, resulting in a situation of intense friction between the Freikorps and the Reichswehr.

The enlisted ranks were chosen at the district level, and since von Seeckt hoped that a future army would be much larger, the recruits were picked by educational as well as physical fitness.⁴⁴ In the event of the expansion of the army the enlisted men would form the nucleus of the non-commissioned officer corps. The preference for rural as

⁴²Demeter, Officer Corps, p. 47.

⁴³Ibid., p. 50.

⁴⁴Gordon, Reichswehr, p. 206.

opposed to urban recruits seems to verify von Seeckt's principle concerning political parties. In the cities, political debate was an everyday occurrence, while in the country politics and parties were of little direct importance.⁴⁵

The idea of a non-political army created bitter hostility between the young Reichswehr and the Freikorps. Not only the ousted military men like Ludendorff and von der Goltz but many active officers were irritated with the government and the army. Added to these men were a handful of civilians who abhorred the leftist influences of the government. Von Seeckt, realizing that the reckless Freikorps would always try to maintain independence, even if incorporated into the army, decided to disband some of the more reactionary units. On March 10, this order was issued, and on March 13, the government was overthrown by units of the old Baltic Freikorps.⁴⁶ The regime of Wolfgang Kapp thus began.

The Kapp putsch was the outward expression of the hostilities felt by the reactionary and right-wing elements in Germany. Although after the November, 1918, revolution

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 207.

⁴⁶ Lord Kilmarnock to Earl Curzon, Berlin, March 14, 1920, D.B.F.P. Series 1, 9:142.

the right-wing elements of Germany seemed to disappear, as the country began to achieve some sort of stability the nationalist groups emerged. Dissatisfaction over the peace treaty, the economic ruin of many middle class men, the drastic reduction of the officer corps, and the composition of the National Assembly caused many nationalists to condemn the government and its policies. Of the military men, five in active service formed the core of opposition. The most important was Lieutenant-General Walther Freiherr Luttwitz. Luttwitz was a distinguished military leader, having commanded the Tenth Army Corps at Verdun, and served as chief of staff to the former Crown Prince's Army. After the Armistice, Luttwitz served as an aid to Noske, a position enabling him to survey the weaknesses of the new army and to ascertain means by which it might be controlled.⁴⁷ Second in importance to Luttwitz was the commander of the Second Naval Brigade, Lieutenant Commander Hermann Ehrhardt. Ehrhardt led one of the most fanatical Freikorps units in Germany. A product of the war, Ehrhardt was impulsive and totally ruthless in dealing with his superiors as well as his subordinates.⁴⁸

⁴⁷Dresel to Secretary of State, Berlin, April 5, R.D.S., 862.00/904.

⁴⁸Gordon, Reichswehr, p. 91.

Colonel Maximilian Bauer provided the intellectual core of the plotters. Having served on Ludendorff's staff during the war, Bauer received an honorary Doctorate of Philosophy, for his aid in the invention of the seventeen-inch howitzer. After the war, Bauer originated the stab-in-the-back theory that was to haunt Germany for more than a decade.⁴⁹ Major Waldemar Pabst, an officer of the foot cavalry, formed the last link in the army involvement in the Kapp putsch.⁵⁰ Pabst was the man who kept the lines of communication open between the Freikorps and the civilians.

The leader of the civilian opposition was Wolfgang Kapp. Born in the United States because his father was expelled from Germany for activities in the 1848 revolution, Kapp served as the General Director of the Central Land Bank of East Prussia and during the war helped establish the reactionary Fatherland Party.⁵¹ His civilian partners were two inconspicuous members of the same party, Gottfried Traub and Traugott Jagow. When the dissolution of the Freikorps was ordered these men decided to strike.

⁴⁹ Dresel to Secretary of State, Berlin, April 5, R.D.S., 862.00/904.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

When word reached Berlin that the Freikorps were advancing, Noske summoned the government in order to formulate a policy. Von Seeckt, as head of the army, was seriously disturbed over the course of events. Since the army reorganization was barely underway, von Seeckt did not know if the Reichswehr would oppose the Freikorps. He had very little information as to the degree of Kapp's influence in the army, so he recommended that the army be ordered to remain in its barracks and then resigned.⁵² Since the police forces and other government security forces had already defected to the rebels, the government was left with no choice but to withdraw from Berlin. President Ebert issued a statement declaring,

By means of a mad coup de main the government buildings of Berlin have fallen into the hands of insurgents. No political party, no man of special brains stands behind these happenings. Everybody deprecates them. When the troops quartered at Doeberitz who were about to be discharged, especially the Baltic troops, backed up this act of folly, the Government left Berlin, in order to avoid bloodshed and to spare the lives of the regular troops in Berlin, who were inferior in numbers; enough blood has flown since 1914, and this adventure will collapse in a few days owing to its innate preposterousness.⁵³

⁵²Noske, von Kiel zu Kapp, pp. 208-210.

⁵³Dresel to Secretary of State, Berling, March 26, 1920, R.D.S., 862.00/892.

Almost from the very beginning, the Kapp-Luttwitz regime was doomed to failure.⁵⁴ The Reichsbank refused to grant the Kapp government credit.⁵⁵ On March 13, the German Trade Unions and the Association of Free Unions of Employees issued a General Strike.⁵⁶ The Ebert government, now in Dresden, sanctioned the strike, and by March 14 the Kapp government was completely crippled.⁵⁷ The center parties of the National Assembly also issued a proclamation condemning Kapp and demanding that

Lawful order must and will be re-established; atonement for lost rights provided. We expect from the Government and the National Assembly speedy and energetic action. From the country we demand the sharpest opposition against the rebel destroyers of the state.⁵⁸

Even the conservative bureaucracy refused to support Kapp.⁵⁹ The rebel government, looking for a way out, attempted to negotiate with Ebert. At first Ebert and Noske refused to

⁵⁴ Luttwitz became the Minister of National Defense.

⁵⁵ Gunther to Secretary of State, Hague, March 15, 1920, R.D.S., 862.00/821.

⁵⁶ Dresel to Secretary of State, Berlin, March 26, 1920, R.D.S., 862.00/892.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Dresel to Secretary of State, Berlin, March 15, 1920, R.D.S., 862.00/844.

compromise with Kapp and stated that all who participated in the putsch would be punished.⁶⁰ On March 17, Kapp resigned but left the government in the hands of Luttwitz and Bauer.⁶¹ The military men, however, left the same day with their disgraced army.⁶² The weapons of the Freikorps had kept the Kapp regime in power a total of four days.

The role of the army during the Kapp Putsch came under criticism from the left and the right. Phillip Scheidemann, the man who deserted Ebert over the treaty, stated that ". . . the tactics of the Reichswehr reminded one of the police in Berlin, who in the critical days of the collapse declared their neutrality with the object of coming in on the winning side."⁶³ The French thought the whole episode was a plot by Noske and the army to overthrow the government. They used the neutrality of the army as prima facie evidence.⁶⁴ The Independents, seeing the opportunity to

⁶⁰Dresel to Secretary of State, Berlin, March 18, 1920, R.D.S., 862.00/839.

⁶¹Dresel to Secretary of State, Berlin, March 18, 1920, R.D.S., 862.00/839.

⁶²Lord Kilmarnock to Karl Curzon, Berlin, March 17, 1920, D.B.F.P., Ser. 1, 9:162-163.

⁶³Scheidemann, Memoirs, 2:334.

⁶⁴Wallact to Secretary of State, Paris, March 16, 1920, R.D.S., 862.00/823.

further embarrass the army, called for the disbanding of the army and the establishment of a workers' army.⁶⁵

In the aftermath of the putsch, however, several points need to be reiterated. How neutral was the Reichswehr? By resigning from office von Seeckt refused to recognize or have any dealings with the rebels. At least 1,000 officers voted to support Ebert before von Seeckt issued his order.⁶⁶ Outside of Berlin there were clashes between the Reichswehr and the Freikorps.⁶⁷ In the capital after Kapp fled and the government was left in the hands of Luttwitz, the Reichswehr, in order to prevent the Freikorps from holding out, did announce support for the Ebert government.⁶⁸ Many people would naturally assume that the army was simply jumping on the victory bandwagon, but one should not forget the role of the Reichswehr in the negotiations between Ebert and Kapp. Although the Kapp government had no popular support, there were still several thousand Freikorps in Berlin.⁶⁹

⁶⁵Dresel to Secretary of State, Berlin, March 26, 1920, R.D.S., 862.00/892.

⁶⁶Dresel to Secretary of State, Berlin, March 15, 1920, R.D.S., 862.00/844.

⁶⁷Dresel to Secretary of State, Berlin, March 18, 1920, R.D.S., 862.00/840.

⁶⁸Lord Kilmarnock to Earl Curzon, Berlin, March 17, 1920, D.B.F.P., Ser. 1, 9:167.

⁶⁹Dresel to Secretary of State, Berlin, March 16, 1920, R.D.S., 862.00/824.

These troops were not adverse to the idea of breaking the general strike with force. The use of terror was not uncommon to the Freikorps, and with the moderating influence of Kapp gone and the realization that the situation was becoming desperate, the Freikorps stood only one real chance of maintaining power. When the Reichswehr came out on the government's side, even the wildest demagogues of the Freikorps realized they could not oppose the army and the workers. Furthermore, if von Seeckt so displeased the government by ordering his troops to remain in the barracks, why did the Ebert government restore him to his former position when the revolt withered?

The army was not left untouched by the Kapp putsch. Some officers had sided with the rebels, confirming von Seeckt's suspicions of the loyalty of the army. Noske had declared that he would "cashier all army officers implicated in the movement . . ." ⁷⁰ and this was done. In an article in Vöorwärts, Noske summed up the role of the army in the Kapp putsch by stating, "Throughout the whole affair a great majority of the army remained loyal to the legitimate government." ⁷¹

⁷⁰Robertson to Earl Curzon, Stuttgart, March 17, 1920, D.B.F.P., Ser. 1, 9:166.

⁷¹Gustav Noske, "The Army and the Kapp Revolt," Living Age (April-June, 1920) 305:401.

If von Seeckt is to be condemned, one should attack his policies and not his politics. The general feared the worst when he envisioned German soldiers facing each other in the streets of Berlin. His concern was foremost for the preservation of an infant army. Noske, who lost his position shortly after the Kapp putsch, had very little reason to defend the army.⁷²

After the defeat of Kapp, the forces of the extreme left refused to call off the general strike and the army was utilized to restore order.⁷³ Of course the critics of von Seeckt see this as an example of the general's anti-communism and the extreme conservatism of the officer corps. A record of von Seeckt's further dealings with Soviet Russia illustrates the general's flexibility in regard to ideological differences.⁷⁴

⁷²Dresel to Secretary of State, Berlin, March 19, 1920, R.D.S., 862.00/851.

⁷³Waite, Vanguard, pp. 168-182.

⁷⁴For information on German-Soviet activities during the Weimar Period see Hans Gatzke, "German-Soviet Military Collaboration in Weimar Period," American Historical Review, 63, April, 1958, pp. 565-597; George W.F. Hallgarten, "General Hans von Seeckt and Russia," Journal of Modern History, 21, March-December, 1949; Cecil Melville, The Russian Face of Germany (London: Wishart and Company, 1932); J.H. Morgan, Assize of Arms: The Disarmament of Germany and Her Rearmament (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), pp. 183-217.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

When viewing the relationship between the German officer corps and the socialists, one seems to be at a disadvantage in finding any area of mutual understanding. The residual hate built up by many years of dogmatic dialectics on one side and anachronistic attitudes on the other, appears to open an inseparable gap between the two forces. Ideologically, the internationalism of Marx contrasted visibly with the nationalism of the officer corps. Realistically, the potential strength represented by the German Social Democratic Party was a direct threat to the actual strength held by the officer corps.

To view this gap as unbridgeable, however, one forgets the realities of nineteenth century Europe. The conscription laws forced millions of workers to bridge the ideological battleground in service to their country. In the world of barracks routine and parade ground discipline, the young soldiers were instilled with the patriotic heritage of their country and the responsibilities each owed his King and country. On returning to civilian life the ex-soldiers

quickly assumed their old roles as workers, but with a changed outlook, be it good or bad, as to the role of the military and its leaders.

The phenomenal success of the SPD had also illustrated to the worker-soldiers that it was possible to share allegiance to both Marx and the Kaiser. The party's unhampered growth after the dropping of the anti-Socialist laws seemed to confirm the policy of gradualism over radicalism. When faced with criticism from socialist parties of other countries, all the Germans had to do was point to their swelling ranks and their plentiful Reichstag seats. The pragmatic German workers viewed positive action not in the philosophic vagueness of the class struggle but rather in concrete policies directed toward the quite realistic day-to-day act of survival. As a result, the term "social" in the Social Democratic Party revolved around social policy as much as socialist policy. Since evolution in practice was outdistancing revolution in theory, the caucus room and Reichstag floor replaced the barricades as the scene of the workers' struggle. With this new center of agitation, the SPD was able to draw the officer corps out of its imperial isolation. In achieving this victory, however, the stage was set for a battle of words rather than weapons.

The officer corps of Imperial Germany was the sole possession of the crown. All officers were chosen, judged, and promoted by or through the monarch. As the size of the state continued to grow and the problems of maintaining it multiplied, the emperor delegated more and more of his authority to subordinates. The military, however, was one area the Kaiser, be he William I or William II, refused to entrust to civilian authorities. The main result of this action was to draw the officer corps closer to its king but farther away from his subjects. It did not take the officer corps long to realize that its exalted existence depended upon the ability of the crown to protect and preserve it. Facing this cold reality, the military elite viewed any attack upon its actions or position, no matter how unimportant, as a direct challenge. To the idealists, these attacks were infringements upon the God-given rights of the Kaiser, while the realists saw a wedge attempting to pry open their door to power and privilege. On the outside of this door, driving the wedge harder and harder, was the dreaded socialist rabble.

The SPD viewed the officer intransigence with contempt. They saw the corps of officers as simply remnants of the past. Phillip Scheidemann's memoirs bristle with remarks on the medieval warrior class. In one incident in 1908,

Scheidemann condemns a group of officers who call their recruits "pigs, swine, sheep, louts, ragamuffins, cowards, blind idiots, etc."¹ In typical fashion, a representative of the war office admits the truth of the accusation but defends the officers. This leads Scheidemann to conclude that "Naturally! Officers in the good old days were demigods, and whoever complained of any one of them was at once accused of having insulted the Corps of Officers--a fellow without a country, on the right road to betray his fatherland."² As the SPD grew it moved into more and more areas of the military domain. This assault was met by the military, and although the officers sometimes retreated, they rarely yielded. If this antagonism had continued unabated, serious constitutional as well as political problems would surely have arisen. What neither force foresaw, however, was the advent of a war so horrendous in scope and tremendous in size that the very survival of all established social and political institutions would be threatened.

World War I temporarily altered the relationship of the officer corps and German society. With millions of men in uniform, the status and power of the officers skyrocketed.

¹Scheidemann, Memoirs, 1:145.

²Ibid., 1:146.

The Burgfrieden declared by all parties in the Reichstag closed the gap of hostility and suspicion. As the soldiers gaily marched off to their respective fronts under the command of their officers, Germany's internal division seemed erased. Almost four years later, however, the weary soldiers marched home to a country broken in body and spirit and convulsing itself in internal revolution. The SPD, once the mighty voice of the working class, stood fragmented and powerless to control the whirlwind events taking place. To understand these dramatic twists of fate one must investigate not only the SPD and the officer corps but the whole panorama of the world conflagration.

As the war changed from an offensive onslaught to a defensive stalemate, the forces who directed it were brought under investigation. At the front the officers, who determined life or death for thousands, were judged by their soldiers not on how they dressed or spoke, but how effective and prudent their orders were. The old concept of blind obedience might have been appropriate on the review grounds but in a battle zone officers had to prove themselves not only to the emperor but also to their men. In Eric Remarque's epic All Quiet on the Western Front, the author describes how men frightened and shell shocked advanced when they heard

the voice of their trusted lieutenant. These same men show nothing but hatred for the rear-echelon officers who continued to try maintaining pre-war standards. In one scene, when a veteran returning home on leave forgets to salute an officer, he is reprimanded and warned. "You think you can bring your front-line manners here, what? Well, we don't stand that sort of thing. Thank God, we have discipline here!" In the rear areas this style of behavior was usually the rule rather than the exception. When the day of atonement descended upon Germany, the memories of these officers burned deep in the minds of the injured.

While a reorientation of the officer corps was taking place, many of the followers of the SPD began to re-evaluate the policy of the socialists. The burning issue of course was the war and Germany's aims. Since the Russian menace seemed checked, many felt that peace should be worked out. The problem was how to disentangle oneself from the war effort without being labeled traitor by the government. Many of the SPD members felt that they had done everything in their power to avert war but now that it was on, there was no turning back. As the bloodbath continued and the Entente noose tightened around Germany, anti-war sentiment began to

grow not only from the ideologists but from the masses of the people. The formation of the USPD in 1917 was the culmination of this protest. By 1917, however, the war chiefs controlled almost every facet of German life and the anti-war measures were the products of those out of power. The SPD stood trapped in a government they had historically opposed, with no way to turn. Theodore Plivier's work The Kaiser Goes, The Generals Remain depicts a debate between a follower of the SPD and the USPD. In this quarrel an old SPD member says, "The old Party is what it has always been, a powerful advocate of our interests. The SPD has always worked for us" The young USPD follower replies with "Traitors, that's what they are!" The SPD advocate retorts with "Traitor, eh? Which are more traitors--those who voted for three loans, or the others who voted for five?" With unrest in the military and the civilian quarters, time was working against the German war lords. In their pursuit to speed up the war they committed grievous errors which eventually not only lost the war but also nearly destroyed their homeland.

After the futile spring offensives of 1918 German troops reeled back toward the Fatherland. The Kiel uprisings in November not only hastened the collapse of the Second Reich

but also opened the door to internal revolution. With the abdication of the Kaiser, the establishment of a Socialist government, and the signing of an Armistice, Germany was following the precedent set by her once war-time enemy to the east.

The German revolution has constantly been played down by scholars as a mini-revolution incomparable to the events in Russia. They seem to take this position because the course of the German revolution did not parallel that in Russia. If one were trying to find parallels, however, the two revolts share much in common. First the conditions of the two countries were ripe for revolution, due to the effects of a very long war. Although German territory was never occupied, the Entente blockade isolated the country and caused shortages to exist just as in Russia. Second, the armed services, especially the non-combatant elements, were quickly becoming demoralized and unruly. Third, the civilian populations of both Russia and Germany were rapidly shedding their wartime enthusiasm and falling under the sway of more radical elements. When the first spark of revolution was ignited in Petrograd in 1917 and Kiel in 1918, the old ruling houses quickly collapsed. Here, with the establishment of provisional governments, is where the two countries altered courses.

In Germany, the Ebert government realized the precarious situation in which they held power, and the almost nationwide support that the SPD seemed to possess was viewed by Ebert as only a temporary approval of his actions. With the country in an almost complete state of physical, political and economic collapse, it would not be difficult for the more radical elements to play upon the fears and angers of the masses to attain their goals. When the forces at the government's disposal began to prove unreliable, Ebert made his decision to contact the High Command and ascertain its usefulness.

Modern historians such as John Wheeler-Bennett and Francis Carsten see Ebert's decision as the beginning of the end of the Weimar Republic. This attitude seems totally indefensible simply from the fact that there was hardly any beginning as yet to end. Neither authors offer any alternatives for Ebert, and if one investigates the situation closely, it is not difficult to see why. There simply were no alternatives. Ebert could not appeal to the Entente powers because four years of war had left nothing but vindictiveness and contempt for Germany. The internal situation was so confused and anarchic that Ebert could not even depend upon his own party, which was also shattered by

the war. The revolution itself unleashed all of the radical and ultraradical elements on the German people, and Ebert, as an officer of the revolution, was forced to allow these groups to exist. Only when these factions began to adopt the practices of their comrades to the east did Ebert fall back upon his last hope for survival, the German officer corps.

The infamous deal struck between Ebert and the High Command seems now not to have been so earth-shaking. All the army asked was for the maintenance of discipline in the armed services and a struggle against bolshevism, not socialism. In return for this the government expected the officers to bring the army home from the front and then to respect the Soldiers' Councils. How this agreement between a government without an army and an army without a government could lead to the destruction of a regime not yet formed has yet to be proven. Ebert, by sticking to his word and not crying wolf, as Kerensky did to Kornilov, was able to maintain his faction in office. Verbal abuse has been heaped upon Ebert for his dealings, but one should always keep in mind that Ebert was the representative of the forces of social democracy while the Spartacists and their followers preached dictatorship of the proletariat.

The USPD has often been seen as the true force of German socialism during this period, and theoretically this may be correct. The vacillating attitudes demonstrated by the Independents, however, also illustrate a weak, disunited force. The Independents, just as their title indicates, were more a group of individuals sharing few common attitudes and expressing fewer common goals. The meeting of the First Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils in December of 1918 expressed the almost total support for the program of Ebert. Although the Ebert program was not the pure socialist program many envisioned, it was the will of the majority. Since the revolutionary leaders could not dislodge Ebert by mandate, they decided to try it with machine guns. At this point, the officer corps whose record up until January had been quite poor, reacted with success.

The failure of the High Command to utilize the old Imperial Army to restore order cannot be blamed on the High Command. Surely the officers would have favored using their war-proven troops to control the situation, but the troops themselves refused to cooperate. The decision to utilize Freikorps was made out of necessity and not of choice. The army command and the government were faced with the alternative to improvise or be defeated. That

they chose the former seemed to guarantee the birth of the Republic rather than forecast its doom. One should not think that most army officers viewed the Freikorps as the army of the future any more than they saw the Kaiser descending back upon his throne. Of course the reality of losing a sovereign must have been hard to accept by those trained in the imperial atmosphere, but realities were keeping the officer corps in a relative high position. The reality of the Versailles Treaty in June, 1919, once again fostered the outrage of the entire nation, crossing all class barriers. The High Command, the hotbed of reaction, as so many have claimed, reacted by warning that war would be suicidal. Frustration and bitterness over the Versailles Treaty, plus the clouded economic and political situation, soon put the army command to the test once more, in the form of a revolt from the right.

The Kapp revolt was the supreme test for the army, for in the 1918-1919 period most revolts were leftist-inspired and led. Critics of the army and its leadership claimed that it was out of desire and not duty that the army, be it Freikorps or otherwise, shot down the insurgents. The Kapp coup was a rightist-inspired plot which in a few cases had direct connections with the army. This is why the army

command, under von Seeckt, had to be extremely careful in dealing with the situation. Although the Ebert government was forced to leave Berlin for a few days, this seems a small sacrifice when one thinks of the serious implications that could have resulted. The picture of Reichswehr troops firing on Freikorps under the Brandenburg Gate smelled of civil war. The far left, with their continuation of the general strike and the raising of a Red Army in the Rhine, illustrated how far they were willing to go in order to crush the government, be it that of Ebert or Kapp. Von Seeckt's actions, while appearing to be underhanded or opportunistic at first glance, need to be considered much more deeply in order for one to make an objective judgment.

In conclusion, one should reiterate that without the active aid and support of the High Command and its subordinates, the founding of the Weimar Republic would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible. The continued existence of the Weimar Republic during the shaky period of 1919-1920 owes its survival as much to the tireless efforts of the High Command and its officers as to the tenacity of Ebert and Noske. The union of the socialists and the military chiefs was the only workable solution to save Germany from immediate anarchy and continued chaos.

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