

Germany
Tried
Democracy



A POLITICAL HISTORY *of* THE REICH
from 1918 to 1933



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To My Mother

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PREFACE

THE story of the German republic makes depressing reading. It records the rise and fall of a venture in democracy. Had this venture succeeded, World War II might never have taken place. Its failure plunged a nation into slavery. Democracy, like peace, is indivisible. What happened in Germany had profound repercussions throughout the world. These repercussions are with us still.

In January, 1919, the republic had the support of most Germans. Fourteen years later, it was dead. The following words might well be inscribed upon its tombstone: "Here lies a noble experiment. It was sabotaged by friend and foe alike." It was sabotaged unwittingly by its friends, but the effect, nonetheless, was devastating. Allied statesmen, who should have known better, treated the new Germany as if it were a replica of the old. The honest, well-meaning men who spoke for the Social Democratic party made one mistake after another. Confusion and faintheartedness marked their tortuous course. While they blundered, the republic's inveterate enemies—the Junkers, the militarists, and one section of the industrial plutocracy—carried on with impunity. Agrarian feudalism survived in Prussia. The military caste retained its grip on the armed forces of the state. The unhampered formation of combines, trusts and cartels placed the nation's economic destiny in the hands of a few masterful men.

Throughout these years the predominance of class over national interests was almost always in evidence. Factionalism paralyzed the Reichstag and undermined respect for the parliamentary principle. Proportional representation on a national scale lent impetus to the splintering of political groups. It also increased the distance between voters and candidates. At a time when the nation hungered for effective leadership, petty bickering and the pursuit of partisan ends aggravated the sense of disunity. The decline of militancy in the trade unions and the fateful split in the ranks of German labor worked incalculable harm to the democratic cause. The runaway inflation of the early 1920's impoverished a considerable section of the middle class. It destroyed, in the process, one of the main props of the Weimar regime. The assignment of excessive powers to the president of the Reich constituted another link in this chain of tragic developments. The *coup de grâce*

was delivered by the great economic depression. It was this world-wide calamity which demoralized and decimated even the staunchest champions of democracy and made possible the phenomenal growth of National Socialism. Bruening's efforts to combat the depression proved futile. His fall sealed the doom of the republic. Thereafter the issue was no longer democracy versus dictatorship. It was conservative authoritarianism versus nihilist totalitarianism. The first was favored by men like Hindenburg, Schleicher, and Papen. The second represented the goal of Hitler and his brown-shirted cohorts.

The history of the German republic is replete with grim warnings. Will these warnings be heeded during the difficult years which are bound to come in the wake of World War II? Much will depend upon the answer to this question. For Germany, despite defeat and dismemberment, remains the key to the future of Europe.

The author takes this opportunity to express his deepest thanks to his wife. Her keen literary sense proved invaluable. Her unfailing encouragement made possible the completion of this book.

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S. WILLIAM HALPERIN

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Chapter I

CROSSCURRENTS IN THE GERMAN EMPIRE 1871-1914

I

THE history of the German republic cannot be understood without reference to the earlier history of the Reich. The forces which shaped its destiny stem from an era far removed from contemporary times. Of these forces the most powerful was nationalism. It was rampant romanticism, with its emphasis on blood and race, its glorification of the past, its call for individual heroism and sacrifice, its clamorous insistence upon *Deutschland ueber Alles*. The annals of German nationalism are studded with memorable dates, but none takes precedence over January 18, 1871. On that day, in the wake of Prussia's smashing victory over France, the German empire came into being. Its birthplace was the famed hall of mirrors of the royal palace at Versailles. Here, in the presence of many distinguished personages, King William of Prussia was proclaimed German emperor. The dream of generations of German nationalists finally came true. The new Reich owed its existence above all to the genius of three men: Otto von Bismarck, the consummate statesman who steered the Prussian ship of state through manifold diplomatic shoals; Albrecht von Roon, Prussia's minister of war and indefatigable "organizer of victory"; and Helmuth von Moltke, the master strategist who headed the Prussian general staff. Encouraging them, sustaining them, were the millions of Germans from many different regions, parties and walks of life who had clung steadfastly to their vision of a united and powerful Reich. The advent of the German empire is one of the great, portentous landmarks of world history. A mighty people, industrious, disciplined and marvel-

Chapter 12

THE KAPP PUTSCH

I

THE Treaty of Versailles saddled the Reich with many new problems. One of the most explosive of these was created by the Allied demand for the extradition of "war criminals." This somewhat elastic category comprised many individuals who were distinctly unpopular in their own country. But the desire of the Allies to get hold of them speedily obscured their sins and invested them with an aura of martyrdom. It became a patriotic duty to shield the nation's wartime leaders from the vengeance of their foreign persecutors. So strong was the feeling against extraditing them that any government which should endeavor to comply with the demand of the Allies was certain to be forced out of office. The Bauer cabinet was well aware of this. On December 18, 1919, it secured the enactment of a law designed to spare the susceptibilities of the German people. Under its provisions, the government obligated itself to open legal proceedings against all individuals designated by the Allies. However, the trials were to take place, not abroad, but in Germany. They were to be conducted by the supreme court at Leipzig. The Allies were warned that if they insisted on extradition, insuperable difficulties would be created.

In the meantime, the Allies had been busily engaged in compiling lists of "war criminals." They wound up with no fewer than 895 names. But they knew they would have to yield on the issue of extradition. This they acknowledged in February, 1920, when they informed the German government that they would not interfere, that they would allow the Reich authorities to assume responsibility for the proceedings against the individuals in question. However, they

reserved the right to scrutinize the results with a view to determining the honesty and sincerity of the German government. An inter-Allied commission would be set up to collect evidence regarding the perpetration of war crimes, and this material would be forwarded to the German authorities. Moreover, the fact that Germany was to be allowed to take care of this business did not imply abrogation of the extradition clauses of the treaty. Should there be convincing grounds for believing that the accused had been permitted to escape the punishment they deserved, they would be compelled to stand trial in foreign courts. The German government, through its foreign minister, Hermann Mueller, promptly gave assurance that everything would be done to insure impartial trials. Early in March, 1920, the necessary arrangements were completed. The Bauer cabinet and the Social Democrats who dominated it had won a notable victory. German "honor" had been successfully defended. The Nationalists, who had been exploiting the Allied demand for extradition to heap abuse upon the government and the republic, were robbed of an excellent talking point. However, they had plenty of others and their campaign of vilification in no way diminished. The proceedings against the "war criminals" turned out to be something of a farce. A list of 45 test cases was presented to the government of the Reich. But no more than twelve were actually tried, and of these only six resulted in convictions.

The prestige which the Bauer cabinet derived from the successful handling of this issue was in part offset by the disaster which overtook one of its ablest and most dynamic members. Erzberger was the *bête noire* of the Nationalists. It was they (to be more exact, their pre-revolutionary selves, the Conservatives) who had been exposed by him in 1906, in connection with the colonial scandals of that year. It was they who thereafter had repeatedly been made to feel the whip-lash of his caustic tongue. It was they who had most strongly opposed the peace resolution of July, 1917, for which Erzberger was primarily responsible. They reviled and cursed him because he had signed the humiliating armistice of November, 1918. His role during the hectic weeks which preceded the signing of the Treaty of Versailles was remembered by them with a bitterness that nothing could assuage. He had managed also to infuriate the great coal and steel magnates, headed by Hugo Stinnes. Stung by the strictures of a spokesman for the People's party, which championed the interests of Stinnes and his fellow-capitalists, Erzberger had warned the captains of industry that their halcyon days were over. He was blunt and often exasperatingly

tactless. Where others might have stepped with caution and chosen the least dangerous course to achieve the object in view, Erzberger waded in with an abandon that did little credit to his political sagacity. Bitter adversaries he had aplenty, but none was more implacable than Karl Helfferich. This able but self-important and quarrelsome man had had a distinguished career before the revolution. He had made a great reputation as an authority on monetary theory. He had held important posts in the government and during a very large part of the war had served as vice-chancellor. Because he had been mainly responsible for the Reich's financial difficulties in the years which preceded the collapse of the old regime, Helfferich brought down upon himself reproaches and accusations from many directions. But no one denounced him as furiously and unmercifully as Erzberger, and between the two men there had sprung up an enmity which time and the impact of revolutionary events had served only to intensify.

Restless, itching for action and power, and unawed by the animosities which he was perennially stirring up, Erzberger utilized his position as minister of finance in the Bauer cabinet to make himself the center of another fierce controversy. In the summer of 1919, he introduced a number of "soak-the-rich" tax measures. He justified them in a blistering speech which sent a tremor of panic through all those who stood to lose the most. The ensuing debates in the assembly and in the country at large were marked by unbridled acrimony and spite. Reactionary and conservative circles pressed into service every means at their disposal in an effort to discredit Erzberger. Helfferich, who had been waiting for just such a moment, gleefully joined in the hue and cry. In a series of newspaper articles he charged that Erzberger had been involved in unsavory financial transactions. The nature of the accusations and the ruthlessness with which they were pressed forced Erzberger to sue his tormentor. The trial opened in January, 1920, and a few days later an unsuccessful attempt was made on Erzberger's life. On March 12, the court rendered its verdict. Helfferich was forced to pay a small fine because he was found technically guilty of slander; but the court held that most of the charges against Erzberger were true. This meant that Erzberger was finished politically. He promptly withdrew from the cabinet. His fall caused wild rejoicing among the enemies of democracy. It gave them new strength and hope. It robbed the Center party of one of its most progressive leaders and correspondingly strengthened the position of its conservative wing. Erzberger's fate was therefore more than a personal tragedy. It was a

tragedy for all who shared his political convictions, for the system and philosophy of government enshrined in the Weimar constitution. Erzberger's shortcomings were beyond question. But, in spite of them, he had performed yeoman's service on behalf of the new regime. In later years, his absence was to be sorely felt.

2

Erzberger's political demise came at a moment when powerful military elements were girding for an onslaught against the Weimar system. The signing of the peace treaty on June 28, 1919, had caused widespread indignation in army circles. So strained did the relations between Groener and a section of the officers' corps become that the general felt impelled to resign from the Supreme Command. His departure was deeply regretted by Ebert. During the summer and autumn of 1919 the feeling among disgruntled officers hardened into a resolve to set up a military dictatorship. The leader of this clique was General Baron Walther von Luetwitz, who commanded the troops stationed in the Berlin area. Luetwitz regarded himself, now that Hindenburg had retired from active service, as the most authoritative spokesman of the military caste. He believed that the existing political regime, in which the traditionally anti-militarist Social Democrats held the upper hand, constituted a perennial threat to the interests of the officers' corps. Consequently, it would have to be removed. The government, in his opinion, had forfeited its right to lead the nation when it accepted the Treaty of Versailles unconditionally. If it remained in office, it would end by destroying the country. Upon the officers' corps rested the obligation of rescuing Germany from the perils which beset her. Bolshevism was by far the greatest danger. Of this Luetwitz and the men around him were unshakably convinced. They regarded a Russo-German war as imminent and therefore sought to do everything in their power to prevent a reduction in the armed strength of the Reich. In assaying the chances of a *coup*, Luetwitz exhibited a shockingly inadequate grasp of political realities. He wished to have Noske on his side, but was prepared to dispense with his support if necessary. He was ready to defy the bulk of the nation. He even persuaded himself that he did not need the help of the two right-wing parties. Control of the army, he felt, would be enough.

Another leading member of the conspiratorial clique was Major Waldemar Pabst. This veteran cavalry officer was ambitious, energetic

and keenly interested in politics. He worked out a plan according to which Noske was to seize power and establish a military dictatorship with the aid of the army. But Noske refused to co-operate, declaring that any attempt to rule against the will of the masses would end in disaster. Thanks to Pabst, other individuals were drawn into the plot. One of these was Colonel Max Bauer, Ludendorff's former adjutant and an old hand at the game of intrigue. Wolfgang Kapp, the East Prussian official who had collaborated with Admiral Tirpitz in establishing the Fatherland party, was slated to be the head of the new government. He maintained close and continuous contact with Ludendorff. The erstwhile war lord expressed complete sympathy with the aims of the conspiracy but requested that he be allowed to remain in the background.

Luettwitz and Kapp counted heavily on the unfavorable reaction of the army to the Allies' demand for speedy execution of the disarmament provisions of the treaty. They figured that irate officers and men, faced with the prospect of dismissal, would be willing to go to almost any lengths to prevent the disbanding of their units. If they were encouraged to resist the Allies' demand, a conflict between them and the government was bound to ensue. Such a conflict would precipitate the fall of the existing regime. The machinations of the conspirators gave rise to rumors that a putsch was impending. Ebert and Noske were inclined to view the situation without alarm. They professed to believe that the army could be trusted and that the republic was therefore in no serious danger. Scheidemann did not share this optimism. With increasing sharpness he called attention to the likelihood of a reactionary counterrevolution and demanded that something drastic be done to curb the military. Ebert and Noske rejected this demand. They persisted in regarding left-wing radicalism as much more dangerous than the forces of reaction. What the nation needed most, they maintained, was maximum industrial production. This could only be insured by repressive measures against the fomenters of strikes and other labor disturbances.

3

The time was approaching when the Reich would have to institute drastic cuts in the strength of its armed forces. According to the terms laid down by the Allies, the German navy on March 10, 1920, was not to exceed 15,000 men while the army was to be reduced to 200,000 by April 10. To meet these figures, the German government found itself

obliged to dismiss without further ado between fifty and sixty thousand men. Orders to this effect were issued and distributed to commanders in every branch of the service. Among the units earmarked for dissolution was the naval brigade commanded by one of the nation's most notorious Free Corps leaders, Captain Hermann Ehrhardt. This brigade, which had the reputation of being a most effective fighting organization, had played a prominent part in the suppression of the Bavarian soviet republic. It was now stationed at Doeberitz, just outside Berlin. Ehrhardt went to Luettwitz and told him that his men were disturbed over the prospect of imminent dismissal. What, he queried, should he do? Luettwitz's answer was most reassuring. He declared that he would not allow the brigade to be disbanded. Ehrhardt reminded him that the order to disband had already been issued. That, retorted Luettwitz, was something he would take care of.

Word quickly got around that Luettwitz had decided to defy the government. One of the first to react was General Hans von Seeckt, head of the *Truppen Amt*, the new agency installed in the place of the Great General Staff which had been abolished by the Treaty of Versailles. Seeckt hurried to Luettwitz to ascertain the truth of the report. He defended the government, pointing out that it was acting under irresistible foreign pressure. Luettwitz, when asked whether he intended to execute a *coup d'état*, disingenuously replied in the negative. General Walther Reinhardt, who, as chief of the army command, topped the republic's military hierarchy, also intervened. Without circumlocution, he asked Luettwitz whether he would respect the constitution. Luettwitz's reply was evasive. But there was nothing ambiguous about what he said at a military review in Doeberitz on March 1, 1920. He would not, he reiterated on this occasion, permit the dissolution of the Ehrhardt brigade.

The Nationalists and the People's party were intrigued by the possibility of a counterrevolution. They sympathized wholeheartedly with the aims of Luettwitz and his associates. But several considerations motivated their decision to stand aloof. They did not regard Kapp as the person best suited to lead the movement. They were inclined to agree with Noske that any attempt to rule against the will of the vast majority of the nation was bound to fail. They did not care to share with the conspirators the risks attendant upon so hazardous an enterprise. If, contrary to expectations, the putsch should succeed, they were prepared to cast aside all reserve and identify themselves completely with the counterrevolutionary forces. In the meantime they hoped to

achieve, by less dangerous means, the goal which Kapp and Luettwitz had in view. They believed—and there was ample evidence to support this conviction—that the time was propitious for action to lessen the influence of the hitherto dominant Social Democrats. Conservatism was palpably on the increase in Germany. And at the other end of the political axis the Independents were daily gaining adherents at the expense of their working-class rivals. Confident that new elections would bring an appreciable increase in their parliamentary representation, the Nationalists and the People's party planned to introduce a motion calling for the dissolution of the national assembly not later than May 1, 1920. They also made ready to demand the formation of a cabinet of "experts" in the belief that such a move would redound to their advantage. Finally, they were determined to urge the immediate enactment of a law to govern procedure in presidential elections. In preparing to press for the adoption of such a law, the two right-wing parties had a special object in view. Hindenburg was now being mentioned for the first time in the pan-German press as a presidential possibility. His admirers among the Nationalists openly referred to him as the white hope of the royalists, as the man whose job it would be to facilitate the restoration of the monarchy. One thing was beyond doubt: the Field Marshal was immensely popular. The defeat of 1918 had tarnished many a military reputation, but Hindenburg's had remained unsullied. He was still idolized as the hero of Tannenberg, the greatest victory won by German arms in the course of the war. He was gratefully remembered as the man who had brought the armies safely home after the signing of the armistice. Now, as a retired general, he lived with exemplary modesty. He kept himself aloof from the swirl of politics, making no effort to trade on his popularity. With such a man as their candidate for the presidency, the monarchists had an excellent chance to win. All this was not lost on the supporters of the republic. The parties that constituted the Weimar coalition contained many individuals who opposed the direct popular election of the president. They feared that it would lead to some form of dictatorship. They wished to see the Reichstag given the power to choose the chief executive. This could be done by amending the constitution. The parties of the Right were alarmed by such talk. They regarded the retention of direct popular election as essential to the success of their plans.

On March 4, 1920, Luettwitz conferred with Oskar Hergt, a leading Nationalist, and Rudolf Heinze, a spokesman for the powerful right wing of the People's party. Neither the general nor the conservative

bloc had sought this contact; it came about at the suggestion of Colonel Arens, a high-ranking police official who wished Luettwitz to see how devoid of political support his contemplated putsch would be. As Arens foresaw, the conference gave little comfort to Luettwitz. The latter explained to his visitors that the troops were in a rather dangerous state of mind because of mass dismissals from the service. "The government," he went on, "must be made aware that it is acting irresponsibly in permitting the last pillars of the state to be undermined. If the Free Corps are dissolved and, in addition, half of the regular army is disbanded, the country will be left defenseless vis-à-vis the threat of Bolshevism." Hergt and Heinze asked what would happen if the Allies insisted on compliance with the military clauses of the treaty. Obedience to the Allies, Luettwitz retorted, must not be carried to the point of disregarding Germany's vital necessities. The dissolution of the Free Corps and further reductions in the size of the regular army would have to be postponed. The two party leaders pointed out that the government would refuse to do anything of the sort. They warned the general that if he laid down an ultimatum, he would jeopardize the efforts of the Nationalists and the People's party to bring about the speedy dissolution of the national assembly and to hasten the election of a new president. Luettwitz declared himself in sympathy with this program but said he doubted the possibility of putting it through by parliamentary means. He would rather rely on his troops. His guests demurred. The masses, they contended, would not support a military coup. They urged Luettwitz to postpone his ultimatum. This he agreed to do provided all went well with the demands which the Nationalists and the People's party were about to lay before the national assembly. But on March 9, 1920, those demands were overwhelmingly rejected. Luettwitz hurried to Hergt. The latter was obviously disappointed. Nevertheless, he continued to counsel patience. The campaign against the government, he said, was just beginning. It would be madness to rush matters. If, in spite of this warning, Luettwitz got himself involved in an open conflict with the government, the two conservative parties would not support him.

Hergt's words fell on deaf ears. Luettwitz, his mind made up, informed Kapp that a showdown was imminent. In an effort to obtain a clear picture of the chances of success, Kapp proceeded to institute inquiries regarding the attitude of the army. He was assured that on the whole it was favorable to the conspirators. His informants were less sanguine on the subject of the police, but they did intimate that

some assistance might be forthcoming from this quarter, too. The government, for its part, attempted to keep close tab on the situation. It was not unduly alarmed. It believed it could count on the loyalty of military leaders like Reinhardt and Seeckt. With such men on its side, it would be able to cope with the rebellious members of the officers' corps. Nonetheless, certain precautions were taken. Noske sent his chief of staff, Major von Gilsa, to ascertain the attitude of Ehrhardt. The latter made it clear that he would obey Luettwitz's orders. Without further ado, Noske took a step which was designed to stop the counterrevolutionaries in their tracks. He withdrew the Ehrhardt brigade from the military jurisdiction of Luettwitz and placed it under the command of Admiral Adolf von Trotha, who was in charge of the nation's naval forces. This action brought matters to a head. Luettwitz saw Ebert and Noske on March 10. He demanded a number of things: the cessation of dismissals from the German army; the removal of Reinhardt from his post as chief of the army command; the resubjection of the Ehrhardt brigade to the control of the area commander. Noske sternly rejected these demands and warned that he would not hesitate to cashier any general who rendered himself suspect. Instead of taking this warning to heart, Luettwitz proceeded to make additional demands. These, it turned out, were identical with the ones formulated by the parties of the Right and rejected by the national assembly only the day before. Ebert replied that the matters in question were the concern of the political authorities. Luettwitz's parting remark left little doubt as to his intentions. He had come, he said, to deliver a warning. If anything unpleasant happened, the responsibility would not be his. Noske needed no more convincing that the situation was serious. On the following day, he removed Luettwitz from his command. Simultaneously, he ordered the arrest of Kapp, Bauer and Pabst. But the three men, forewarned of what was in store for them, managed to elude the police. They prepared to strike. Last-minute arrangements were hurriedly attended to. The Ehrhardt brigade was to spearhead the assault. The government, for its part, was far from idle. It labored to place the capital in a state of readiness for whatever might happen.

4

March 12, 1920, was a day of mounting excitement. Berlin seethed with rumors that the Ehrhardt brigade was about to go into action against the government. Noske sent Trotha to Doeberitz with instruc-

tions to ascertain Ehrhardt's intentions and to bring him to his senses if possible. The captain refused to deny or confirm the report that his brigade was about to march. His men, he told the admiral, were asleep; complete quiet prevailed in the encampment. This message Trotha relayed to Noske. But at 10 P.M., in accordance with prearranged plans, the brigade set out for Berlin. Noske hurriedly dispatched emissaries to negotiate with Ehrhardt. They returned with an ultimatum from the rebel leader. Among the demands put forward were those originally made by the two parties of the Right. The remaining stipulations called for the reinstatement of Luettwitz, the removal of Noske and the assignment of his post to a general. The government was given until 7 A.M. to reply. This short reprieve proved a godsend for Ebert and the members of the cabinet. It gave them time to consider appropriate countermeasures. Noske summoned the top-ranking military leaders and told them that Ehrhardt's ultimatum was unacceptable. He wished to proceed against the rebels. But first he wanted to know where the officers stood. Only two of those present—Reinhardt and Gilsa—declared themselves ready to defend the government. The spokesman for the unco-operative majority was Seeckt. German soldiers, he said, must not be allowed to fire upon each other. If a pitched battle did take place, the rebels would win. They had the support of large sections of the police. Noske thus learned, to his consternation, that the generals, who always managed to find enough troops to quell left-wing radicals, could not bring themselves to take action against reactionary foes of the republic.

The attitude of Seeckt and his colleagues foredoomed any attempt to defend Berlin militarily. The next move was up to the cabinet. Reinhardt, to the surprise of the ministers, asked that all available troops be ordered to proceed against the rebels. His request was voted down. He replied to this rebuff by resigning as chief of the army command. At the suggestion of Eugen Schiffer, the Democratic vice-chancellor, the cabinet decided to leave Berlin. If it remained in the capital it would be taken captive and the fight against the rebels would be stymied. Schiffer declared his willingness to stay behind and serve as the government's representative. He was authorized to inform Ehrhardt that the ultimatum had been rejected. Berlin was still wrapped in early morning darkness when the members of the government, headed by Ebert, departed by automobile for Dresden. But shortly before their departure, a decisive step was taken: the workers of the

land were called upon to stage a general strike. The hurriedly composed manifesto ran as follows:

Workers, comrades! The military putsch is under way! The Ehrhardt naval brigade is marching on Berlin in order to force a transformation of the government. These mercenaries, who fear disbandment, want to put reactionaries in the various ministerial posts. We refuse to bow to this military pressure. We did not make the revolution in order to acknowledge once again the bloody rule of mercenaries. We will make no deal with the Baltic criminals. Workers, comrades! . . . Use every means to prevent this return of bloody reaction. Strike, stop working, strangle this military dictatorship, fight . . . for the preservation of the republic, forget all dissension! There is only one way to block the return of William II: to cripple the country's economic life! Not a hand must move, not a single worker must help the military dictatorship. General strike all along the line! Workers, unite!

This call was issued in the name of the Social Democratic party. It was communicated without a moment's delay to every section of the Reich. Ulrich Rauscher, chief of the chancellery's press bureau, sought to give added weight to the document by appending to it the names of the Social Democratic members of the government. This he did without consulting the individuals in question; there was no time for such formalities. The manifesto presented German Social Democracy in a new role. In the past the party had almost invariably frowned on the use of the general strike. But in the desperate situation which now obtained, there seemed no other way to save the republic.

Early on the morning of March 13, 1920, the Ehrhardt brigade arrived at the Tiergarten in Berlin and there awaited the government's reply. The police, far from interfering with the rebels, shouted words of approval. As soon as he learned that the ultimatum had been rejected, Ehrhardt ordered his men to occupy the government buildings and hoist the old imperial colors. No resistance was encountered. Kapp proclaimed himself chancellor. Luettwitz assumed the ministry of war and named General Ernst von Wrisberg, one of his closest friends, chief of the army command. Traugott von Jagow, former police chief of Berlin, was made minister of the interior. The insurgents sustained a serious blow when Seeckt refused to place himself at their disposal. His example was followed by a number of staff officers attached to the ministry of war.

The mantle of leadership now rested on the shoulders of Wolfgang Kapp. His career until this moment had been far from distinguished. He had spent the best years of his life as a provincial bureaucrat. He had served, faithfully but not brilliantly, the interests of his Junker masters. He was the son of a German liberal, Friedrich Kapp, who had migrated to the United States in 1848. There Wolfgang was born. Domiciled at an early age in the land of his forebears, he grew up to be a fanatical chauvinist and pan-German. During the war he had repeatedly attacked Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg, even going so far as to accuse that statesman of being secretly in the employ of the British government. Kapp was regarded in his own circles as a man of iron will. Actually, however, he was given to vacillation. This trait cropped up directly he assumed power and contributed significantly to the failure of the putsch.

In their first manifesto to the nation, the rebels announced that they were establishing a government of "order, freedom and action." Order was clearly their primary concern. They instructed army commanders throughout the land to proceed against all foes of the new regime and to keep the press tightly muzzled. Simultaneously, however, they attempted to curry favor with the industrial masses by promising far-reaching concessions to labor. It was one thing to issue pronouncements and make promises; it was quite another to get on with the urgent tasks of administration. Key bureaucrats in some of the ministries flatly refused to co-operate with Kapp. The Reichsbank said no to his frantic requests for money. Some of his subordinates, especially those in charge of the press bureau, proved hopelessly incompetent. To make matters worse, an inspired purposefulness reigned in the camp of his enemies. The Independents, the Democrats and the Centrists aligned themselves with the Ebert-Bauer government and backed the call for a general strike. Only the Communists stood aloof. Insisting that there was no real difference between people like Ebert and Kapp, Noske and Luettwitz, they disassociated themselves from the strike call and announced a policy of neutrality. But this one note of discord was drowned out by the great roar of approval which came from the German proletariat. The trade unions responded magnificently to the appeals of their leaders. By the late afternoon of March 14, 1920, the greatest strike the world had ever seen was a reality. The economic life of the country came to a standstill. In the face of this

stupendous demonstration of proletarian unity and discipline, the Communists relented and climbed on the bandwagon. Kapp attempted to break the strike. He issued a stringent decree "for the protection of labor peace." He made picketing a capital offense. But his efforts proved totally ineffectual.

In the meantime, the Ebert-Bauer government, from its temporary refuge in Dresden, issued a proclamation designed to give further impetus to the nation-wide movement of resistance. The cabinet, the proclamation asserted, had left Berlin in order to avoid bloodshed. As for the putsch, it would collapse very shortly. Until that happened, every German citizen would remain under obligation to be loyal and obedient to the legal government which alone was entitled to give orders. The Kapp-Luettwitz regime stemmed from an act of violence perpetrated by a few men; as such it was bereft of authority both at home and abroad. True, certain officers had broken their oath and had rallied to the support of the rebels. But the army as a whole would be well advised not to follow their example. This warning was only partially successful. In its attitude toward the Kapp-Luettwitz regime, the army split on regional lines. The units stationed in the eastern provinces aligned themselves with the rebels; those stationed in the west and south remained loyal to the Ebert-Bauer government. The local authorities, too, were divided. Bavaria, Wuertemberg and Baden declared their solidarity with the legitimate government, but some of the other *Laender* went over to the insurgents.

Of considerable importance was the attitude of the two right-wing parties. They had plenty of unkind things to say about the Bauer cabinet. They accused it of seeking to retain power in contravention of the constitution and ascribed the current upheaval to this alleged disregard for legality. They adopted a different tone when speaking of the rebels. But their allusions to Kapp were too guarded to commit them to any particular course of action. They had evidently decided that wait-and-see tactics would serve their interests best so long as the fate of the putsch remained in doubt.

At the suggestion of Ludendorff, who was one of the insurgents' behind-the-scenes advisers, Kapp promised to stage new elections as soon as order had been restored. He hoped thereby to win the active support of the Nationalists and the People's party. His calculation seemed sound enough. The conservative bloc was shouting to high heaven that the composition of the national assembly no longer reflected the popular will. But Kapp's adversaries gave him no chance to

profit by this gesture. The legitimate government, which had moved to Stuttgart, issued a call for the immediate convocation of the national assembly. On March 16, Schiffer conferred with spokesmen for the parties of the Weimar coalition. He got them to agree on the following points: a date for new elections would have to be set without delay; the constitutional provision for popular election of the president was not to be tampered with; the Bauer cabinet was to be reorganized at the earliest possible moment. This agreement produced the intended effect. Having gotten what they wanted, the two parties of the Right decided that Kapp, whose prospects grew hourly darker, had become a liability. They advised him to discuss terms with his foes. At the behest of his superiors, Pabst went to see Schiffer. The latter laid down hard conditions. He demanded the withdrawal of Kapp and Luettwitz and the removal from Berlin of every soldier who had participated in the putsch. The Bauer government added a few stipulations of its own. It insisted on the dissolution of the Ehrhardt brigade and the subjection of all troops in the Berlin area to the command of a trustworthy general.

The morning of March 17, 1920, found Kapp in a very unhappy frame of mind. The Berlin police and some of the troops supporting his regime were demanding his resignation from the chancellorship because they wanted Luettwitz, their favorite, to assume supreme authority. Realizing that his position had become thoroughly untenable, Kapp decided to capitulate. That very morning, at 10 A.M., he announced his resignation. He explained his decision in the following proclamation to the country: "After the Bauer government resolved to fulfill the basic political demands whose rejection led on March 13 to the establishment of the Kapp government, Chancellor Kapp regards his mission as accomplished and is resigning. . . ." He added that he was transferring full executive power to Luettwitz. He closed with an allusion to the need for a united national front against the "destructive danger of Bolshevism."

The legitimate government at Stuttgart exulted over Kapp's departure, but it refused to have anything to do with Luettwitz. Spokesmen for all the political parties except the Independents and the Communists met in Berlin to consider the situation. Stresemann, who was working to bring about some sort of *modus vivendi* between the rival camps, contrived to have Luettwitz present. But the Social Democrats refused to sit at the same table with the general and walked out. Luettwitz did not help matters by insisting that he be permitted to re-

tain the chancellorship for at least two weeks. However, late in the afternoon of March 17, he yielded to the urgent counsels of certain of his fellow-generals and submitted his resignation. Together with Kapp and other high-ranking insurgents, he promptly left Berlin. Schiffer took charge of affairs in the name of the Bauer government. That evening Ebert, at the suggestion of Reinhardt, appointed Seeckt acting chief of the army command.

6

The principal reason for the failure of the Kapp putsch was the general strike. The virtually total paralysis of the country's economic life created insuperable difficulties for the insurgents and doomed their enterprise from the very beginning. Organized labor's display of solidarity on this occasion proved that its will to act was equal to its comprehension of the issues involved. Notice was served upon the enemies of German democracy that the spirit of revolution still lived among the industrial masses. The events of March, 1920, demonstrated conclusively that a united and dynamic proletariat was essential to the preservation of the republic. In making common cause with the Social Democrats, the Independents had placed their concern for the national welfare above party considerations. And even the Communists, whose divisive tactics were soon to bear fruit, had been forced to go along. Other factors contributed to the failure of the putsch. These included the loyalty of certain bureaucrats in the ministries of war, finance and the interior to the legal government of the Reich; the refusal of several outstanding military leaders, headed by Seeckt, to place their services at the disposal of the insurgents; the ambiguous, do-nothing attitude of the parties of the Right; the personal shortcomings of Kapp himself.

The leaders of the putsch fared variously. Kapp and Max Bauer fled the country. Ailing and dispirited, Kapp eventually gave himself up. He died in prison on June 12, 1922, while awaiting trial. Bauer stayed away until he was amnestied. Luettwitz severed his connections with the army and settled down to a quiet existence in Schweidnitz. Ehrhardt found a haven in Munich, where he identified himself with secret terrorist organizations. Jagow was tried in 1921 and sentenced to five years' imprisonment. He was amnestied in 1924, thanks to the clemency so often displayed toward men of his stripe.

7

Although the Kapp putsch proved a complete fiasco, it made possible a victory of lasting importance for the reactionary elements in Bavaria. When General Arnold von Moehl, who commanded the armed forces in the Munich area, heard of the happenings in Berlin, he decided to launch a coup of his own. During the night of March 13-14, 1920, he informed Hoffmann, the Bavarian premier, that it would be impossible to guarantee the safety of the government unless all political authority was vested in the army command. Hoffmann promptly assembled his cabinet and urged rejection of the general's ultimatum. But most of the ministers shrank from such a course. They supported the proposal put forward by the Democratic leader, Ernst Mueller-Meiningen, who suggested that Moehl be allowed to have his way and that Gustav von Kahr, the governor of the province of Upper Bavaria, be entrusted with the administration of civil affairs. Thereupon Hoffmann resigned; his colleagues had no choice but to do likewise. At once a committee representing the socialist parties, the trade unions and the factory workers' councils issued a call for a general strike. In explaining its action the committee declared: "The Junker reaction is here. We must fight it together. We must preserve the socialist republic." On March 16, Kahr was elected premier by the Bavarian Diet. The Social Democratic deputies decided, by a vote of 32 to 8, to spurn representation in the new government. They charged that Kahr, by working with Moehl on the night of March 13-14, had made himself politically unacceptable. This action marked the definitive end of Social Democratic participation in Bavarian cabinets. The mainstay of Kahr's ministry was the Bavarian People's party. It had recommended his election as premier. It supported with enthusiasm the conservative program to which he was committed. On a good many national questions, this group did not see eye to eye with its parent organization, the Catholic Center. In the elections to the national assembly, it had campaigned under the Centrist banner. But it had subsequently severed this tie and struck out on its own. It did not relish the progressive outlook of the Center's left wing. Besides, an independent status in the national legislature would afford it a better opportunity to indulge its particularist bias.

On the morrow of Kahr's election to the premiership, the leaders of the strike, sensing the futility of further overt resistance, ordered their followers to go back to work. While calm was thus being restored in

Munich, momentous developments seemed to be in the making in Stuttgart, the capital of near-by Wuerttemberg. There, on March 18, 1920, the national assembly convened. About 200 deputies were present. Of these only three were Nationalists and only one belonged to the People's party. Chancellor Bauer delivered the main address. Adverting to the putsch, he declared that German democracy had won a complete victory. But the country, he went on, had not yet regained stability. An ominous increase in communist activity was evident. Bloody clashes were occurring in certain sections of the Reich, and responsibility for this unfortunate state of affairs rested squarely upon the shoulders of Kapp and Luettwitz. Bauer's closing words were addressed to the Allies. He implored them not to aid the chauvinist elements in Germany by making impossible demands upon the Reich. The ensuing debate turned out to be a most lively affair. The honors for plain and vigorous speaking went to Scheidemann. He demanded a thorough purge of the Reichswehr. Every officer who had shown himself unreliable must be dismissed, he said. And all those who had aided and abetted the conspirators must be drastically punished, even to the extent of being deprived of their property. To this the spokesmen for the parties of the Right demurred, but they were careful at the same time to emphasize their loyalty to the Weimar constitution.

Directly the national assembly adjourned, Noske, drawing attention to Scheidemann's speech, submitted his resignation. This he did in response to pressure that was being exerted by certain elements within his own party. For some time Scheidemann supported by several of his Social Democratic colleagues, had been denouncing the war minister's pronounced predilection for members of the officers' corps. Hitherto Noske had always managed to come out on top, thanks to the support given him by the majority of his party's representatives in the national assembly. But now the mood of the Social Democratic deputies was grim; they were inclined to be less tolerant of Noske and his coddling of militarist counterrevolutionaries. Giving free vent to their feelings, they called for the establishment of a supreme people's court in Leipzig which would be charged with the task of trying the members of the Kapp government. They demanded, in addition, the creation of six lower people's courts whose function it would be to chastise local Kappists by confiscating their property.

In the meantime, a basic divergence had developed between the leaders of organized labor and the parties of the Weimar coalition. The general strike, these parties contended, had completely achieved its purpose—reestablishment of the Weimar system—and should therefore be terminated forthwith. But the trade unions felt otherwise. They wanted more than a mere return to the regime which they had rescued. They insisted on a number of sweeping reforms and indicated they would refuse to call off the strike or permit the Bauer government to resume office until their demands had been granted. They had their way. On March 20, 1920, the day the German government returned to Berlin, the three parties and the trade unions concluded the following nine-point pact: 1) The composition of new governments in Prussia and the Reich was to be determined only after agreement with the trade unions, which were to be accorded "a decisive voice in the formulation of economic and socio-political legislation." 2) All those who had participated in the putsch were to be immediately disarmed and punished. 3) Guilty persons were to be removed from all public administrative offices and from managerial posts in industrial establishments. Their places were to be taken by "trustworthy leaders." 4) Administrative reform "on a democratic basis" was to be instituted at once with the approval of the trade unions. 5) Existing social legislation was to be expanded, and new statutes, which would guarantee "complete economic and social equality" to the working classes, were to be enacted. A "liberal civil service law" was to be passed forthwith. 6) The socialization of those branches of the national economy "that are ripe for it on the basis of the recommendations of the Commission on Socialization" was to be initiated without delay. The Coal and Potash Syndicates were to be owned by the government. 7) All available foodstuffs were to be effectively controlled and, if necessary, seized. Profiteering was to be severely repressed. 8) "Associations of counterrevolutionary troops" were to be disbanded. Their duties were to be assigned to military organizations composed of "trustworthy republican elements of the population, particularly organized manual workers, clerical employees and civil servants. . . ." 9) Noske and the Prussian minister of the interior, Wolfgang Heine, who had likewise submitted his resignation, were to withdraw from public office.

The program laid down in this agreement was ambitious, to say the least. The first point was particularly arresting. Its effectuation would

have made the trade unions the final authority on questions of economic and social policy. The administrative and managerial purge demanded in Point Three was likewise an objective of revolutionary proportions. Point Five, with its reference to "complete" equality in the economic and social spheres, suggested nothing less than a redistribution of the nation's wealth. This contrasted sharply with the relatively modest request put forward in Point Six, which in essence was merely a reaffirmation of the program advocated by the Social Democrats. Familiar, too, was the demand in Point Eight for the creation of a truly republican army. Had the agreement of March 20, 1920, been carried out, German democracy would have been placed on a much surer footing, and the subsequent history of the Reich might have followed a vastly different course. There was no lack of understanding of what the situation called for, of what had to be done to preserve the republic. But the requisite will, courage and leadership were conspicuously absent. Once again a golden opportunity was thrown away.

Announcement of the nine-point pact was accompanied by a proclamation from the trade unions declaring the general strike at an end. But the situation was suddenly complicated by the refusal of the Independents to sign the proclamation. They wanted, they said, to think the matter over before making up their minds. They were not sure that the time had come to call off the strike. The Communists assumed a more militant stand. They took issue with the authors of the proclamation, insisting that the strike should not be terminated until certain conditions had been fulfilled. These included the arming of the workers and the complete subjugation of the reactionary officers' clique. Swayed by the attitude of the Independents, most of the workers in the Berlin area refused to heed the back-to-work order. The trade-union leaders and their Social Democratic allies urged the Independents to put aside partisan considerations and come out four-square for the proclamation. The strike, they wailed, was being unnecessarily prolonged. The Independents countered with the contention that the nine-point agreement represented labor's minimum program. Further concessions, especially in the military realm, would have to be granted to insure the preservation of the republic. When Bauer stated his readiness to consider such concessions, the Independents declared themselves satisfied and agreed to support the proclamation. The Communists, however, persisted in their demand that the strike be continued. It was in the face of violent opposition from them that the workers of Berlin decided on March 23, 1920, to return to their jobs.

In the meantime, Noske's letter of resignation had been lying unanswered on the president's desk. For obvious reasons, Ebert was reluctant to dispense with the services of his hard-boiled minister of war. He was just as vulnerable as Noske to the charge of partiality to reactionary militarists and of excessive severity to radicals of the Left. Were he to get rid of Noske, he would, in a sense, be repudiating the policy of collaboration which he and Groener had inaugurated on November 10, 1918. Yet he, like Noske, was still convinced of the rightness of that policy. Ebert's position was therefore a painful one. But the pressure to which he was subjected was now too great to be resisted. On March 22, 1920, he finally gave in and accepted Noske's resignation. The Social Democratic party's choice for the vacated post was its chairman, Otto Wels. But he declined the honor, preferring the less arduous duties of a party functionary. With no other candidate of their own ready to hand, the Social Democrats acquiesced in the appointment of Otto Gessler, a member of the Democratic party. There was something grimly ironic about the substitution of Gessler for Noske. For the new minister of war promptly fell under the spell of the military. The generals found him a willing tool. Through him they acquired more and more influence in all matters pertaining to national defense. They used him to make themselves increasingly independent of parliamentary control. Gessler held this post during the greater part of the republic's abbreviated career: from March, 1920, until January, 1928. Under the cover which he provided, the military caste was able, with comparative impunity, to tighten its hold on the Reichswehr and thus make itself the strongest power in the state.

The resignation of Noske necessitated a further reshuffling of the cabinet. But this process ran afoul of insuperable difficulties, with the result that the entire ministry was forced to resign on March 26, 1920. Mindful of their decisive role in frustrating the Kapp putsch, the trade unions now came forward with the contention that one of their leaders should be made chancellor. But Carl Legien, head of the Free trade unions and organized labor's most powerful figure, declared that he was not interested. A similar attitude was expressed by Wissell, whose name had also been suggested by the trade unions. Thereupon Hermann Mueller was asked to form a new government. This he did on March 27. His cabinet, which was destined to be short-lived, consisted of Social Democrats, Democrats and Centrists. Resolution of the ministerial crisis in the Reich had its parallel in Prussia. There, too, the parties of the Weimar coalition collaborated to fashion a new gov-

ernment. This reshuffle brought to the fore two of the strongest personalities in the Social Democratic party: Otto Braun, who assumed the premiership, and Carl Severing, his choice for the post of minister of the interior. For years—in fact, until 1932, when they were both ousted by Chancellor Papen—Braun and Severing played a vital role in German political life. They were admired by their party comrades and respected by most of their adversaries.

On March 29, Mueller announced his program before the national assembly. Germany, he declared amid applause from the Left, was in need of a thorough house-cleaning. Her administrative system and her economic life would have to be democratized. This was in keeping with the government's firm resolve to fulfill the demands of the trade unions. Specific reforms were already being envisaged. These included a new law for the settlement of industrial disputes, more adequate provision for the victims of the war and the adoption of broadly conceived labor and civil service codes. Mueller talked at considerable length about the all-important subject of socialization. He pointed out that socialization of the electrical industry had been agreed to in principle and that government operation of the mining industry was being contemplated. Indeed, he went so far as to indicate that complete nationalization of the Coal and Potash Syndicates was only a matter of time. Gessler supplemented the chancellor's remarks by promising that the Kappists would be punished and that the Reichswehr would be reconstructed along democratic lines as soon as it had been purged of unreliable elements.

9

In most parts of Germany the collapse of the Kapp putsch had been followed by the restoration of public order. But the situation was very different in the Ruhr. Here the anti-Kapp strike staged by the workers had played into the hands of left-wing Utopians. These radicals were not content with checkmating the putschists. Their aim was social revolution, and to its accomplishment they dedicated themselves with fanatical zeal. They managed to obtain control of several important localities, including Essen, Duesseldorf, Muelheim, Elberfeld and Oberhausen. They organized a Red army which proved strong enough to force the withdrawal of the regular troops stationed in the area. They were quelled early in April, 1920, after a series of bloody encounters with the Reichswehr.

Chapter 13

GERMANY MOVES TOWARD THE RIGHT

I

THE disturbances in the Ruhr had a dramatic sequel. In the course of its operations against desperately resisting remnants of the Red army, the Reichswehr moved into the demilitarized zone. By way of reprisal, French troops proceeded on April 6, 1920, to occupy Frankfurt a. M., Darmstadt, Hanau and Dieburg. Still other localities were occupied during the next twenty-four hours. The commander-in-chief of the Allied armies of occupation in the Rhineland, General Degoutte, issued an explanatory proclamation. The German government, he charged, had yielded to the pressure of the "military party." It had ordered "a sudden offensive . . . against the working class of the Ruhr." In so doing, it had violated one of the most important provisions of the Versailles Treaty. The government of France was therefore compelled to intervene. Its action was not inspired by hostility to the working-class population of the Ruhr. Its sole purpose was to insure compliance with the terms of the treaty. Occupation of the newly overrun localities would be terminated as soon as the Reichswehr had evacuated the demilitarized zone.

The Mueller government reposed no trust in these assurances. It regarded the French action as a move designed not only to sever the occupied area from the rest of the country but to encourage particularist and separatist movements in the Catholic west and south of Germany. Such movements were of long standing, and of long standing, too, was France's desire to dismember the Reich. German suspicions were further aroused by the hypocritical attitude of French army leaders. They were, by and large, reactionary in their social