

"My Four Years in Germany"---By Ambassador James Watson Gerard

Bethmann-Hollweg Elucidated for United States Envoy the Terms on Which Germany Would Make Peace

FIRST ACCOUNT OF GERMANS' TERMS AS BASIS OF PEACE

Ambassador Gerard, who, during the four years preceding the declaration of war, was in Berlin and in constant touch with German affairs has written a vivid story of his experiences. This story the Washington Times will publish in daily installments of which the following is the first. No document of diplomacy was ever more vital or more interesting.

By JAMES W. GERARD.

American Ambassador at the German Imperial Court, July 28, 1913, to February 4, 1917.

(Copyright, United States, Canada, and International, 1917, by the Public Ledger Co.) From the time when Chancellor von Bethmann-Hollweg first spoke of peace I had asked him and others what the peace terms of Germany were. I could never get any one to state any definite terms of peace. On several occasions, when I asked the chancellor whether Germany were willing to withdraw from Belgium, he always said, "Yes, but with guarantees."

Finally, in January, 1917, when he was again talking of peace, I said: "What are these peace terms to which you refer continually? Will you allow me to ask a few questions as to the specific terms of peace?"

"First. Are the Germans willing to withdraw from Belgium?" The chancellor answered, "Yes, but with guarantees."

I said, "What are these guarantees?" He replied: "We must, possibly, have the forts of Liege and Namur. We must have other forts and garrisons throughout Belgium. We must have possession of the railroad lines. We must have possession of the ports and other means of communication. The Belgians will not be allowed to maintain an army, but we must be allowed to retain a large army in Belgium. We must have the commercial control of Belgium."

I said: "I do not see that you have left much for the Belgians, excepting that King Albert will have the right to reside in Brussels with an honor guard."

And the chancellor answered: "We cannot allow Belgium to be an outpost of England" (Vorwerk).

"I do not suppose the English, on the other hand, wish it to become an outpost of Germany," I returned. "Especially as Von Tirpitz has said that the coast of Flanders should be retained in order to make war on England and America." I then asked, "How about northern France?"

"We are willing to leave northern France," the chancellor responded, "but there must be a rectification of the frontier."

"How about the eastern frontier?" I asked.

"We must have a very substantial rectification of our frontier," he said. "How about Roumania?"

"We shall leave Bulgaria to deal with Roumania."

"How about Serbia?"

"A very small Serbia may be allowed to exist, but that is a question for Austria. Austria must be left to do what she wishes to Italy, and we must have indemnities from all countries, and all our ships and colonies back."

Of course, "rectification of the frontier" is a polite term for "annexation."

Address to the Senate.

On January 22, 1917, our President addressed the American Senate, and in his address he referred to his note of December 18 sent to all belligerent governments. He stated, referring to the reply of the entente powers to his peace note of December 18: "We are that much nearer to the definite discussion of the peace which shall end the present war."

In this address also, referring to the answers received from the belligerents to his peace note of December 18, the President said:

"The central powers unite in a reply which stated merely that they were ready to meet their antagonists in conference to discuss terms of peace. The entente powers have replied much more definitely, and have stated in general terms, indeed, but with sufficient definiteness to imply details, the arrangements, guarantees, and acts of arbitration which they deem to be indispensable conditions of a satisfactory settlement. We are that much nearer a definite discussion of the peace which shall end the present war."

The President further referred to a world concert to guarantee peace in the future, and he said:

"The present war must first be ended. We owe it to candor and to a just regard for the opinion of mankind to say that so far as our participation with guarantees of future peace, it makes a great deal of difference in what way and upon what terms it is ended."

Without Victory.

He said, further, that the statement of both of the groups of nations at war had declared that it was not part of the purpose they had in mind to crush their antagonists, and he said that it must be implied from these assurances that the peace to come must be "a peace without victory."

In the course of his address President Wilson remarked that "statesmen everywhere are agreed that there should be a united, independent, and autonomous Roumania" in a place he said: "So far as practicable, moreover, every great people in the struggle toward a full development of its resources and its powers should be assured a direct outlet to the highways of the sea, and, where this could not be done by cession of territory, that it could be arranged by the neutralization of direct rights of way. He closed by proposing, in effect, that the nations of the world should adopt the Monroe doctrine, and that no nation should explain its policy for any other nation or people."

After the receipt of the ultimatum of January 21 from Germany, in my conversation with Chancellor von Bethmann-Hollweg, he referred to this peace note of December 18 and the peace speech of January 22 of the President.

I must say here that on my return to Germany I went very far in assuring the chancellor and other members of the government of the President's desire to see peace established in the world. I told them that I believed the President was ready to go very far toward forcing any nation which refused a reasonable peace; but I also impressed on all the members



DR. SPAHN, LEADER OF THE CATHOLIC PARTY.

of the government with whom I came in contact my belief that the election had not in any way altered the policy of the President, and I warned them of the danger to our good relations if ruthless submarine warfare should be resumed.

Von Bethmann-Hollweg's Verdict.

The chancellor, however, at this interview after January 31, said that he had been compelled to take up ruthless submarine warfare because it was evident that President Wilson could do nothing toward peace. He spoke particularly of the President's speech of January 22, declaring that in it the President had made it plain that he considered the answer of the entente powers to his peace note formed a basis for peace, a thing impossible for Germany even to consider.

The chancellor said, further (and this was a criticism I heard not only from him but from many Germans) that when the President spoke of a united and independent Poland he evidently meant to take away from Germany that part of Poland which had been incorporated in the Kingdom of Prussia and give it to this new and independent kingdom, thereby bringing the eastern frontier of Germany within two hours by motor from Berlin, and, further, when the President spoke of giving each nation a highway to the sea, that he meant the German port of Dantzig should be turned over to this new State of Poland, thereby not only taking a Prussian port, but cutting the extreme eastern part of Prussia from the remainder of the country.

I replied that these objections appeared to me very frivolous; that there should be a peace, had said that all parties were apparently agreed that there should be a peace; if Germany was fighting merely a defensive war, as she had always claimed, that she should be greatly delighted when the President declared that all the world was in favor of a peace without victory—which meant, of course, that Germany should be secured from that crushing and dismemberment which Germany's statesmen had stated so often that they feared.

I continued that I was sure, when the President spoke of the united and

Independent State of Poland, he had, of course, not had reference to Poland at any particular period of its history, but undoubtedly meant that Poland as constituted by Germany and Austria themselves. In referring to the right of a nation to have access to the sea, I held that the President had in mind Russia and the Dardanelles, rather than any attempt to take a Prussian port for the benefit of Poland.

Determined Germany.

The chancellor answered that one of the principal reasons why Germany had determined upon a resumption of ruthless submarine warfare was because of this speech of the President to the American Senate.

Of course, the trouble with this feeling and criticism of the President's speech made by the chancellor is that the orders for the resumption of ruthless submarine warfare had been given long before the news of the speech came to Germany.

My commission had read: "Ambassador to Germany."

It is characteristic of our deep ignorance of all foreign affairs that I was appointed ambassador to a place which does not exist. Politically, there is no such place as "Germany." There are the twenty-five States, Prussia, Bavaria, Wurttemberg, Saxony, etc., which make up the "German Empire," but there is no such political entity as "Germany."

These twenty-five States have votes in the Bundesrat, a body which may be said to correspond remotely to our United States Senate. But each State has a different number of votes. Prussia has seventeen, Bavaria six, Wurttemberg and Saxony four each, Baden and Hesse three each, Mecklenburg-Schwerin and Brunswick two each and the rest one each. Prussia controls Brunswick.

Reichstag Nothing But a Debating Society.

The Reichstag or imperial parliament corresponds to our House of Representatives. The members are elected by manhood suffrage of those over twenty-five. But in practice the Reichstag is nothing but a debating society because of the preponderating power of the Bundesrat in our State legislatures.

At the head of the ministry is the chancellor, appointed by the Emperor; and the other

ministers, such as colonies, interior, education, justice and foreign affairs, are but undersecretaries of the chancellor and appointed by him. The chancellor is not responsible to the Reichstag, as Bethmann-Hollweg clearly stated at the time of the Eastern affair, but only to the Emperor.

It is true that an innovation properly belonging only to a parliamentary government was introduced some seven years ago, viz., that the ministers must answer questions (as in England) put them by the members of the Reichstag. But there the likelihood to a parliamentary government begins and ends.

The members of the Bundesrat are named by the princes of the twenty-five states making up the German Empire. Prussia, which has seventeen votes, cannot seventeen members of the Bundesrat, or one member who, however, when he votes casts seventeen votes. The votes of a state must always be cast as a unit. In the usual procedure, bills are prepared and adopted in the Bundesrat and then sent to the Reichstag; if passed, they then return to the Bundesrat, where the final approval must take place. Therefore, in practice, the Bundesrat makes the laws with the assent of the Reichstag. The members of the Bundesrat have the right to appear and make speeches in the Reichstag.

Like Ordinary Law.

The fundamental constitution of the German empire is not changed, as with us, by a separate body, but is changed in the same way that an ordinary law is passed; except that if there are fourteen votes against the proposed change in the Bundesrat, the proposition is defeated, and further, the constitution cannot be changed with respect to rights extending to some of the members of the twenty-five states without the assent of the state.

In order to pass a law a majority vote in the Bundesrat and Reichstag is sufficient. There is a quorum present, and a quorum is a majority of the members elected in the Reichstag, and in the Bundesrat the quorum is our State legislatures. The members of the Reichstag are present at a regularly called meeting, providing the chancellor or the vice chancellor attends.

The members of the districts sending members to the Reichstag have not been changed since 1872, while, in the meantime, a great shifting of population as well as great increase of population has taken place. And because of this the Reichstag today does not represent the people of Germany in the sense intended by the framers of the imperial constitution.

Much of the legislation that affects the everyday life of a German emanates from the parliaments of Prussia, Bavaria, and Saxony, etc., as with us in our State legislatures. The purely legislative power of the ministers and Bundesrat is, however, large. These German states have constitutions of some sort. The grand duchies of Mecklenburg have no constitution whatever. It is understood that the people themselves do not want one, on financial grounds, fearing that a system of direct taxes by the grand duke out of his large private income would be saddled on the people.

The other states have constitutions varying in form. In Prussia there is a house of lords and a house of deputies. The members of the latter are elected by manhood suffrage, by which the vote of one rich man voting in circle No. 1 counts as much as thousands voting in circle No. 3. It is the recognition by Bethmann-Hollweg that this vicious system must be changed which brought down on him the wrath of the Prussian country squires, who for so long have ruled the German empire. Biting places civil and military with their children and relatives.

The German Military Influence.

In considering Germany, the immense influence of the military party must not be left out of account, and, with the development of the navy, that branch of the service also claimed a share in guiding the policy of the government.

The administrative, executive, and judicial officers of Prussia are not elected. The country is governed and judged by a system of circles, branches of the government service exactly as others the army or navy. These are gradually promoted through the various grades. This applies to judges, clerks of courts, district attorneys, and the officials who govern the political divisions of Prussia, for Prussia is divided into circles, presidencies and provinces. For instance, a young man may enter the government service as assistant to the clerk of some court. He may then become district attorney in a small town, then clerk of a larger court, possibly attached to the police presidency of a large city; he may then become a minor



Program of the services in the cathedral to celebrate the completion of 500th year of leadership of Hohenzollerns.

er ministers, such as colonies, interior, education, justice and foreign affairs, are but undersecretaries of the chancellor and appointed by him. The chancellor is not responsible to the Reichstag, as Bethmann-Hollweg clearly stated at the time of the Eastern affair, but only to the Emperor.

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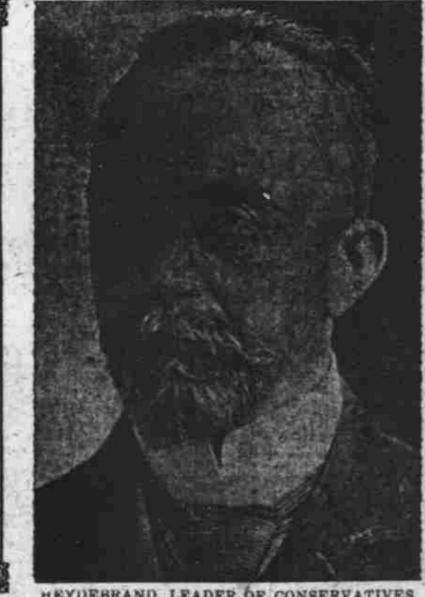
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HEYDEBRAND, LEADER OF CONSERVATIVES.

the German Reichstag. To the right of the presiding officer sit the Conservatives. Most of these are members from the Prussian Junker or squire class. They are strong for the rights of the crown and against any extension of the suffrage in Prussia or anywhere else. They form probably the most important body of Conservatives now existing in any country in the world.

Their leader, named Heydebrand, is known as the uncrowned king of Prussia.

On the left side the Social Democrats sit. As they evidently oppose the kingship and favor a republic, no Social Democratic member has ever been called into the government. They represent the great industrial population of Germany. Roughly, they constitute about one-third of the Reichstag, and would sit there in greater numbers if Germany were again restricted as that proper representation were given to the cities, in which there has been a great rush of population since the time when the Reichstag districts were originally constituted.

In the center and holding the balance of power sit the members of the Centrum, or Catholic, body. Among them are many priests. It is noteworthy that in this war Roman Catholic opinion in neutral countries, like Spain, inclines to the side of Germany, while in Germany, to protect their religious liberties, the Catholic population vote as Catholics and send Catholic members to the Reichstag, and these sit and vote as Catholics alone.

This Catholic party is the result in Germany of the kultur-kampf, or war for civilization, as it was called by Bismarck, a contest dating from 1870 between the state in Germany and the Roman Catholic Church.

(Continued Tomorrow)

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