

THE CENTRUM PARTY'S INFLUENCE IN GERMAN AFFAIRS.

THE FUTURE CONTEST BETWEEN CLERICALISM AND SOCIALISM.

BY EDWARD T. HEYN.

Former American Vice-Consul.

IT is greatly surprising that, although thousands and thousands of articles on German political conditions have appeared in America since the world war, but little has been said of the stupendous influence of the powerful Centrum or Clerical Party. That the Centrum however is an important factor to-day in Germany was fully demonstrated a few months ago when Count von Hertling, a decided ultramontane and former Centrum leader was appointed German Chancellor. Hertling's present, somewhat lukewarm support of the important bill for the reform of the Prussian franchise, as well as the decided opposition to the same measure by a large faction of the Centrum in the Prussian Diet, is abundant proof that the party is not very much in favor of a very radical democratization of German political institutions.

The Centrum Party or Center, why so called? It was so named because its members occupy seats in the center of the German Parliament. Considered politically, the name "Center" admirably characterizes its tendencies, for during its entire history the party has taken an attitude midway between that of the Conservatives and the radical parties of the Left. On many questions, in fact, this party throughout its history has been unstable, assuming a character at times very conservative, while under other conditions it has displayed democratic and very popular tendencies.

Does the Center Party deserve the name "Clerical," so emphatically repudiated by its followers? Let it be said, that before the war there were 23,821,453 Roman Catholics in Germany (as against 39,991,421 Protestants), the majority of which belonged to the "Centrum," "the only party," in the words of the now frequently mentioned Dr. Matthias Erzberger, "in which a consistent German Catholic can be active, for it is the only one which gives him what

he needs with regard to political, religious and educational matters." The Roman Catholics are indeed an active and very influential element in Germany. Does the public of the United States know that in certain German states, as sovereign as any in the American union, Bavaria and Baden, for example, the Catholics are in the majority, and that over 20 percent of the population of Prussia with its almost solidly Catholic Westphalia and the Rhine provinces, Württemberg, Hesse, Oldenburg, are adherents of the Roman Church? The "Centrum" in these states has a large following, and in October 1915 the party adopted a resolution in which it was said: "Besides the protection of material possessions, we hope for the happiness of our dear Fatherland, to carefully cultivate the old religious virtues of the people, which are the cause of the true greatness of Germany, and the means of divine grace." A similar opinion was expressed by one of its prominent members, Gronowski, who in February 1910 said: "If you desire to know the secret of our unity I will unfold it to you, it is our Christian point of view which keeps us together."

Yet the "Centrum" has always denied that it is an exclusively religious party, and especially repudiated the strong indictment framed against it by Bismarck in 1872 when the great Chancellor said: "I have always felt that it was an extraordinary phenomenon in a political direction, that a 'confessional' party faction had formed a political organization. Indeed I have learned that in accepting the principles of the 'Centrum,' neither the German nor the Prussian State can permanently exist." Since that time the Center Party has again and again denied that its aims are primarily religious, asserting especially in a strong party declaration in 1909: "The Centrum is fundamentally a political and not a 'confessional' party. The fact that most of its supporters and deputies belong to the Catholic Church is a sufficient guarantee that in all activities of public life it will support the justified interests of the German Catholics." What is more, the Center Party has repeatedly stated that only in religious matters does it acknowledge the authority of the Vatican, while in exclusively political subjects, in the words of the Reichstag Center member Fehrenbach, "it is uninfluenced by Pope or Bishops." This independence the Center Party displayed on numerous occasions, but especially in 1887, in the great parliamentary fight for the increase of the size of the German army, known as the "Septennate question." The Center Party then refused to support Bismarck's military policy, against the advice of the Roman Hierarchy which had come to an understanding with the

Prussian government in a reform of the obnoxious religious legislation known as the "May Laws." The Pope in fact had asked the Center Party to vote for the military budget, but the organization refused. Later the "Centrum" made a concession by abstaining from voting, and as a result the Reichstag was dissolved. In this connection it was noted at the time, that Baron von Frankenstein, a prominent member of the "Centrum," while visiting Rome in 1887, asked the Pope whether it was his wish that the party should disband as a political organization. His Holiness answered that he considered its continuance necessary in the interest of the Church. In the course of this article I intend to show that the continuance of the close relations which have always existed between the Vatican and the German Center Party, is of vital importance to Roman Catholicism. It certainly constitutes an important element in the recent attempt of the Vatican to bring about an early peace.

The Center Party is a power to be reckoned with. It has 91 deputies in the Reichstag, out of a total number of 397 members. (The Social Democrats in that body have 110 seats.) The clerical influence surrounding the Centrum is best indicated by its membership, for in 1912 at least a dozen of its deputies were than Catholic priests or at one time had belonged to religious orders. The official Reichstag directory for the same year shows that 130 deputies of the parliament were Roman Catholics, affiliated with all parties, while there were 180 Protestants in the entire body.

The growth of the Center Party, from the first day of its establishment has been phenomenal. Starting with over 71,000 voters in 1871 and 63 deputies, in 1890 it received over 1,342,000 votes and elected 106 deputies; in 1912 it received 2,035,290 votes and elected 91 deputies. The total number of votes for all parties cast in 1912 was 12,260,731, divided as follows:

Social Democrats	4,250,399	voters.
Center Party	2,035,290	"
National Liberals	1,672,619	"
Progressive Peoples Party ..	1,528,886	"
Conservatives	1,129,275	"
Free Conservatives	370,287	"

The remainder of the votes in 1912 were received by the smaller parties of the Reichstag, the Poles, Guelfs, Alsatians, Union of Husbandry, Danes and Christian Socialists.

The Center Party, whatever may be said of its former attitude on religious matters, at the present time is a truly German national

party, loyal, moderate and responsible for much constructive legislation, particularly such passed in the interest of the working people. For example, at a time when the Socialists were still opposed to the introduction of State Social Insurance in Germany, the Center supported this measure most enthusiastically. The Center Party has become a great national peoples' party, and no German statesman can ignore it. I am not unmindful of the enormous growth of Social Democracy, but the "Centrum" at the present time holds the balance of power in the Reichstag, and in its support of the parliamentary resolution for more democratic government gave a decided turn to its affairs. If the "Centrum" in the past showed conservative leanings, this attitude was due to its intense hatred of radical liberalism and socialism. Only a year ago a Catholic weekly in Augsburg said that the Center Party would never allow the Social Democrats, the "unbelievers," to become the real rulers of Germany. In connection with the Centrum's support of a peace resolution and democratic reforms, it was generally stated in the American Press that Dr. Matthias Erzberger, the democratic member of the Centrum, was the official leader of the Party, but in fact until quite recently Dr. Peter Spahn, now Prussian Minister of Justice, held that position. Spahn during the war has been a warm supporter of the Government's policies and of the Kaiser. This was indicated by a speech which he made in the Reichstag, in which among other things he declared: "When the enemies of Prussian militarism and of the Hohenzollerns revile the exalted person of the Kaiser, this only tends to bring His Majesty closer to the hearts of the German people."

Spahn speaking thus uttered the real sentiments of the conservative elements of German Catholicism, of the Catholic hierarchy and officials, of the Catholic nobility, and of the Catholic manufacturers of the Rhine, especially of Bavaria and Westphalia. Similar conservative tendencies were also shown by Deputy Fehrenbach of the Center Party, when in introducing the "majority" peace resolution he added:

"If some enemy voices explain the resolution as a sign of weakness, we shall prove that we are ready to fight and capable of achieving victory. Our military situation makes any such misunderstanding impossible, and we therefore make this peace demonstration. If the hand which the German Parliament extends to the enemy is refused by our enemies, we will achieve even greater and more heroic deeds. Then we will show the world that the German people is unconquerable in its unity.

"The Emperor's magnanimous decree extended the field of internal politics in a manner corresponding with the wishes of the people. We hope electoral reform will soon be accomplished without internal strife. As for our parliamentary system, the center party will fully protect the rights of the federal states and those of the Emperor.

"It is hoped the new chancellor will succeed in bringing about a peace which will guarantee free development of the German peoples, but which also will lead to an understanding among the nations."

The Center Party, Friendly to Labor.

"The Center Party" includes, in the words of the late Professor Lamprecht, "all those who in the different layers of society disapprove of the system of capitalist enterprise, and aim at restricting free competition, and substituting a united system based upon Christian principles for the unlimited development of subjective individualism. This would explain for instance the great solicitude which Catholicism has for centuries shown for the Fourth Estate, and its persistent and time-established effort to solve the social problem in a Christian way."

As has already been intimated the Center Party was the most active supporter of State Social Insurance, established in the interest of the German working people. Much has been heard since the war as to the great strength of the German socialist trade unions, the *Gewerkschaften*, but it is not generally known that the so-called "Christian-Social Trade Unions," consisting of both Catholics and Protestants, have a large following. Before the war the socialist trade unions had 2,300,000 members, as compared with 1,300,000 Christian trade unionists. A few years before the war, a bitter and acrimonious controversy stirred up German Catholicism, the issue being the propriety of giving support to these Christian-trade unions. The Center Party and the German hierarchy were divided on the question, whether the men of their faith should belong to these unions or to an exclusive Catholic Workman's organization. Giesbert and Schiffer, two very prominent Catholic trade unionists, members of the Christian-Social Trade Union, at a conference held at Zürich in 1910 said: "The Christian Social Trade Unions represent economic aims, they are interconfessional, but as exclusive Church organizations would lose their backbone in the growing economic contests."

The two German Catholic factions known respectively as the

Cologne and Berlin *Richtungen* were completely at odds as to which of the trade unions a Catholic workman should belong. As a result of the bitter contest which ensued, Cardinal Fischer, the highest dignitary of the Church in Germany, in 1910 went to Rome to confer with the Pope on the important question. His Holiness decided that he would take an entirely neutral stand on the matter, urging at the same time that the Executive Catholic Workmen's Union should receive equal support. As a result, while many German Catholics still belong to the so-called Christian-Social Trade Unions, an independent Catholic Workmen's Trade Union organization also exists.

The Center Party and Alsace-Lorraine.

Before the war the two provinces of Alsace-Lorraine had a population of 1,428,343 Catholics as compared to 408,274 Protestants and 30,483 Jews. It is not surprising in view of these figures that not a single utterance can be quoted indicating that German Catholics are willing to voluntarily give up the provinces to France. Dr. Ricklin, a prominent Alsatian and members of the "Centrum," president of the Alsatian Diet, said in that body:

"Gentlemen, we cannot depart without expressing the hope and wish for an honorable peace. We need not hush our cries for peace because this war has brought untold agony upon our country and population, and it is becoming evermore apparent that separation of Alsace-Lorraine from Germany is assuming a preponderant position among our opponents' war aims. Therefore we owe it to our conscience to declare that the people of Alsace-Lorraine decidedly reject the idea that this terrible bloodshed shall be continued for their sake and that they have no other desire than to remain inseparably united with the German Empire, which best guarantees their cultural, economic and political future, having proper regard for our national peculiarity."

Dr. Ricklin uttered the real sentiments of German Catholicism, for the "Centrum" as a truly German national party is naturally opposed to giving up Alsace-Lorraine, for of course with the return of these provinces to France the party would lose at least five deputies in the Reichstag with a consequent reduction of political influence in the German parliament.

The Center as a Political Factor.

As has already been said, the Center Party has frequently supported progressive measures. It voted for the establishment of

the gold standard, favored colonial reforms and building of railroads in the German colonial possessions. It brought about the more humane treatment of the natives in the colonies. It was very active in the legislation establishing the famous Civic Code, which gave Germany more uniform laws. The Centrum voted for the army increases, building and extension of the German navy, for more liberal pensions for the veterans, restricting speculation in futures, and more equitable distribution of taxes. It supported legislation limiting the power of the Cartels and monopolies. It aided in limiting the abuses of common soldiers by their officers, and was most energetic in opposing dueling in the army. Indeed, largely as a result of the work of the Center Party in that direction no German Catholic before the war would accept a challenge to a duel. The Center Party, while at one time a free trade party, later changed its attitude on the question and supported increased customs' duties, not only on manufactured goods but especially on agrarian products. The agrarian members of the Center Party from South Germany repeatedly favored higher duties in order to hit the agrarian products imported from Russia, Austro-Hungary and the United States.

The Center Party however did not display a similar "backbone" when the German Government, in order to obtain additional revenues, endeavored to impose a special national tax on inheritances. This legislation was bitterly fought by the Conservatives, and the Center Party supported the "Junkers" in order not to antagonize its own followers belonging to the landed nobility and representing capitalist interests.

*The Future Contest Between the Center Party and Social
Democracy.*

It is now certain, whatever may be the outcome of the war, that Germany will become more democratic and obtain a government responsible to the Reichstag. The Center Party by lending its support to the "majority party" peace resolution demonstrated its interest, and in cooperation with the Social Democrats and Liberals favored the change of the Reichstag suffrage. For the Centrum now recognizes, though it has not always done so in the past, that the existing national suffrage laws have heretofore been largely nullified by a specious system of districting or gerrymandering. Despite the enormous shifting of population from the country to the industrial centers the socialists did not obtain the number of deputies to which they were entitled according to their votes. In

Berlin for example before the war they had only six deputies when according to population they were really entitled to ten. A similar injustice prevailed in the electoral systems for the various state legislatures of Germany. If the Conservative Party, the famous party of the "Junkers" is largely responsible for the peculiar system of suffrage heretofore existing in Prussia, its continuation up to this time is in large measure due to the Center Party, which refused its aid to change "the most miserable of all electoral franchises" as Bismarck once called the Prussian three-class system.

It is quite clear, whatever may be the result of the war, that the Center Party will continue to be a dominant factor in German politics. Prince Buelow, the former German Chancellor, once said: "If the Center Party did not exist it would be necessary to create it as a bulwark against Social Democracy, and as a 'stopgap' between the extreme views of the parties of the right and left." In his interesting book *Imperial Germany*, Prince Buelow, whose downfall was largely brought about through the influence of the Center, says: "I never for a moment failed to realize the inconvenience that was entailed by dissolving the Reichstag, and thus breaking with a party so powerful and so tenacious as the Centrum."

Tenacity indeed has always been the strongest trait of the Center Party, and it has never hesitated to make alliances with other parties to accomplish a purpose. At times it was even willing to make deals with the hated socialists, as it did in 1907, when the party leaders of the Bavarian Centrum and the Bavarian Socialists met in the famous Dom at Speyer, and formed a secret coalition to fight the forces of the government and the allied parties known as the "Bloc." And again in 1912 when the "Bloc" was broken the Center Party did not hesitate to support the Conservatives in their opposition to inheritance taxes and reform of the Prussian franchise system. As once was said by the liberal leader Dr. Bamberger, "The Centrum can boast of being the sweetheart whose love all political parties in Germany desire."

Religious Contest of the Future.

Despite the past and present understandings established between the Center and the Social Democrats, it is certain that a big contest will be fought between the two parties when the war is over. The Center, allied with the Conservatives and the forces of religious orthodoxy, both Catholic and Protestant, will then bitterly oppose every move made by German Liberalism to bring about a separation between Church and State and the consequent abolishment of re-

ligious instruction in the public and private schools, not only in Protestant Prussia, but also in Catholic Bavaria and in the other German Federal States. Under present conditions every religious denomination, whether Protestant, Catholic or Jewish, receives state aid. A tax-payer required to make a statement of his income is compelled to make known the religious denomination to which he belongs. When the tax bill comes in he finds an additional amount added for the support of the particular church of which he is an adherent. A non-church member must advance most convincing proof to avoid the payment of a church tax. Even foreigners in Prussia are required after three months residence to pay income taxes and are subject to this church tax. Americans living in Berlin before the war usually were exempt from this tax in case they could show that they belonged to the American church in that city.

The relation between State and Church in Prussia as well as in the other Federal States of Germany is most intimate, especially with regard to questions relating to religious instruction in the schools. Every child attending school has to spend certain hours a week in a class of his religious denomination. The Poles of the Province of Posen for many years fought the requirement of the Prussian State for the religious instruction of school-children in German. At times strenuous attempts have been made to evade the law compelling this attendance. Hoffmann, a socialist member of the Prussian Landtag, objected to the law which required him to send his child to a religious class. He said that although he was a Protestant he would, if his request was refused, send his child to the Jewish instruction, and when an exemption was denied, he carried out his threat.

This question of Church and State will have to be solved before Germany can be democratized and more liberal government is introduced. The Center Party, rather than see the Liberals and Socialists in power, will support every move of the Imperial and various German federal governments to combat advanced ideas. For it must be borne in mind that the Center Party to-day believes as it has in the past, in a monarchical form of government, in the union of church and state, and in the language of the famous Bishop von Ketteler, in every activity which will guard the German nation against "materialism and unbelief." The Center Party in one of its party declarations stated: "The foundation of the Center tower rests on religion; it is the strength of our power. The Center is a Christian party."

In view of the peculiar party conditions in Germany, it needs

hardly to be said that the Imperial and state governments of the country in the future as they have done in the past will do everything to please and satisfy the Center Party. For it has been the policy of the German governments, for the sake of religious peace to maintain a "parity" between Catholics and Protestants, and political questions therefore were often considered primarily from a religious standpoint. The Center Party in the course of the present war has given an example of its great influence by the passage of a law permitting the Jesuits to enter Germany. This question has been a bone of contention between Church and State for forty years. A few years ago the Reichstag passed a law permitting German Jesuits to establish their orders in Germany, and the above-name legislation now extends a similar privilege to foreign Jesuits. It is fortunate that the present war has put an end for the time being at least, to the unfortunate religious differences which formerly existed between the various religious denominations of Germany. A few years ago, for example, in the ultra-Protestant states like Brunswick, Mecklenburg and Saxony German Catholics complained bitterly of religious discrimination against them by state religious synods. Erzberger in his book on the German Centrum mentions the fact that a foreign priest was not allowed to offer the death-sacrament to a communicant in the above-named Protestant states. On the other hand it is only fair to say that in certain Catholic states like Bavaria, Alsace and Baden, and the Prussian province of Posen, the Center was most anxious to retain narrowly sectarian instruction in the public schools.

What Will Be the future Relations of the Pope with France and with Germany?

It will be remembered that for twelve years before the war, the relations of the Holy See and France were very strained owing to the Republic's disestablishment of the Church. One was reminded of this bitter contest by a speech made by Mr. O'Connor, the Irish Nationalist, visiting America, who in speaking before the Aldine Club of New York said that some Americans were not anxious to fight for "atheistic France." (Atheistic translated into plain English: Church disestablishment.) Mr. O'Connor however at the same time assured his hearers, that both priests and unbelievers were fighting the "Prussian Junkers," in which latter category he undoubtedly also included the German soldiers belonging to the Center Party and the Bavarians fighting in Belgium. On the other hand the relations between the Vatican and the Im-

perial German and Prussian Governments before the war were cordial and intimate. The last two popes before Benedict XV frequently referred to the excellent position of Catholics in Germany. Prussia, a Protestant state, sent a minister to the Holy See. The Kaiser repeatedly visited Catholic churches and convents, presented valuable gifts to Catholic orders, contributed to the rebuilding of ancient cathedrals, and took pleasure in being the guest of the Catholic nobility of Silesia, of Alsace, and of the rich Catholic manufacturers of the Rhine. The late Cardinal Kopp was the link in the various questions negotiated between the Prussian State and the Catholic Church, especially concerning the delicate Polish problem. Kopp's successors, Cardinals Fischer and Hartmann, continued the friendly policy and complete understanding between the Holy See and the Prussian Government. In 1905, when France disestablished the Church, Germany became the protector of German Catholic missions in the Orient, a position previously held by the French Republic.

The Influence of the Center After the War.

During the great religious contest known as the *Kulturkampf* fought between the Center Party and the Prussian Government Bismarck dramatically said: "We shall not go to Canossa," referring to the historical incident of the twelfth century when a German emperor dressed in sackcloth and on bended knees had to beg forgiveness of the pope, in order to escape from the bonds of excommunication. Bismarck in the nineteenth century, after the great *Kulturkampf* was over, had to admit that he had been the loser and that only "ashes and ruins" remained. The famous Prussian minister of finance von Miquel once said to Dr. Lieber, the Center leader, that the German Government had committed three asinities (*Eseleien*), the *Kulturkampf*, the anti-socialist laws and the obnoxious anti-Polish policy; and in consideration of possible future political events in Germany, the question occurs to the writer, will the Kaiser, and his government, allied with Conservatives and National Liberals, make a similar mistake and strengthen the Center Party, the party which in its blind hatred of Liberalism and Socialism aims to sustain the relation of Church and State, and retain religious instruction in the public schools? However, who knows what may happen after the world war? Everything is possible as long as the Center Party is powerful in German political affairs, for in popular German vernacular, it always holds the trumps.