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MUNICH-BERLIN RELATIONS, 1914-1917: THE ROLE OF
COUNT HUGO VON LERCHENFELD

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the effect of Count Hugo von Lerchenfeld, the Bavarian envoy to Berlin from 1880-1918, upon the relationship between Bavarian and the German central government from 1914-17. Count Lerchenfeld was chosen as the focus of this thesis because of Bavaria's important position within the Reich and because of the amount of political influence which this particular envoy exercised in both Berlin and Munich. The unusual stresses which World War I placed upon Berlin-Munich relations accentuated the importance of Count Lerchenfeld, making this period a critical one for study.

The major source for this thesis is the edited correspondence between Count Lerchenfeld and Count Georg von Hertling, Minister President of Bavaria from 1912-17. Also helpful were Manfred Rauh's studies of the constitutional structure and parliamentary development in Imperial Germany and Karl Heinz Janssen's analysis of the conflict between the states and Berlin during the wartime period.

An examination of the letters revealed that Lerchenfeld acted as a moderating influence upon Munich in its relations with the central government. Through adept diplomacy and close contact with both governments,

Lerchenfeld prevented the Bavarian government from overreacting to the problems caused by centralization, war aims, submarine warfare, and the increase in power of the military and the Reichstag and, in some cases, facilitated collaboration between Hertling and Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg against the Chancellor's political enemies. Careful study of the source material also illustrates the Chancellor's dependence upon Bavarian backing for the success of many of his policies and demonstrates that although Bavarian demands posed many problems for Bethmann Hollweg, Munich's support of the Chancellor in times of crisis made their relationship a delicate mixture of conflict and cooperation.

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INTRODUCTION

During World War I, the German Empire was plagued with many internal problems which were rooted in the prewar period. Some of the most serious of these institutional conflicts in Imperial Germany resulted from the attempts by the imperial parliament (Reichstag) and the federal states to exert more influence over the government. Although historians have done much work on the Reichstag, they have paid relatively little attention to the states and their contributions to the government's problems in the World War I period.

Two exceptions are Manfred Rauh's studies of Bismarck's constitutional system and of parliamentary development in the second Reich¹ and Karl Heinz Janssen's study of the war aims of the federal states during the first world war.² Through a detailed analysis of the legislative concerns of the Bundesrat, or the German Federal Council, in the prewar period, Rauh shows the conflict inherent in the Bismarckian system between states' rights and any increase in parliamentary power.

¹Manfred Rauh, "Föderalismus und Parlamentarismus im Wilhelmschen Reich (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1973); Manfred Rauh, Die Parlamentarisierung des Deutschen Reiches (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1977).

²Karl Heinz Janssen, Macht und Verblendung (Göttingen: Musterschmidt Verlag, 1963).

In the process, he provides a thorough explanation of the states' position within the government and of their role as a bulwark against further democratization. Unlike Rauh, Janssen limits his study to a discussion of the conflict between the states and the central government over war aims from 1914-1918. Based primarily upon extensive research in the Bavarian state archives in Munich, Janssen's work makes little effort to deal with constitutional problems. He focuses instead on the detrimental effects this conflict had on the government's attempts to solve wartime problems.

Although both Rauh's and Janssen's works are vital to an understanding of the position of the states in Imperial Germany, neither of them, taken alone, offers a sufficient explanation of the relationship between the states and the central government during World War I. Rauh's interest in parliamentary development precludes an intensive examination of the states' views on such issues as war aims, and he limits his discussion of the war to one chapter on Count Georg von Hertling's chancellorship. Janssen provides the necessary coverage of the war, but because of his sympathy for the central government and for Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, he underemphasizes the importance of the constitutional structure in creating the problems which existed between the states and the government in Berlin.

Instead, he chooses to blame these problems on the states' greed for annexations.

One means of reaching a balance between these two extremes is to approach this problem of the relationship between the states and the central government from a new perspective, that of the federal diplomats, whose function was to facilitate better relations between the states and Berlin. This task was never more difficult than during World War I, which served as a strenuous test of this new federal unity.

One diplomat in particular, Count Hugo von Lerchenfeld, the Bavarian envoy to Berlin from 1880-1918, was essential in maintaining federal unity during the war years, and an analysis of his role in this complex relationship lends several advantages to this approach. First, as the Bavarian envoy to Berlin, Lerchenfeld's position was a crucial one; Bavaria was the second most powerful state in the Reich, and many of the problems which the government encountered with the states during the war centered on Bavaria. Second, since Count von Lerchenfeld served as the vital communications link between Berlin and Munich, he was well versed in the views of both of these governments on any particular situation, and his reports summarize the arguments put forth by both sides. Finally, the influence Lerchenfeld exercised in both Munich and Berlin makes him a dominant figure in any study of Bavaria's relationship to the

Reich in the Imperial period. Well respected in all political circles, Lerchenfeld's expertise reached beyond that of states' rights alone, and he was able to gain access to information which was denied to other envoys and which he relayed to the Bavarian government in private letters to the resident Minister President of Bavaria.

Ernst Deuerlein edited the private correspondence between Count von Lerchenfeld and the Minister President of Bavaria from 1912-1917, Count Georg von Hertling.³ The bulk of this correspondence consists of Lerchenfeld's letters to Hertling explaining recent developments in Berlin. Yet enough of Hertling's letters to Lerchenfeld exist to give the reader an idea of Hertling's perceptions of the wartime situation. Deuerlein also included the infrequent correspondence between Hertling and Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg as well as a few letters from Lerchenfeld to King Ludwig III of Bavaria. Lerchenfeld's reports to the Bavarian monarch, however, were atypical, since much of the negotiating process excluded King Ludwig.

This private correspondence served some functions which the official diplomatic reports could not. First,

³Ernst Deuerlein, ed., Briefwechsel Hertling-Lerchenfeld, 1912-1917, 2 vols. (Boppard am Rhein: H. Boldt, 1973); hereafter cited as BWHL.

it gave Lerchenfeld and Hertling the opportunity to discuss their specific interests. Second, it enabled them to express their personal opinions of crucial matters, which, in turn, enables the reader to discern the motivations behind many of their responses to different situations.

The topics of the correspondence in the years 1914-1917 vary. Since the war dominated German political life during this period, Lerchenfeld devoted much space to a discussion of military campaigns. On other matters, such as economics, however, Lerchenfeld spent little time, since the Bavarian government had other officials in Berlin to handle such matters. Only when economic issues threatened to upset Berlin-Munich relations did Lerchenfeld refer to them in the letters. The envoy also satisfied Hertling's curiosity about foreign affairs, an interest Hertling developed during his terms in the Reichstag.

The letters in the correspondence pertinent to this thesis are those dealing with wartime questions which affected the relationship between Bavaria and the central government or those which provide some insight into Lerchenfeld's role in Berlin's political life. These letters provide the reader with an understanding of Lerchenfeld's role as mediator between Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg and Minister President Hertling in the discussion of such crucial wartime issues as annexations,

unrestricted submarine warfare, centralization of the economy, and the rise in power of the army and the Reichstag. They also show Lerchenfeld's influence on broader political events such as the resignation of Chancellors Bethmann Hollweg and Georg Michaelis. Finally, by giving the reader some insight into the decision making process in Munich, the letters survey many of the areas of conflict and cooperation between Berlin and Munich and explain Bavarian motivations in its dealings with the central government. These letters, combined with Rauh's explanation of the constitutional struggles and Janssen's intensive study of the war aims issue, ultimately raise the larger question of how detrimental or helpful Bavaria was to Berlin during World War I. Before addressing these critical points, however, a brief review of Bavaria's position within the Reich is in order.

CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND: BAVARIA IN GERMANY, 1800-1914

German history has been to a large extent a history of individual German states, and one of the major problems in German history has been the problem of unification. As one of the larger and older states of Germany, Bavaria was an important force in the struggle against a strong central government and could claim such figures as Henry the Lion, the Welf duke who rebelled against Frederick Barbarossa, as proof of its abiding commitment to the particularist cause. The real hero of Bavarian independence in the modern period, however, was not a Bavarian, or even a German king, but an emperor of France. As a result of treaties with Napoleon, Bavaria ceased to be a tribal duchy, increased its territory by one third, and became a kingdom. Furthermore, it modernized its government and gained importance as a state.¹ These changes gave Bavaria the legal justification and the material resources to demand that its new position of power be maintained in any Germany which was established after Napoleon's defeat.

¹Eberhard Weis, "Die Begründung des modernen bayerischen Staates unter König Max I. (1799-1825)," in Handbuch der Bayerische Geschichte, ed. Max Spindler (Munich: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1974), IV, 16-38.

Part of the credit for Bavarian development must also be given to Clemens von Metternich, who acknowledged Bavaria's sovereignty and accepted Bavaria's territorial increases, with certain modifications, in exchange for a military alliance between Bavaria and Austria against Napoleon. The only matter which Bavaria considered unresolved after the Treaty of Ried with Austria in 1813 was the loss of the right bank of the Rhine Palatinate to Baden, and even on this point Metternich was willing to compromise by assuring Bavaria the return of this province upon the extinction of the Baden royal line and by agreeing that Austria would pay Bavaria 100,000 gulden per year as compensation until its return. By showing Bavaria such generosity, Metternich drew Bavaria closer to Austria and fostered Bavarian support for a "greater Germany," a Germany including Austria, during the nineteenth century.²

During the next sixty years, Bavaria struggled to preserve its sovereignty in the midst of the turmoil caused by Austro-Prussian dualism and by the growing demand for the creation of a national state. As a supporter of the "greater German" point of view, Bavaria opposed the unification of Germany under Prussian leadership in 1848-9, but with the increasing power of Prussia vis a' vis Austria in the late 1850's and early 1860's,

²Weis, 16-38.

the Bavarian government began to view some type of cooperation with Prussia as necessary to maintain the gains it had made during the Napoleonic period. During the crisis over Schleswig-Holstein in 1864, Bavaria took the first step towards a reconciliation of its differences with Prussia by agreeing to the Prussian domination of northern Germany in return for Prussia's recognition of Bavaria as a leader of the southern states. This unofficial agreement broke down, however, upon Prussia's invasion of Holstein in 1866, an action which the Bavarian government interpreted as a threat to the integrity of the federal states. In the ensuing war between Austria and Prussia, Bavaria sided with Austria.³

The Austrian loss in 1866 placed the southern states at the mercy of Prussia, which consolidated its position in northern Germany following the war by annexing Schleswig-Holstein, Hanover, Nassau, Hesse, and Frankfurt. Bismarck, however, was careful not to press his advantage too far. In a brilliant strategic move, he offered the states a lenient peace and arranged military alliances between the southern states and Prussia against France, which, after Austria's defeat, was the only possible ally left for the states against Prussia. The subsequent war against France in 1870

³Hans Rall, "Die politische Entwicklung von 1848 bis zur Reichsgründung 1871," in Handbuch, IV, 238-43; 246-51; 254-61.

served as a final boost towards unification, and after receiving certain concessions from Bismarck, Bavaria accepted unification of a "small Germany" under the leadership of Wilhelm I of Prussia.⁴

Bismarck may have created a united Reich in name, but he did not attempt to destroy the particularist tradition. Bavaria, for example, maintained some autonomy within the Reich, retaining control over its own postal system, coinage, and army, except in times of war when the Kaiser commanded the entire German army. It also continued to send diplomats to foreign nations, and, like the other German states, had its own diplomatic corps in Berlin.⁵

Although Bismarck allowed Bavaria to keep these privileges, he made sure that Bavaria did not have a decisive voice in national politics. The states were represented in the government through the Bundesrat, an assembly of appointed delegates from the states whose function was to approve all legislation which came before the Reichstag. Bismarck limited the power of this institution by denying the Bundesrat the power to appoint or dismiss the Chancellor, who, as leader of the Prussian delegation, was its chairman. Indeed, for Bismarck, the

⁴Rall, IV, 270-82.

⁵Dieter Albrecht, "Von der Reichsgründung bis zum Ende des Ersten Weltkrieges (1871-1918)," in Handbuch, IV, 283-93.

Bundesrat simply served as a clever political tool. First, it satisfied the demands of the states to be included in the government, but without giving them the power to dictate policy. Second, it established a bulwark against the further democratization of Germany. Because the delegates to the Bundesrat were appointed, rather than elected, officials, they generally supported the monarchical principle and the interests of the upper classes of society. The legislation they consequently recommended would not threaten the monarchical system.⁶

Bismarck also made certain that the principle of Prussian hegemony was preserved in the Bundesrat by basing the number of votes of each state on land size and population. As the largest state in both categories, Prussia was granted seventeen of the fifty-eight total votes; Bavaria, the next largest state, had only six. Whichever side of an issue Prussia chose to support was almost certain to triumph, especially since Prussia usually commanded the majority of the twenty-four votes of the smaller states in northern Germany.⁷

Bismarck did make one small concession to Bavaria by giving it the chair of the Bundesrat's Foreign Affairs Committee. Since this committee could only recommend policy, not enforce it, this concession was indeed a

⁶Rauh, Föederalismus, pp. 47-61; 65-75.

⁷Rauh, Föederalismus, pp. 93-4.

small one. The committee had very few responsibilities in the prewar period, when it was called to session only three times, twice in 1912 and once in 1913. The committee did assume a more important role during the war, as it met frequently to discuss foreign policy with the Chancellor. Yet this change was due more to Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg's political strategy than to an increase in the constitutional power of the states. Bethmann Hollweg used the states as a counterbalance to the increasing power of the army, the right wing groups and the Reichstag.⁸

Bismarck's constitutional system, therefore, was heavily weighted in Prussia's favor. The German Kaiser was the King of Prussia, Prussia had the controlling votes in the Bundesrat, and the Chancellor was, with the one exception of Count Georg von Caprivi (1891-94), also the Minister President of Prussia and, as such, was obligated to serve Prussia's interests as well as those of the Reich. The other states were powerless to interfere with either the Kaiser's or the Chancellor's prerogatives, although both of these men did have to consider the desires of the other states in the interest of civil peace. In addition to all of these limitations, the states also had to contend with the power of the

⁸See Ernst Deuerlein, Der Bundesratsausschuss für die Auswärtigen Angelegenheiten 1870-1918 (Regensburg: Joseph Habel Verlag, 1955).

Prussian army, an institution so awesome that even Bismarck could not totally control it. Within the Reich the Kaiser had authority over the army, and the states could not count on the King of Prussia to take their side against the Prussian army. This problematic situation worsened during the war when Kaiser Wilhelm II virtually abdicated his power to Generals Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff, leaving the states to defend themselves against the army's demands as best they could.⁹

Bismarck had succeeded in creating a constitutional system which simultaneously promoted Prussian hegemony and pacified the other political forces within Germany, but this system's structural flaws were to cause Germany much political grief during the next fifty years. Aside from the independent position of the army, two major weaknesses became apparent. First, Bismarck's constitutional structure did not lend itself easily to expansion of Germany territory, and second, it placed too much power in the hands of the Chancellor, who was vulnerable to attack from above.

The problem with any territorial expansion was that it threatened to upset the delicate balance of power between the states in the Bundesrat. Although

⁹For a discussion of the role of the Prussian army in German history, see Gordon Craig, The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945 (Oxford, 1955; rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

the balance of power weighed in Prussia's favor, a slim chance existed that the other states could win enough votes to overrule a Prussian proposal. Any increase in Prussian territory would lessen this chance; consequently, the other states would oppose it. In a similar vein, Prussia would not look kindly upon the admission of a state which was sympathetic to the southern German cause, since it might undermine the Prussian hegemony in the Bundesrat.¹⁰

What made this issue so crucial was that Alsace-Lorraine waited in the wings as a candidate for statehood from the very birth of the Second Reich. Taken from the French in 1871, Alsace-Lorraine was admitted to the Reich as a Reichsland, a status equivalent to that of an occupied territory, until such time as the government and the states determined that it could be properly incorporated into the Reich. After almost forty years, the people of Alsace-Lorraine believed they had sufficiently proved their loyalty and demanded that the government give Alsace-Lorraine statehood. The Chancellor at this time, Bethmann, Hollweg, was sympathetic to the Reichsland's cause, but the southern states opposed the action because they believed that the representatives from Alsace-Lorraine, whom Kaiser Wilhelm would appoint, would vote with Prussia, thus increasing

¹⁰Rauh, Parlamentarisierung, pp. 203-18.

Prussian power in the Bundesrat. As a temporary measure, Bethmann Hollweg worked out a compromise whereby Alsace-Lorraine was to be denied statehood but would receive three votes in the Bundesrat. He specified, however, that these votes could never be used to throw a tie vote in the Bundesrat in Prussia's favor.¹¹

Although this compromise averted a constitutional crisis, it left the problem of Alsace-Lorraine unsolved. When war broke out in 1914, Bavaria reopened the debate over what to do with the Reichsland by demanding Alsace as compensation for its participation in the war. Reluctant to agree to such a proposition but unable and unwilling to reject it out of hand, the Berlin government was forced to struggle with this complicated internal problem in the midst of a world war.

The other constitutional problem, the importance and simultaneous vulnerability of the Chancellor's position, was also a major concern for the central government both before and during the war. The Chancellor was the keystone of the German civil government, and in the positions as Chancellor of Germany, Prussian Minister President, and chairman of the Bundesrat, his power was second only to the Kaiser. Moreover, he was, in many

¹¹Dan P. Silverman, Reluctant Union (University Park: The Penn State University Press, 1972), p. 146.

respects, the only connecting link between the different parts of the government.¹²

The organization of this system was, of course, created by Bismarck for himself, since he believed that he was the person most capable of running Germany. Yet, because even Bismarck could not run Germany single-handedly, he established a relatively small bureaucracy under the leadership of a Secretary of State. He made certain, however, that he remained the ultimate authority by forbidding the different offices of his bureaucracy to have contact with one another or with the Kaiser without his approval. He also forbade correspondence between Prussian offices and Reich offices and intimidated the Prussian ministers into seeking his approval on all matters. In short, Bismarck was aware of every move planned by the Reich and Prussian governments.¹³

The problem with this system was that the Chancellor had only as much power as the Kaiser wished him to have. Initially, Bismarck did not have to worry about this aspect of the Chancellor's position, because Kaisers Wilhelm I and Frederick Wilhelm allowed him to do as he pleased. With the ascent of Kaiser Wilhelm II to the throne, the situation changed. Determined to run

¹²J.C.G. Röhl, Germany Without Bismarck (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 20-5; Rauh, Föederalismus, pp. 62-5.

¹³Röhl, pp. 20-5.

the government himself, Wilhelm began to assert his royal prerogative, and the power struggle, which rapidly developed between the Kaiser and his Chancellor, ended in Bismarck's dismissal in the spring of 1890.¹⁴

As a result of the Kaiser's drastic reduction of the power of the Chancellor's office, the next two Chancellors, Count Georg von Caprivi and Prince Chlodwig Karl Viktor zu Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, were little more than Wilhelm's puppets. The mechanics of the governmental machine also changed. No longer under Bismarck's thumb, the different departments of the government, such as the Prussian Ministry and the central bureaucracy, began pursuing their own interests, and powerful individuals worked behind the scenes to shape policy and determine appointments. The Kaiser, influenced by first one individual and then another, haphazardly attempted to enforce his ideas, even if they conflicted directly with the policies of his Chancellor, and within a few years, Bismarck's delicate creation lapsed into political chaos.¹⁵

According to historian Manfred Rauh, the states benefited from this change, since they could make back-room deals with the departments and individuals who happened to be exercising the most influence at any

¹⁴Röh1, pp. 25-56.

¹⁵Röh1, pp. 85-98.

particular time.¹⁶ Count von Lerchenfeld claimed, however, that the states' power actually decreased because it was dependent to some extent on the strength of the Chancellor. As long as Bismarck was in firm control of the government, the states had only to convince him of the soundness of their plans to see them enacted. Under Caprivi and Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, the states had less leverage, because the Chancellor - their only link with the rest of the government - lacked the power to enact their plans. The new policy of having to "knock on many doors" instead of just one was, in Lerchenfeld's opinion, less effective.¹⁷

The first Chancellor who attempted to broaden his support and to regain some of the power which Bismarck's successors had lost was Count Bernhard von Bülow, who was appointed in 1900. Because he could not expect the Kaiser to support a strengthening of the Chancellor's office, he attempted to use the parties in the Reichstag as a power base for this purpose. During his first years in office, he courted the Catholic Center Party, and when the Center proved unreliable, he tried to build a coalition of the Conservatives, National Liberals and

¹⁶Rauh, Parlamentarisierung, p. 24.

¹⁷Hugo Graf von Lerchenfeld-Köffering, Erinnerungen und Denkwürdigkeiten, ed. Hugo Graf von Lerchenfeld (Berlin: E.S. Mittler und Sohn Verlag, 1935), pp. 193-4.

Progressives which would back his policies. These efforts only produced more fragmentation among the Reichstag parties, and by the end of Bülow's chancellorship, German political life was even more confused than when he was appointed.¹⁸

Because Bülow had so splintered the parties, his successor, Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, was forced to turn towards the states and, in particular, towards Bavaria for his support.¹⁹ This strategy was advantageous to Bethmann Hollweg in two ways. First, Bavaria would, in most cases, give Bethmann Hollweg its support in return for some influence in governmental affairs. Second, Bavaria, as a Catholic state, had a strong membership in the Center Party, and the man who became Minister President in 1912, Baron Georg Hertling, had recently been the head of the Center. Through his good relations with Bavaria, therefore, the Chancellor could hope to gain some political backing from the Center and from the Catholics of Germany.²⁰

Bethmann Hollweg's elevation of Bavaria's position within the Reich had an effect upon the relationship between Bavaria and the central government during the war.

¹⁸Rauh, Föderalismus, pp. 245-53; Parlamentarisierung, pp. 147-53.

¹⁹Rauh, Parlamentarisierung, p. 153.

²⁰Deuerlein, BWHL, I, 87.

First, it created the possibility of Bavaria's using its new importance to the Chancellor as a means of gaining more influence over the government's decisions on important war issues. Since Bethmann Hollweg needed Bavarian support even more during the war than he had before and since he had to avoid at all costs the possibility of the empire's disintegration, he would not be able to refuse out of hand the demands made by Bavaria.²¹ Paradoxically, Bavaria's new status also presented an opportunity for greater cooperation between Munich and Berlin, because the Bavarian government would not want to antagonize a Chancellor who was friendly to it.

How Bavaria would use this new position of power depended to a large extent upon the actions of two men, Count von Lerchenfeld and Count von Hertling. Because of the importance of these men to the Bavaria-Reich relationship and the relatively small amount of scholarship concerning them,²² it might be necessary to give a short biographical sketch of each before analyzing their wartime actions.

Hugo Philipp Peter Count von and zu Lerchenfeld auf Köfering and Schönberg saw his career simply:

²¹For an explanation of the difficulties of Bethmann Hollweg's position, see Janssen, Macht.

²²The one exception is the recent publication, Winfried Becker, Georg von Hertling, 1843-1919, I, (Mainz: M. Grünewald Verlag, 1981).

On November 12, 1880, I became [the Bavarian] ambassador in Berlin; on November 12, 1918, I left that post and retired to the old home in Köfering. That is my entire life history.²³

This statement in his memoirs is not as much of an exaggeration as it seems, because although Count von Lerchenfeld's record thirty-eight years of service as the Bavarian envoy to Berlin accounted for less than half of his life, he did spend most of his early years preparing, albeit unknowingly, for this diplomatic position.

Lerchenfeld was born on October 13, 1843 in Berlin, where his father, Maximilian Joseph Count von and zu Lerchenfeld, served as the Bavarian envoy from 1839-49. When the child Hugo was six, the Bavarian government transferred his father to Vienna, where he remained as Bavarian envoy until his death in 1859. These formative years in Berlin and Vienna were important ones for Lerchenfeld, because as a result of his father's position, he became acquainted with the upper echelons of these societies.²⁴

Upon graduation from the gymnasium, Lerchenfeld studied law in Munich and Bonn. Perhaps just as importantly, while in Bonn, he was admitted into Borussia

²³Lerchenfeld, Errinerungen, p. 178. All translations of source material in the original German in this thesis are my own.

²⁴Deuerlein, BWHL, I, 50.

Corps, an exclusive society whose members included such Prussian aristocrats as Herbert von Bismarck and Wilhelm II. His membership in this society and his love of hunting proved invaluable aids to him in his years in Berlin, since they insured his admittance into the homes of Berlin's elite and placed him on an equal footing with the Prussian aristocracy.²⁵

Lerchenfeld took his first state legal examination in 1865 in Munich and began his apprenticeship as a lawyer in Traunstein in 1866. One year later he applied for admission to the Bavarian Civil Service. As the aristocratic son of a former Bavarian diplomat with the recommendation of Prince Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, he had no trouble being accepted as a candidate for admission. He passed his exams on January 17, 1868, and after being formally admitted into the Bavarian diplomatic corps, he received his first assignment, that of "student" attache in Paris from January to December of 1869, a job he performed well. He returned to Paris in the fall of 1870 as secretary to Count Otto von Bray-Steinburg, who conducted the negotiations for Bavarian acceptance into the Reich. During this stint in Paris, Lerchenfeld met Bismarck for the first time.²⁶ Lerchenfeld was impressed by the Chancellor, and although not

²⁵Deuerlein, BWHL, I, 50.

²⁶Deuerlein, BWHL, I, 51.

blind to Bismarck's faults and mistakes (he was, for example critical of the Kulturkampf), Lerchenfeld came to admire and respect the founder of the Second Reich.²⁷

Lerchenfeld's first major position with the new Reich was embassy secretary and charge d'affaires of Bavaria in St. Petersburg from 1871-5. The Bavarian government then appointed him Bavarian ambassador to Vienna in 1876, a position which he held until his appointment as Bavarian envoy to Berlin in 1880.²⁸

As ambassador in the Prussian capital, Lerchenfeld had the responsibility of chairing the Bavarian delegations to the Bundesrat. Initially, he was somewhat anxious about his duties there, claiming that he had little training in law, economics, or speechmaking. But the Bavarian government reassured him that it had other minor officials to take care of the details of Bavaria's affairs in the Bundesrat. What the government needed was a diplomat, someone who could get along with Bismarck and who could report to its officials about events in Berlin.²⁹

Lerchenfeld's anxieties probably stemmed from the fact that the Berlin post was recognized as the most

²⁷Over one half of Lerchenfeld's memoirs is a discussion of the pros (mostly) and cons of Bismarck's policies.

²⁸Deuerlein, BWHL, I, 52.

²⁹Lerchenfeld, Errinerungen, p. 183.

difficult position for a Bavarian ambassador. According to Karl Georg von Treutler, the Prussian envoy to Munich, it was hard to get along with Bismarck and do one's duty to the Bavarian government at the same time.³⁰ Since the founding of the Reich, Bismarck had already requested the recall of two ambassadors, Baron Pergler von Perglas and Baron Gideon von Rudhart. To be offered this assignment so early in his career was, therefore, both a compliment and a challenge for the young diplomat.

Lerchenfeld stated that he was chosen for this prestigious and problematic position because Bismarck liked him.³¹ The two men had worked together during the forced resignation of King Ludwig II, who was discreetly removed from the Bavarian throne because of mental instability, and Bismarck had evidently formed a favorable opinion of Lerchenfeld.³² Another reason for his appointment was his amiability, and he credited this quality for the longevity of his stay in Berlin.³³

Personality was obviously an important factor in Lerchenfeld's career, and by all accounts his was

³⁰Karl Georg von Treutler, Die Graue Excellenz. ed. Karl Heinz Janssen (Berlin: Ullstein Verlag, 1971), p. 54.

³¹Lerchenfeld, Errinerungen, p. 178.

³²Lerchenfeld, Errinerungen, pp. 168-9.

³³Lerchenfeld, Errinerungen, p. 178.

quite charming. Not one to be overly modest, Lerchenfeld stated that his most successful qualities were:

an extensive flexibility, certain tact, the ability to make a good first impression upon people, and for these reasons, the ability to ingratiate myself with others.³⁴

History, however, does not have to depend on his words alone. Treutler described Lerchenfeld as "tactful, adroit, loyal, and industrious. . . a product of many generations of statesmen."³⁵

Lerchenfeld's aristocratic background, his membership in the Borussia Corps, and the memory of his father opened many doors for him in Prussian society. He spent many of his weekends and holidays hunting with the Prussian aristocracy, and he counted Herbert von Bismarck as one of his close personal friends, a fact which caused him some problems at the time of Bismarck's dismissal.³⁶

Lerchenfeld was also well schooled in the social graces and had the reputation of being an excellent host. During his term as Bavarian envoy, he oversaw the construction of a new building for the Bavarian delegation in Berlin, which had the advantage of a central location. The combination of Lerchenfeld's skill and the geography

³⁴Lerchenfeld, Errinerungen, p. 179.

³⁵Treutler, p. 54.

³⁶Deuerlein, BWHL, I, 59-61.

of the building, according to historian Ernst Deuerlein, made the Bavarian embassy the center of political and social life in Berlin.³⁷

All his charm, manners and social standing would have meant little if Lerchenfeld had not also possessed a sharp mind. He had the rare ability to cut through extraneous matter to get to the crux of a situation, and he was capable of judging what was politically feasible and what was not. As early as November of 1914, for example, Lerchenfeld perceived that Germany was not going to win the war and that the best strategy would be to settle for peace on the basis of the status quo ante bellum.³⁸ He was also an astute politician, realizing that to achieve one's goals, one needed to make compromises whether they were with the Chancellor, the Conservatives, or the Socialists. Finally, he had the quality of reserve, or Zurückhaltung.³⁹

All of these traits made Lerchenfeld a successful and well respected diplomat, not only in Bavaria, but also in Berlin. The Bavarian government so trusted his abilities that it allowed him a "great freedom of

³⁷Deuerlein, BWHL, I. 64-5.

³⁸Lerchenfeld-Hertling, (L-H), 6 May 1916, Letter 255, BWHL, II, 612-3.

³⁹Deuerlein, BWHL, I, 55.

movement in many things."⁴⁰ As for Berlin, Wilhelm I supposedly remarked upon meeting him that "The new Bavarian envoy is a true gentleman. . . .when I saw him for the first, I asked myself which of us was really the nobler one."⁴¹ Wilhelm II remarked that "When I speak to Count Lerchenfeld, one might think that he is the Kaiser and I am the Bavarian envoy."⁴² According to Count Bogdan von Hutten-Czapski, Lerchenfeld was so well respected that he was suggested as the successor to Chancellor Bülow in 1908.⁴³

Since he was able to exercise a certain amount of influence, it would be worthwhile to examine Lerchenfeld's political sentiments. Although he took pride in belonging to no one political party or group, he was not apolitical. As an admirer of the Bismarckian system, Lerchenfeld sought to protect the federalist structure of the Reich from rabid particularism and parliamentary development. Unlike some Bavarians, Lerchenfeld did not dislike or necessarily distrust Prussia on principle. Instead, he viewed Prussia as an ally against centralization and at times against the other

⁴⁰Lerchenfeld, Errinerungen, pp. 179-80.

⁴¹Deuerlein, BWHL, I, 55.

⁴²Deuerlein, BWHL, I, 55.

⁴³Bogdan Graf von Hutten-Czapski, Scchzig Jahre Politik und Gesellschaft, 2 vols. (Berlin: E.S. Mittler und Sohn Verlag, 1936), II, 1.

states, which he claimed often voted against Bavarian measures in the Bundesrat due to their envy of Bavaria.⁴⁴

As for political parties, Lerchenfeld came to view the Conservative Party as outdated and insistent, but he also believed that socialism was "the spirit of negation,"⁴⁵ and he feared revolution as a result of the war. Unlike Hertling, he was not overly concerned with religious issues. Negotiating terms for the repeal of the Jesuit Laws was part of his job, but it never became an obsession with him as it was with Hertling. During the war, for example, he advised Hertling to stop pressuring the government about the repeal because it might upset the civil peace (Burgfrieden).⁴⁶

In foreign affairs, Lerchenfeld preferred the Bismarckian tradition to the new politics of Kaiser Wilhelm II. He viewed the outbreak of World War I with pessimism and blamed it on the braggadocio and influence of the navy and on the foreign policies of Chancellor Bülow.⁴⁷ As a diplomat, Lerchenfeld quite

⁴⁴Lerchenfeld, Errinerungen, pp. 196-7.

⁴⁵Lerchenfeld, Errinerungen, p. xvi.

⁴⁶L-H, 20 November 1914, Letter 140, BWHL, I, 364-5.

⁴⁷Lerchenfeld, Errinerungen, p. 434.

naturally believed that the Foreign Office, not the army or the navy, should conduct diplomacy.

Lerchenfeld shared this dislike of the army's interference in civilian affairs with his superior, Count Georg von Hertling. Despite their agreement on certain political issues, however, they were exact opposites in personality. In fact, if one were asked to describe a character which was the antithesis of Lerchenfeld's, one would probably choose Count von Hertling as a model.

Hertling was born on August 31, 1843 in Darmstadt. His father, Baron Jacob von Hertling, chamberlain to the Grand Duke of Hesse and councillor to the high court in Darmstadt, died when Georg was only six years old. Unlike Lerchenfeld, Hertling did not inherit connections in the upper echelons of Prussian and Viennese society from his father. Instead, he grew up in the shadow of his pious, Catholic mother, depending on the charity of his relatives for his excursions into the outside world.⁴⁸

Perhaps as a result of his childhood experiences, Hertling's personality developed in direct contrast to that of his contemporary, Count von Lerchenfeld. Instead of the charm, sophistication, and elegance

⁴⁸Ernst Deuerlein, Deutsche Kanzler (Munich: Paul List Verlag, 1968), pp. 194-5; hereafter cited as DK.

of Lerchenfeld, Hertling possessed a serious, introspective, and introverted nature. Bülow described Hertling as having the character of a Dutch Calvinist,⁴⁹ and the historian Ernst Deuerlein labeled him as "colorless."⁵⁰ Unfortunately for Hertling, his serious, almost pristine demeanor often left him open for ridicule. Bülow quoted Prince Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst as saying that Hertling had "'never drunk a good glass of wine, never kissed a pretty woman, and never had a good fitting pair of pants.'"⁵¹

Despite these apparent failings in his character, Hertling somehow managed to have successful academic and political careers. He began his university studies in Münster in 1861 with the half formed intention of becoming a priest. After conferring with his mother, he decided against that calling. He then transferred to the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich in the fall of 1862, where he decided to pursue a degree in philosophy with the ultimate goal of promoting Catholic scholarship.⁵²

Shortly after making that decision, Hertling enrolled in the University of Berlin, since, ironically,

⁴⁹Deuerlein, BWHL, I, 8.

⁵⁰Deuerlein, BWHL, I, 9.

⁵¹Deuerlein, BWHL, I, 8.

⁵²Deuerlein, BWHL, I, 10-11; DK, p. 195.

he could not understand or adapt himself to the less serious lifestyle of Munich. Hertling remained in Berlin until the summer of 1864, when he passed his orals in philosophy. As a reward for this accomplishment, he treated himself to a trip abroad. Not one to be sidetracked by the idle pleasures of parties and hunting, Hertling toured Italy and visited the Pope.⁵³

While completing his dissertation entitled "A Comparison of the Metaphysical Fundamental Principles of Schopenhauer with the Aristotelian Striving in Nature," Hertling took a position as an instructor at the Friedrich Wilhelm University in Bonn in 1867. Unlike Lerchenfeld, however, Hertling's career did not progress quickly. Trouble arose almost immediately at the university over Hertling's political and religious convictions. The Austro-Prussian War of the previous year had upset Hertling, because, as Bülow stated, "He (Hertling) was for Austria and for a greater Germany with all his heart and soul."⁵⁴ Hertling's attitude did not go unnoticed by his colleagues and superiors, and their uneasiness about Hertling intensified when he refused to sign a petition against the papal doctrine of infallibility. The final breach came when Hertling

⁵³Deuerlein, BWHL, I, 11.

⁵⁴Bernhard von Bülow, Memoirs of Prince Bülow, trans. F.A. Voigt, ed. Franz von Stockhammern, 4 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1931), I, 553.

signed a petition protesting the expulsion of the Jesuits during the Kulturkampf. As a result of these actions, he remained at the instructor level for thirteen years.⁵⁵

Although his lack of promotion caused Hertling to feel bitter about the academic world, it opened new doors for him, since he began to look outside of the university to politics for opportunities for advancement. His chance came when Karl von Savigny, the Reichstag representative for Koblenz-St. Goar, died in 1875. Hertling ran as his replacement and was elected to the Reichstag as a member of the Center Party.⁵⁶

Hertling's area of expertise during his first years in the Reichstag from 1875-90 was labor relations. As an admirer of Ludwig Windthorst, an important leader of the Center Party in its early years, Hertling opposed the state's large role in labor relations, arguing instead for the formation of social organizations to protect the workers' rights. Although Hertling's views of labor relations were undercut by the passage of Bismarck's bills for invalid and old age insurance, his work in the Reichstag earned him the recognition he had not won during his instructorship in Bonn, and both his academic and political careers flourished. He formed

⁵⁵Deuerlein, BWHL, I, 13.

⁵⁶Deuerlein, BWHL, I, 14.

and became lifelong president of the Görres Society, a society for Catholic professors, and under pressure from the Prussian Minister of Culture, the Friedrich Wilhelm University appointed him Professor Extraordinary (Extraordinarius) in 1880. Two years later he was given a chair in philosophy at the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich, and he began to gain the trust and good will of the Bavarian government.⁵⁷

After serving fifteen years in the Reichstag, Hertling retired from political life, intending to concentrate on his family, his professorship, and the Görres Society. Unable to remain very far from the political arena, he was appointed as a lifelong councillor to the crown in the senate of the Bavarian parliament, and Luitpold, Regent of Bavaria, offered him the position of Minister of Culture in 1895. His "retirement" ended in 1896, when he was elected as Illertissen's representative to the Reichstag, a position which he held until 1912. He gained respect and recognition from the central government in 1897-8 when he broke with the rest of the Bavarian representatives and voted in favor of increasing the naval budget. As a result of this action, Bonn offered him another position at the university, an olive branch which Hertling refused. Hertling also began to make a name

⁵⁷Deuerlein, BWHL, I, 16-22.

for himself in foreign affairs as the central government's emissary to Rome. His crowning achievement was his appointment as the head of the Center Party in 1909.⁵⁸

Hertling and Lerchenfeld became well acquainted during Hertling's term as head of the Center. Hertling respected the influence Lerchenfeld exercised in Munich, and Hertling's position in the Center Party made him an important connection for Lerchenfeld. Hertling's experience in the Reichstag led Lerchenfeld to recommend him to succeed Baron Friedrich Krafft von Grailsheim as Minister President of Bavaria in 1912. Hertling's appointment came as a surprise to some observers of the Bavarian political scene, but because of the tensions between the crown and the Bavarian Parliament, a "king's man" such as Lerchenfeld or a Bavarian politician would have angered either side. As an "outsider" of some renown, Hertling made the perfect compromise.⁵⁹

Initially, Hertling was hesitant to accept the appointment because of his love of his work in the Reichstag and his feeling that he was not trusted in Bavaria. He would be the first parliamentary member ever to become Minister President of Bavaria, and some people feared that he would encourage the democratization

⁵⁸Deuerlein, BWHL, I, 22-3.

⁵⁹Deuerlein, BWHL, I, 69.

of the system. Despite all of his reservations, Hertling managed the job quite well until October of 1917, when he resigned to become Chancellor of Germany.⁶⁰

According to his biographer, Winfred Becker, Hertling was not "a practical materialist, a pragmatic on principle, a polished skeptic, (nor) a nationalist," but a man who would have been happier living during the time of Goethe.⁶¹ Historian Arthur Rosenberg describes him as a conservative Catholic who favored the establishment of a middle class constitutional monarchy during his term as Chancellor.⁶² Although Hertling's actions as Chancellor remain outside the scope of this thesis, Rosenberg's analysis hits the mark. Hertling's letters to Lerchenfeld show a fear of revolution, a basic hostility to the Socialist Party, and an opposition to the strengthening of the left wing parties or any drastic increase of parliamentary power at the expense of the states or the middle class. On this point, Hertling and Lerchenfeld agreed, although Lerchenfeld was more aware of the need for compromise with the Reichstag.⁶³

⁶⁰Deuerlein, BWHL, I, 36-7.

⁶¹Becker, pp. 281-2.

⁶²Arthur Rosenberg, *Imperial Germany*, trans. Ian F.D. Morrow (Frankfurt am Main, 1931; rpt. Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), pp. 201-2.

⁶³Compare L-H, 2 April 1917, Letter 359 BWHL, II, 826-9 with Hertling-Bethmann Hollweg, 4 April 1917, Letter 42, BWHL, II, 1014-6.

Religion also played a large role in Hertling's political philosophy. According to historian Ernst Deuerlein, Hertling often tried to use his position as Minister President of Bavaria to solve church problems, a thesis the Hertling-Lerchenfeld correspondence affirms. One of Hertling's fears during World War I was that the Pope would speak out against Germany's involvement in the war, forcing the German Catholics to choose between their country and the Pope.⁶⁴

Although Lerchenfeld and Bethmann Hollweg were not as concerned as Hertling about the impact of the war on German Catholicism, the three men did share common problems. At the top of the list stood war aims. The Bavarian and central governments argued about whether or not Germany should annex territory, which territories should or should not be annexed, and whether or not Berlin should compensate Munich in case of a gain for Germany. The two governments also discussed the suitability of military commanders, the wisdom of enforcing unrestricted submarine warfare, and the dangers of parliamentary reform and of the political ambitions of the military. The centralization process which occurred as a result of the war added more friction to this delicate relationship,

⁶⁴Deuerlein, BWHL, I, 37; 39.

since Munich viewed each attempt at coordination of the Germany economy as an infringement upon its "independence."

These arguments weighed heavily on Bethmann Hollweg's shoulders, since he was trying to avoid any conflicts with the states which would threaten German internal unity. The states' support was crucial to the war effort and, moreover, could protect the Chancellor from challenges from opponents, such as the OHL or the Pan German League. To insure Bavarian loyalty to the central government and to himself, the Chancellor maintained a frequent dialogue with Hertling through Count von Lerchenfeld. By impressing upon Lerchenfeld the complicated and perhaps farfetched nature of Bavarian demands and complaints, he hoped to moderate the Bavarian position.

Lerchenfeld's defense of the Chancellor's policies was not always easy. Hertling had pressures of his own with which to contend. Wartime problems aggravated the Bavarian distrust of the central government and of Prussia which had existed before the war. This animosity towards Berlin took many forms and affected all political parties in Bavaria. The parties of the left disliked Prussia because of its anti-liberal policies, and they supported the Reichstag's demands for reform and peace without annexations in 1917. The government itself resented Berlin's interference in its

economic affairs and fought against the centralization process which grew out of the wartime situation. The army disliked handing over its command to the Prussians and complained about the treatment its soldiers received at the hands of Prussian officers. The right wing opposed what it viewed as the weak-kneed stance of Bethmann Hollweg on the war aims and U-boat warfare questions and aligned itself with the Pan German parties in calling for extensive annexations for Germany and Bavaria and for the initiation of unrestricted submarine warfare. King Ludwig III was vulnerable to the polemics of these right wing groups, since he wanted to increase his own dynastic holdings through the annexation of Alsace by Bavaria.⁶⁵

To keep his government together and to prevent revolution, Hertling had to pacify all of these factions or at least limit their influence. Consequently, he relied upon Lerchenfeld to impress upon the Chancellor the necessity of compromise with Bavaria. The extent to which Lerchenfeld was able to fulfill this dual role as confidant to both Berlin and Munich is the central theme of the following chapters, which will deal with three main, sometimes intertwined questions: war aims, war methods, and military versus parliamentary considerations.

⁶⁵Willy Albrecht, Landtag und Regierung in Bayern am Vorabend der Revolution von 1918 (Berlin: Duncker and Humblot, 1968), pp. 38-72.

CHAPTER II

WAR AIMS: ANNEXATIONS AND COMPENSATIONS

The outbreak of World War I placed new strains on the relationship between Bavaria and the central government. The success of the German war effort depended on close cooperation between the states and Berlin, yet the new problems introduced by the war created even more possibilities for conflict between the two. During the first year of the war, from July of 1914 until August of 1915, Munich and Berlin argued over two basic issues of annexations and the appointment of General Erich von Falkenhayn as Chief of the German General Staff.

The disagreement between the two governments over war aims remained primary for the duration of the war. As a reward for Bavarian participation in the war, the Munich government, but especially King Ludwig III, believed that Bavaria deserved certain territorial compensations. Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg equivocated, and, as a result, the two governments conducted a series of debates about the validity of Bavarian demands during the first year of the war.

Also producing much discussion between Berlin and Munich was Bavarian dissatisfaction with General

Falkenhayn's appointment, which arose because of Falkenhayn's retention of his position as War Minister and because of his lack of military success on the western front. Although the Chancellor gradually came to agree with Bavaria's request that the Kaiser remove Falkenhayn from office, he was powerless to enact such a change. His impotence, however, did not prevent Bavaria from voicing its complaints and from demanding action.

Since the bulk of the responsibility for the day to day negotiations on these problems fell on the shoulders of Count Hugo von Lerchenfeld, he arranged meetings between Minister President Georg von Hertling and Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, delivered messages between the two governments, and kept Bavaria appraised of political, military, and diplomatic developments. But he acted as more than just a communications device, stating his opinions, urging certain courses of action, and calling attention to new problems.

During the July crisis in 1914, however, Lerchenfeld played a minimal role. He did report to Hertling on July 2 that Serbia's refusal to accept Austrian help in tracking down those responsible for the assassination of Franz Ferdinand could lead to a conflict between Austria and Serbia, but, in his opinion, it would only be a limited war between the two countries.¹ Perhaps

¹L-H, 2 July 1914, Letter 102, BWHL, I, 303.

in light of this belief, Lerchenfeld left Berlin on vacation and did not return until the last week of July.

Although an error in judgement, Lerchenfeld's absence probably did not make a great difference. Hans von Schoen, the Bavarian chargé d'affaires in Berlin, kept Hertling informed about the progress of the negotiations, and Lerchenfeld did return in time to represent Bavaria during the meeting of the Bundesrat which voted in favor of the war.

The outbreak of the war in August depressed Lerchenfeld, because he believed that Germany had not prepared very well diplomatically for the war. This mistake, he wrote Hertling, was the fault not of the political leaders, who were correct in their support of Austria-Hungary; rather the navy's insistence on a large fleet had helped to complete Germany's diplomatic isolation. As a result:

We made England into an enemy by the development of our sea power. We already had enough enemies with France and Russia and should not have brought another one down around our necks.²

Lerchenfeld's pessimism was atypical of the German national mood of patriotic fervor during the war's early weeks. The invasion of Belgium in August only increased such feeling, as certain groups within Germany

²L-H, 3 August 1914, Letter 116, BWHL, I, 326.

began to plan and campaign for the annexation of Belgium. Bavaria was not immune to this war excitement, and King Ludwig III, who had an exaggerated sense of his own importance, expected rich rewards for Bavarian participation in the war. He expressed his viewpoint quite clearly in a meeting with Wilhelm von Schoen, Prussia's representative at the Bavarian court, on August 15. He warned Schoen that Bavaria would not tolerate the same treatment it had received at the peace settlement in Paris in 1871, when Bavaria had not even recovered the territory it had lost in 1866. He knew Bismarck had been a "great man," but the lack of compensation had angered him. He understood Prussia's desire for territory, but this time Bavaria must also receive "something." The "something" Ludwig had in mind was Alsace, but he also demanded that Belgium remain in German hands after the war, since Antwerp might make a convenient port for Germany south of the Main.³

Hertling hurriedly relayed an account of this conversation to Lerchenfeld so that the latter could counteract any adverse reaction. Fortunately for the Bavarian government, the news apparently went no farther than the Chancellor's office, and there was no further

³Beilage, Hertling-Lerchenfeld (H-L), 15 August 1914, Letter 121, BWHL, 333-4.

mention of it in the letters. Ludwig was not always so lucky, and one of Lerchenfeld's important functions during the war was to quiet the scandals caused by Ludwig's outspokenness.

The subject of annexations arose again on August 22 when Ludwig and Hertling paid a visit to army headquarters in Coblenz. Ludwig had gone there with the intention of speaking to the Kaiser about his annexationist plans, but Hertling and Lerchenfeld persuaded him to talk to Bethmann Hollweg instead, thus avoiding a possible conflict between the two monarchs.⁴

Bethmann Hollweg listened to Ludwig but made no promises. His hesitancy is understandable given the delicate balance of power among the federal states in the Reich. The annexation of Alsace by Bavaria would obviously enhance that state's standing within the Reich, and the other states, such as Baden, Württemberg, or Saxony, would also demand compensation from either Alsace-Lorraine or from territories in the east to maintain their status.

The question of Belgium was even more complicated. Ludwig's hope that the central government would allow Bavaria to annex Belgium was ludicrous since, if any state annexed Belgium, it would be Prussia. Such

⁴Kurt Riezler, Tagebücher, Aufsätze, Dokumente, ed. Karl Dietrich Erdmann (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck und Rupprecht, 1972), p. 202.

an enlargement of Prussian territory, however, would only increase the pressure of the other states upon the central government for annexations of their own. The creation of another Reichsland was also a debatable solution; Alsace-Lorraine had proved that occupied territories caused more problems than they solved. By September 9, the Chancellor had devised a third alternative. He would avoid the difficulties of a direct annexation by connecting Belgium to Germany through certain economic and military agreements.

Hertling was not content to allow the government in Berlin to make all the decisions about annexations and foreign affairs without the aid of the states. He wrote to Lerchenfeld on October 24 to ask his opinion of the states' taking a more active role in the decision making process.⁵ Hertling's intentions were not without constitutional grounds, since Bavaria headed the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Bundesrat.

Yet the committee had never really been active in foreign affairs before the war, so Lerchenfeld's rejection of Hertling's plan was to be expected. He explained to Hertling that foreign policy was being decided on the battlefields, not in conference rooms, and that everyone would have to wait until after the war before drawing up specific plans. He suggested

⁵H-L, 24 October 1914, Letter 129, BWHL, I, 347-8.

that Hertling rely on his reports for information, or, if he felt the need, he could talk privately with Clemens von Delbrück, Reich Minister of the Interior.⁶ Ironically enough, the Foreign Affairs Committee met frequently during the war, and although it did not shape foreign policy, it did influence government decisions on war aims and submarine warfare.

At the same time that Bavaria was attempting to persuade Bethmann Hollweg to accept Bavarian war aims, the Chancellor was trying to moderate some of these demands. On November 15, Bethmann Hollweg warned Hertling about the danger of excessive war aims. Particularly, he was concerned about a group of annexationists, headed by Grand Duke Friedrich August von Oldenburg, who, according to the Chancellor, planned to use Ludwig to gain support for his war aims program which included not only the annexations of Belgium but a southern France, under a restored Bourbon monarchy, strongly tied to Germany. Bethmann Hollweg explained to Hertling that such "utopian" plans would weaken, rather than strengthen, Germany's position.⁷

Bethmann Hollweg had good reason to be concerned, since Ludwig, with his grandiose dynastic dreams, was

⁶L-H, 29 October 1914, Letter 130, BWHL, I, 348-50.

⁷Bethmann Hollweg-Hertling (BH-H), 15 November 1914, Letter 7, BWHL, II, 966-8.

the perfect target for people like the Grand Duke. According to historian Karl Heinz Janssen, the Chancellor's admonition did not have the desired effect, and instead of modifying Bavarian demands, it raised the suspicion in Munich that the Chancellor had lost his nerve. In early December, Hertling traveled to Berlin to evaluate the situation. Before he left, Ludwig ordered him to inform the government that Bavaria wanted compensations from the war, that Alsace-Lorraine must be divided with Bavaria receiving its share, and that Belgium must be annexed either to Prussia or to Bavaria.⁸

Lerchenfeld arranged a dinner for the Chancellor and Hertling on December 1 for this purpose. Hertling first introduced the question of Belgium. Bethmann Hollweg suggested that Belgium should not be annexed, but should be linked to Germany economically and militarily. Thwarted by this statement, Hertling proposed the idea of a territorial exchange with Baden which would complete a union of the Rhine territory for Bavaria. A surprised Bethmann Hollweg advised Hertling not to pursue this plan, and Hertling answered that in case Bavaria must have another compensation.⁹

The other compensation was Alsace. Hertling spoke with the Alsatian representative, Georg Ricklin,

⁸Janssen, Macht, p. 36.

⁹Deuerlein, BWHL, I, 358-9f.

on December 2, and Ricklin assured him that Alsace would welcome a union with Bavaria.¹⁰ This meeting gave Hertling reason to hope for the success of this plan, and he suggested it the next day in another meeting with Bethmann Hollweg. Because of the obstacles involved in making Alsace-Lorraine into a federal state, the Chancellor agreed to a division of the Reichsland.¹¹ Although Janssen claims that the Chancellor did not commit himself to a division between Prussia and Bavaria,¹² his agreement satisfied Hertling, and the Minister President returned to Munich with his mission at least partially fulfilled.

The problem of war aims was not the only issue over which Munich and Berlin disagreed. The Bavarians also complained to Berlin in December that they were being left out of the decision making process on important financial matters. In particular, the Bavarian government was upset that Berlin had not consulted Bavaria about the establishment of a private corporation, the Reichseinkauf GmbH, to buy wheat abroad. This corporation moved from Hamburg to Berlin in December of 1914 and eventually became part of the governmental machinery for controlling the food supply. The government

¹⁰Deuerlein, BWHL, I, 359f.

¹¹Deuerlein, BWHL, I, 359-60f.

¹²Janssen, Macht, p. 41.

had also neglected to discuss the formation of the War Wheat Board with Bavaria, an organization created in November of 1914 to buy large quantities of wheat on the German market and to store them for later use. Hertling opposed the government's interference in the market place and accused it of adopting "'socialist principles.'"13

When Lerchenfeld heard about Bavarian complaints from Bethmann Hollweg, he asked Hertling not to put too much pressure on Berlin. He explained that the wartime situation forced the central government to take matters into its own hands and that Bavaria should understand this fact and accept it. He continued:

I certainly do not believe that because of the war Bavaria must say yes to everything. We should quietly say no if we do not like something. Only we should not show pique. This (pique) is always bad and at this time more than ever. Pique is the reserve right of Saxony. It does not suit Bavaria.¹⁴

What Lerchenfeld recommended was sound policy for war aims as well as for economics, but while it might have had some effect upon Hertling, it did not silence King Ludwig. Five days after Lerchenfeld's letter, Matthias Erzberger, the head of the Center Party, made a trip to Munich and talked with Ludwig

¹³Gerald D. Feldman, Army, Industry, and Labor (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), pp. 97-105.

¹⁴L-H, 20 December 1914, Letter 146, BWHL, I, 377.

about Bavaria's territorial ambitions. Belgium, Ludwig told Erzberger, must be annexed, and if Prussia did not want it, Bavaria did, since Antwerp would provide Bavaria with a more convenient access to the sea, a proposal whose technicalities he did not explain. The monarch also wanted Alsace and would have been willing, in exchange for the province, to renounce the reparations Austria had paid Bavaria annually since the Treaty of Ried.¹⁵

This conversation caused a scandal in government circles, since Erzberger, according to Lerchenfeld, repeated "every word that Ludwig said to him in the Foreign Office,"¹⁶ Consequently, Bethmann Hollweg sent Count Botho von Wedel, a member of the Foreign Ministry, to tell Lerchenfeld that remarks like those Ludwig made could have "disagreeable and dangerous consequences."¹⁷ Lerchenfeld explained to Wedel that there was no way to make monarchs hold their tongues, but Wedel snapped back that since that was so, it would be wise to keep people like Erzberger away from them.¹⁸ This incident demonstrates clearly how Lerchenfeld was forced to walk a tight rope in his dealings with Munich and Berlin.

¹⁵Deuerlein, BWHL, I, 379f.

¹⁶L-H, 8 January 1915, Letter 147, BWHL, I, 379.

¹⁷L-H, 8 January 1915, Letter 147, BWHL, I, 380.

¹⁸L-H, 8 January 1915, Letter 148, BWHL, I, 380-

Lerchenfeld reported all of these events to Hertling and then suggested that he write a letter to Erzberger asking him to be more discreet. Hertling followed Lerchenfeld's advice, but the damage had already been done. The envoy informed Hertling on January 21 that people in Berlin were saying that "'Bavaria wants everything'" and warning him that Bavaria would have a better chance of obtaining Alsace if it did not broadcast its desire for it.¹⁹ Lerchenfeld must have hoped that the details of the outrage over the Erzberger interview would make an impression on the Bavarian government and cause its officials to tone down their approach, if not the aims themselves. Unfortunately, it was impossible to keep all of Ludwig's statements from reaching the government's ears, and this scandal was not the only one which caused trouble between Berlin and Munich during the war.

While the discussion over the war aims progressed, Lerchenfeld and Hertling had been working behind the scenes on another project, the dismissal of Erich von Falkenhayn, who had replaced Helmuth von Molke as chief of the German general staff in September of 1914. Criticism of the army and especially of its leaders on the western front had arisen after the failure of the

¹⁹L-H, 21 January 1915, Letter 153, BWHL, I, 388-9.

Schlieffen plan and the ensuing Battle of the Marne in the fall of 1914. The resulting stalemate in the west contrasted unfavorably with the successes of Field Marshall Paul von Hindenburg and General Erich Ludendorff in the east and, along with Falkenhayn's retention of the office of War Minister, aroused Bavarian suspicions of the General.

Hertling first approached Bethmann Hollweg with questions about Falkenhayn's abilities and about his dual responsibilities as War Minister and Chief of Staff during his trip to Berlin in December.²⁰ Lerchenfeld brought the matter to the Chancellor's attention again in a meeting between the two during the last part of December. Lerchenfeld reported to Hertling that when asked about the permanence of Falkenhayn's position, Bethmann Hollweg had explained that as long as Hindenburg and Ludendorff were needed in the east, Falkenhayn would remain as Commander of the German army. Lerchenfeld interpreted this to mean that after victory in the east, Hindenburg would take command in the west. Until then, everyone would have to be content with Falkenhayn's leadership.²¹

²⁰L-H, 7 February 1915, Letter 156, BWHL, I, 398-404.

²¹L-H, 20 December 1914, Letter 146, BWHL, I, 375-8.

Hertling and Lerchenfeld let the matter rest until February, when Falkenhayn gave an interview to the press. In this interview Falkenhayn described the war as an attempt to destroy Germany and claimed that Germany would "'go down in honor, fighting for the last piece of earth and until the last man.'"²² This statement upset both Lerchenfeld and Hertling and occasioned another visit by Lerchenfeld to Bethmann Hollweg to discuss Falkenhayn's unsuitability. The Chancellor explained that the Kaiser and Falkenhayn were too close for him to recommend the General's dismissal and that he had no one with whom to replace him. He did agree, however, to suggest that the Kaiser appoint someone else as War Minister, a proposal which the Kaiser eventually accepted.²³ This compromise was as much as Lerchenfeld and Hertling could hope for from the Chancellor at that time, and the Falkenhayn controversy receded temporarily.

Less than a month later, Lerchenfeld described the war to Hertling in as pessimistic a manner as Falkenhayn had in his interview. He believed that England did not want to destroy Germany but only wanted to insure the independence of Belgium. The German people, however, would not accept the loss of Belgium, so "it

²²Deuerlein, BWHL, I, 400f.

²³L-H, 7 February 1915, Letter 156, BWHL, I, 398-404.

only remains to fight on until war weariness, the signs of which are noticeable everywhere, is stronger."²⁴ The "dream of victory" was over, and all Germany could hope for was to hold onto its position. The only concession Germany might get from the Entente when peace was made was the possibility of keeping part of its colonies in exchange for pulling out of Belgium and northern France. He believed that Germany should agree to this condition and defended his believe as follows:

Now you [Hertling] know that I have always had the viewpoint that we cannot hold onto Belgium and that even if we could, we should not. Germany is a national Reich. The few non-Germans [that we have had] up until now have only caused us trouble, because we do not possess the talent of assimilation.²⁵

While he was not totally against a Belgium economically or militarily dependent upon Germany, Lerchenfeld believed that such a plan was not feasible unless Germany defeated England. But he did not think that such a defeat was possible, especially after the early failures of German submarines.²⁶

In short, the compensation which Germany would receive from the war was the satisfaction of "having

²⁴Lerchenfeld-Lössl, 6 March 1915, Letter 161, BWHL, I, 411.

²⁵L-H, 21 March 1915, Letter 163, BWHL, I, 414.

²⁶L-H, 21 March 1915, Letter 163, BWHL, I, 414.

defended its existence against the world. . . ."27 To Lerchenfeld, this seemed adequate, but he feared that the German people would not view it in quite the same light. Instead, they might blame the government and the Kaiser for the outcome of the war and instigate a revolution. Germany consequently could not afford to make peace. It had to fight on until there was a military breakthrough or until the people got so tired of the war that they would accept a less glorious peace.28

Falkenhayn could not have been more pessimistic about the chances of a successful war. The difference was that Lerchenfeld was not the Commander of the German army giving a public interview which might undermine the confidence of the people in their government. Nor was Lerchenfeld's criticism of Falkenhayn based on one newspaper interview. He feared that any peace made by Falkenhayn, of whom many people were already critical, would lead to revolution. He based his support of Hindenburg's candidacy for chief of the general staff on the hope that Hindenburg would be able to effect a positive change on the western front and the belief that Hindenburg's popular support might

27L-H, 21 March 1915, Letter 163, BWHL, I, 413-6.

28L-H, 21 March 1915, Letter 163, BWHL, I, 413-6.

enable him to negotiate a peace based on the status quo ante bellum without the risk of revolution.²⁹

Lerchenfeld's prescient prediction of a possible revolution as a result of the war alarmed the conservative Hertling. He sent a letter to Bethmann Hollweg on March 28 calling for the replacement of Falkenhayn by Hindenburg and warning the Chancellor about the dangers of making peace at this time, since it would not be the type of peace that Germany needed. Naturally, Hertling did not want to "interfere in the constitutional authority of the government leaders in the area of foreign policy," but it was his duty to inform Bethmann Hollweg that Ludwig, "who was first a German nationalist and secondly a Bavarian," believed that a strong peace was essential because a weak peace would only lead to revolution.³⁰

Lerchenfeld wrote to Hertling on the same day and continued his discussion of the war. He believed that Germany's best chance of an acceptable peace was with Russia, but even such a peace would depend on a big victory in the east, a victory which Lerchenfeld did not consider possible at this point. The only other option was a weak peace with England, the repercussions

²⁹L-H, 3 April, 1915, Letter 167, BWHL, I, 420-3.

³⁰Hertling-Bethmann Hollweg (H-BH), 28 March 1915, Letter 9, BWHL, II, 970.

of which Lerchenfeld had already discussed in his previous letter. For the moment, however, he advised Hertling not to press Bethmann Hollweg about Falkenhayn's dismissal. He thought that the commanding generals could handle the western front unless some large campaign were scheduled, at which point Falkenhayn would have to go because the army would need someone it trusted to take command.³¹

Falkenhayn was not the only person coming under criticism as a result of the war, for certain annexationist groups had begun to campaign for Bethmann Hollweg's dismissal. Hertling informed Lerchenfeld on March 29 that there had been many complaints about the Chancellor's "weak-kneed" stance on war aims. So far Hertling had thwarted any attempt to involve the Bavarian government in intrigues against the Chancellor. He had explained to each group of petitioners that he supported Bethmann Hollweg and would not be involved in any schemes to "trip him up."³²

One of these groups, represented by Grand Duke von Oldenburg, asked Ludwig during the last of March to recommend to the Kaiser that he dismiss Bethmann Hollweg. Hertling told the Grand Duke that there might

³¹L-H, 28 March 1915, Letter 164, BWHL, I, 416-8.

³²H-L, 29 March 1915, Letter 165, BWHL, I 418-9.

come a time when he had to speak with the Kaiser about the Chancellor but that this was not it. Instead, Hertling suggested that he would write to Bethmann Hollweg and ask him to call a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Bundesrat so that the states would know "in which direction the trip was going." If the Chancellor refused, the states would have cause for complaint. Hertling then told Lerchenfeld that he hoped the Chancellor would agree to the meeting and use the opportunity to strengthen his position.³³

According to Janssen, it speaks well of Hertling that he did not enter into this intrigue against Bethmann Hollweg,³⁴ and one might well ask why he did not. Part of the explanation lies in the close cooperation that had existed between Bavaria and the central government before the war. Hertling was aware that the possible replacements for Bethmann Hollweg might not be so open to cooperation with Bavaria and might pursue policies which benefited only Prussia or which were oriented towards the further democratization of Germany.

Dieter Albrecht also attributes part of this decision to the influence which Lerchenfeld exercised upon Hertling.³⁵ Certainly Lerchenfeld's reports had

³³H-L, 29 March 1915, Letter 165, BWHL, I, 418-9.

³⁴Janssen, Macht, p. 44.

³⁵Albrecht, "Reichsgründung," IV, 368-9.

made Hertling aware that the war aims issue was not as simple as it seemed and that, because of military considerations, a change in chancellors might not improve Germany's chances of obtaining the annexations that Oldenburg wanted. Lerchenfeld had also argued against the annexation of Belgium, and although Hertling might not have agreed with Lerchenfeld's opinions, he at least was familiar with the pros and cons of the matter. To grasp the relative importance of Lerchenfeld's influences, one need only imagine what Hertling's perspective would have been if the Bavarian envoy had been a fervent particularist and annexationist.

Lerchenfeld also influenced Bethmann Hollweg's decision to agree to the meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee by informing him that the states might approach the Kaiser if he refused.³⁶ Bethmann Hollweg immediately sent a letter to Hertling accepting his suggestion. The Chancellor also proposed that the states use the conference to discuss what kind of peace they would prefer and what kind of peace they would have to accept if the military situation remained the same.³⁷

During a discussion with the Chancellor on April 1, Lerchenfeld briefed him on the Grand Duke von Oldenburg's visit, and Bethmann Hollweg expressed his

³⁶L-H, 1 April 1915, Letter 166, BWHL, I, 419-20.

³⁷BH-H, 1 April 1915, Letter 10, BWHL, II, 971.

gratitude for Bavaria's support. He explained to Lerchenfeld that peace would be made when the military judged that it was the right time. Lerchenfeld agreed but stated that it might be easier to convince the German people of the need for peace if Falkenhayn were replaced by Hindenburg. According to Lerchenfeld, if Falkenhayn were to sue for peace, "no one would believe Falkenhayn. For that reason it was necessary both for peace and for the war effort to have a man in the west who inspired trust."³⁸

Bethmann Hollweg replied that he was well aware of the criticism of Falkenhayn and wanted to know if the Bavarian government was displeased. Lerchenfeld explained that most of the complaints came from Berlin. The Chancellor then stated that there was nothing he could do. The Kaiser liked Falkenhayn, and he would be hard-pressed to find a replacement for Hindenburg in the east if he were promoted.³⁹

Reporting to Hertling, Lerchenfeld stated that he might have made some impression on Bethmann Hollweg regarding Falkenhayn. Yet, things still might not change, since Bethmann Hollweg was so slow with decisions, a fault which Lerchenfeld emphasized repeatedly. Not wanting to undermine Bavarian support of the

³⁸L-H, 3 April 1915, Letter 167, BWHL, I, 421.

³⁹L-H, 3 April 1915, Letter 167, BWHL, I, 420-3.

Chancellor, however, he was always careful to point out that there was no qualified replacement for him.⁴⁰

The Foreign Affairs Committee met in Berlin on April 8. The focus of the Chancellor's report to the ministers of the states was the necessity for patience and level-headedness during the war. He also presented his plan for a Belgium which would be tied to Germany economically and militarily after the war and stated that he was even willing to give up this demand if necessary. His minimal aims were strategic territory on the eastern and northwestern borders, war indemnities, and the maintenance of German colonies in Africa. Whether or not the states would receive war indemnities was still open to question.⁴¹

The ministers were a little surprised at the limited nature of these war aims, but they recovered in time to make a list of their own aims. Saxony wanted military fortifications in the area of Maas; Mecklenburg, a general security against future invasions; and Baden and Württemberg, a buffer zone in the southwest and the fortification of Belfort. Hertling, however, declared that he was in full agreement with what Bethmann Hollweg had said.⁴² Janssen seems a little

⁴⁰L-H, 3 April 1915, Letter 167, BWHL, I, 420-3.

⁴¹Janssen, Macht, pp. 46-7.

⁴²Janssen, Macht, pp. 47-8.

surprised that Hertling did not bring up his demands for Belgium and Alsace, yet there are possible explanations for his gesture of support. First, Lerchenfeld's reports on the war and on Belgium, combined with what the Chancellor had said, might have convinced Hertling to accept Bethmann Hollweg's program for Belgium. Since, however, the subject of the annexation of Belgium would arise again in the summer of 1915 and since Hertling never gave up his desire for Alsace, a more likely explanation is that Hertling had learned a lesson from the Erzberger scandal and was trying to be a little more reserved about Bavarian war aims. Finally, Hertling had asked for the meeting to give support to the Chancellor, and he did exactly that.

Bethmann Hollweg repaid Hertling's reticence of the next day by holding a meeting with the representatives of Saxony, Baden, Württemberg, and Bavaria to discuss Alsace-Lorraine. Because he needed the states' support both for the war effort and for himself, the Chancellor had spent the past few months working on a plan for the division of the Reichsland which he hoped would satisfy everyone. According to the Dallwitz Plan, as it was called, Prussia would receive almost all of Alsace-Lorraine except for a chunk of territory north of Strassburg, which would be

given to Baden, and the southeastern corner of Alsace, which was to be awarded to Bavaria.⁴³

The reaction of the states quickly disappointed the Chancellor's hopes. Hertling opposed the plan and argued for Bavaria's annexation of all of Alsace. Baden and Saxony objected to Bavaria's plan because they feared that it would recreate the dualism which had existed between Prussia and Austria. They suggested instead that Prussia incorporate the entire Reichsland. Württemberg proposed that Lorraine be ceded to Prussia and that Alsace be established as an independent province. In short, everyone disagreed, and the only result of the conference, according to Karl Heinz Janssen, was to drive the point home to Bavaria that it could not achieve its aims without the aid of Prussia. Janssen also argues that Bavarian support for the Prussian annexation of Belgium in the months ahead was motivated by the hope that Prussia would be more generous to Bavaria in the Alsace question.⁴⁴

Lerchenfeld expressed his opinion on Alsace-Lorraine to Hertling on April 13. If Alsace-Lorraine remained a Reichsland, he explained, then there was no need to worry about it. If, however, its status

⁴³Janssen, Macht, pp. 52-4.

⁴⁴Janssen, Macht, pp. 55-7.

changed, then Bavaria would get its share.⁴⁵ He probably hoped that this matter of fact assessment of the situation would calm Bavarian anxieties about the Reichsland and relieve some of the pressure which Bavaria was putting on the central government. This letter also summarizes Lerchenfeld's position on Alsace throughout the war, for whatever reservations Lerchenfeld had about Belgium and later about Poland, as a federalist, he supported Bavaria's right to part of the Reichsland if the government decided to divide it.

Despite the quarrel over Alsace-Lorraine, the Foreign Affairs Committee meeting in April had been a success for Bethmann Hollweg, since it provided him with a much needed political boost. Unfortunately, there was little that the states or he could do about the rising dissent in Germany, which was caused by disappointment over the lack of progress in the war. Lerchenfeld informed Hertling on May 2 that there was a renewed wave of criticism in Berlin directed at the Kaiser, who was "busy doing nothing," and his advisors, especially Bethmann Hollweg. Lerchenfeld believed that government had brought this problem upon itself by allowing the army to have such a commanding voice in the course of war, diplomatically as well as militarily. In his opinion:

⁴⁵L-H, 13 April 1915, Letter 168, BWHL, I, 423-4.

It is simply sad that such an eminent, highly respectable man [as Bethmann Hollweg] does not have the courage to stand up for what he believes is right. From the beginning he has not understood to assert his authority in headquarters, because he goes out of his way to avoid every conflict.⁴⁶

Foreign Secretary Gottlieb von Jagow was not much more assertive of his rights than the Chancellor, and as a result, the military was now running the war effort.

This interference of the military in civilian affairs had, of course, existed before the war and had provoked many complaints from Lerchenfeld, especially in the area of Anglo-German relations. The war's intensification of this problem probably did not surprise Lerchenfeld. He even told Hertling that the power which the army wielded might be bearable if the best qualified people were in the commanding positions.⁴⁷ He also stated, however, that the military was simply incapable of handling some matters, or as he phrased it a year later, "most of them [the generals] lack the talent which is most important for the politician, deciding what is feasible and what is not feasible."⁴⁸

Lerchenfeld also argued against the recent criticism of Delbrück's economic policies. He believed

⁴⁶L-H, 30 April/1-2 May 1915, Letter 171, BWHL, I, 431.

⁴⁷L-H, 30 April/1-2 May 1915, Letter 171, BWHL, I, 428-32.

⁴⁸L-H, 5 February 1916, Letter 237, BWHL, II, 579.

that anyone would have made the same mistakes as Delbrück did in waiting so late to mobilize the economy, for everyone had thought that the war would be over quickly. At least, he pointed out, the country had not gone bankrupt, and Germany had all the materials it needed to continue the struggle.⁴⁹

This report on the government's problems was typical of Lerchenfeld's diplomatic style. It relayed information but underneath recommended a policy of moderation. In this instance, it informed Hertling of the current attacks upon the government while stressing that these attacks did not reflect the complexity of the situation. It provided Hertling with a perspective which he would not ordinarily have had and facilitated smoother relations between the two governments. The problem was that Lerchenfeld's power was quite limited. He could only hope to influence policy, not dictate it. Inevitably, there were times when his opinions and governmental policy went in different directions. One crucial area in which the two had already parted company, war aims, became important again in the summer of 1915.

The debate over war aims was renewed at least partially by rumors of a separate peace with Russia. When these rumors reached Hertling during the first part

⁴⁹L-H, 30 April/1-2 May 1915, Letter 171, BWHL, I, 428-32.

of June, he wrote to Bethmann Hollweg to give his opinion of the peace. Originally, he had planned to promise the Chancellor Bavarian support for a status quo ante bellum peace with Russia. When King Ludwig read the draft of the letter, however, he became enraged, and Hertling was forced to remove that passage.⁵⁰ As a result, the letter that eventually reached the Chancellor only asked if it were true that he was trying to negotiate a status quo peace with Russia. Hertling then offered his view of how the negotiations might be arranged and suggested that one clause of the treaty might be a promise that the Germans would force the French to annul the Russian debt to France.⁵¹

Hertling did not explain how Germany would fulfill this condition of the treaty, but he apparently assumed that the Russians would look favorably upon this offer. The letters indicate that Hertling felt a certain ambivalence about the war against Russia. As a moderate conservative, he probably found it incongruous that Russia was allied with the liberal governments of France and England. He must have believed, therefore, that Russia only needed some encouragement to make peace with a nation whose political sentiments were closer to its own.

⁵⁰Albrecht, Landtag, p. 156.

⁵¹H-BH, 14 June 1915, Letter 11, BWHL, II, 942-3.

Any remaining significance that Hertling's letter might have had after Ludwig's editing was further lessened by a "misunderstanding" between Bavaria and the central government which occurred around the same time. The origin of the problem was a speech Ludwig made on June 6 to the Canal Organization in Fürth in which he mentioned the possibility of Germany's obtaining another direct outlet to the sea or, in other words, the possibility of annexing Belgium.⁵² The government was not overjoyed by this speech, especially given the pressure being exerted on it by the annexationist and U-boat groups. The situation was further complicated by remarks which Ludwig allegedly made criticizing Bethmann Hollweg for having no firm policies and for not wanting to conclude a peace with Russia. When the Chancellor heard about these statements, he called Lerchenfeld into his office and asked him to arrange a meeting with Hertling to discuss the problem.⁵³

Lerchenfeld sent a reproachful letter to Hertling on June 17 in which he relayed the Chancellor's message. He told Hertling that the charges Ludwig had made were completely untrue and proceeded to defend Bethmann

⁵²King Ludwig III in a speech to the Canal Organization, 6 June 1915, in König Ludwig III. im Weltkrieg, ed. W. Zils (Munich: T. F. Lehmann Verlag, 1917), pp. 56-9.

⁵³L-H, 17 June 1915, Letter 186, BWHL, I, 437-9.

Hollweg. "Whoever has no illusions," wrote Lerchenfeld, "must say to himself that Germany is still fighting for its existence."⁵⁴ To talk of any other aims at this point was senseless and would remain so unless the military situation changed. Of course, he continued, Bethmann Hollweg would like to conclude a peace with Russia, but the Russians were not willing to talk about peace. He also relayed the Chancellor's disappointment that Bavaria would attack him at a time when he was under pressure from the U-boat sympathizers.

Lerchenfeld reiterated his opposition to annexations. Any annexations would be dependent upon Germany's military situation after the war, but he doubted that "the results will be such that we should take on the continuing hatred of the entire world for one province [Belgium] which we can hardly assimilate."⁵⁵ The best way for Germany to gain greatness was not through annexations, he continued, but through economic strength, which meant holding onto its colonies and developing its markets. If Germany did not succeed in that, then the possession of Antwerp would mean very little. The best attitude for the government to take was neither total renunciation nor total conquest of Belgium. It should remain neutral on the issue until

⁵⁴L-H, 17 June 1915, Letter 186, BWHL, I, 457.

⁵⁵L-H, 17 June 1915, Letter 186, BWHL, I, 459.

after the war when Germany's position would be clear.⁵⁶ In short, Lerchenfeld recommended once again that the Bavarian government re-evaluate its endorsement of the annexation of Belgium and adopt a more cooperative attitude towards the central government.

Upon receipt of Lerchenfeld's letter, Hertling wrote to Lerchenfeld and Bethmann Hollweg denying that Ludwig had said anything against the Chancellor.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, Bethmann Hollweg scheduled a meeting with Hertling on July 6 to discuss the misunderstanding. In practical terms, this meant that the Chancellor planned to use this discussion to give Hertling a clearer picture of Germany's position and to modify Bavarian war aims and insure continued support of his policies.

Hertling welcomed the chance to talk with the Chancellor. Ever eager to have some influence on the important decisions of foreign policy, Hertling assured Bethmann Hollweg of his personal support of a separate peace with Russia. He suggested that Germany try to renew the Three Emperors' League and use the promise of Russian access to the Dardanelles as a peace offering, yet another indication of Hertling's pro-Russian policy.⁵⁸

⁵⁶L-H, 17 June 1915, Letter 186, BWHL, I, 457-9.

⁵⁷H-L, 19 June 1915, Letter 187, BWHL, I, 459-60; H-BH, 24 June 1915, Letter 13, BWHL, II, 974-6.

⁵⁸H-BH, 24 June 1915, Letter 13, BWHL, II, 974-6.

Before the meeting took place, Hertling was busy redefining his position on annexations. In response to a report by Crown Prince Rupprecht, Hertling stated that he no longer believed that Holland, which Rupprecht thought should be incorporated into the Reich as an independent state, would willingly join the Reich. As for Belgium, he proposed a third alternative to its direct annexation as an occupied territory or as a federal state, which was to make Belgium a Prussian crown colony. Germany would occupy the fortified places, establish a customs union with Belgium, and limit Belgium's military and diplomatic independence. He also argued against the annexation of heavily populated areas of northeastern France, since the annexation of non-Germans would not mean a "'strengthening, but [would introduce] an element of weakness and constant unrest [into the Reich].'"⁵⁹

This argument was, of course, the same argument that Lerchenfeld and the Chancellor had been using to try to convince Hertling to give up the idea of a German possession of Belgium. Although the argument had evidently made some impression upon Hertling and he had modified his plans for Belgium, Hertling and the Bavarian government were still unwilling to renounce fully their aspiration. It should be pointed out in Hertling's

⁵⁹Janssen, Macht, p. 68.

defense, however, that he probably believed he was following governmental policy, since his plan for Belgium was a version of the military and economic ties that Bethmann Hollweg had spoken about at the meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee in March. What Hertling had forgotten or misunderstood was that the Chancellor's statement had been one of maximum goals, as he was willing to forego even these goals if the situation called for it. Bethmann Hollweg also would not appreciate Hertling's giving his permission for a Prussian occupation of Belgium, because with that permission came the Bavarian demand for all of Alsace.

Both men, therefore, had already established the conditions for disagreement before the meeting began. The first of Hertling's miscalculations which Bethmann Hollweg corrected was the idea of a separate peace with Russia. He explained to Hertling that he thought the possibility of peace in the east was very slim, but when pressed by Hertling, he promised to make every attempt to secure such a peace.⁶⁰

The Chancellor then complained about the furor over war aims and stressed that Germany was in no position to demand large annexations. Although there was the possibility of annexing some strategic border areas in France, he ruled out any hope of gaining large

⁶⁰Janssen, Macht, p. 68.

amounts of territory in France. He also asserted that Germany could not annex all of Belgium. Certain key strategic areas such as the city of Lüttich might come under German control, and the government would try to institute some type of custom's union, but even that was not certain.⁶¹

The meeting ended with some dissention between the two men over Alsace. Hertling warned Bethmann Hollweg that Bavaria would not tolerate the incorporation of upper Alsace into Prussia. According to Hertling, the Chancellor seemed surprised at this news and argued that Bavaria did not have the military capability to defend all of Alsace. Hertling, however, refused to back down, and the two men parted in disagreement.⁶²

By the end of July, Lerchenfeld wrote to Hertling to confirm and support much of what Bethmann Hollweg had said to Hertling. In his letter, Lerchenfeld reported the failure of the Russian peace mission, which he blamed on the annexationist groups in Germany:

As long as. . . [we] place our war aims so high, and the international community believes that these represent the will of the German nation, it cannot be expected that our enemies will be ready to conclude a peace. In my opinion, all these annexations of non-German lands would not strengthen Germany and make it more secure,

⁶¹Janssen, Macht, p. 69.

⁶²Janssen, Macht, p. 69; Deuerlein, BWHL, I, 472-4f.

but weaken it and expose the Reich to the dangers of a prolonged war.⁶³

Lerchenfeld continued by arguing that if Germany totally defeated its enemies, then it would naturally expect some compensations. He did not, however, believe that total defeat was possible, and it seemed unwise to him to broadcast these extreme war aims to the world, since it would lessen Germany's chances of negotiating a separate peace.⁶⁴

This advice was contrary to the policies which the Bavarian government had been pursuing, and Hertling was unwilling and unable to let the issue drop. Upset by the Chancellor's remarks about Belgium and Alsace, Hertling asked Lerchenfeld about the possibility of calling another meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Bundesrat in August to discuss war aims. Lerchenfeld responded on August 2 that now was not a good time for Hertling to come to Berlin or to call such a meeting, since "it is still too early to establish definite war aims and to reach big decisions."⁶⁵ He then repeated his now familiar assertion that such issues depended on military considerations, not political ones, because the war was being led "unpolitically in all areas." Hertling

⁶³L-H, 31 July 1915, Letter 201, BWHL, I, 484.

⁶⁴L-H, 31 July 1915, Letter 201, BWHL, I, 483-5.

⁶⁵L-H, 2 August 1915, Letter 202, BWHL, I, 512.

did not press the point, and the only visit made in August was one by King Ludwig to review troops in Strassburg. Hertling's comment on this visit was representative of the tension between Berlin and Munich at this time, for Hertling told Lerchenfeld that "if there is a spontaneous demonstration of fondness given for the King in Alsace. . .we can only be glad that we are in no way answerable for it."⁶⁶

So ended the first year of the war with tensions high between the two governments. Minor conflicts erupted during this year over economic matters and over Bavaria's dissatisfaction with General Falkenhayn, a nagging problem which would reach its peak in 1916. The dominant issue, however, was the war aims controversy. Pulled in one direction by the right wing sentiments of people like the Grand Duke of Oldenburg and in the other by the moderate policies recommended by Lerchenfeld, the Bavarian government struggled to make its demands understood in Berlin without destroying its relationship with the federal government and the other states.

As Minister President of Bavaria, Hertling was caught in the middle of this struggle and at various points either attacked or defended the Chancellor's war aims policy. This oscillation makes it difficult to determine Hertling's own opinions on annexations.

⁶⁶H-L, 14 August 1915, Letter 204, BWHL, I, 516.

Historians dealing with Hertling seem to disagree on this issue. Ernst Deuerlein claims that Hertling personally opposed the annexations whereas Karl-Heinz Janssen portrays him as being only slightly more moderate than King Ludwig. The evidence presented so far shows that Hertling supported the incorporation of Alsace into Bavaria and that he desired some form of German control over Belgium. Whether these policies were indicative of Hertling's own beliefs or whether they were dictated by the responsibility of his position is open to question. His feelings about the eastern territories, however, were more obvious. Hertling's letters to Bethmann Hollweg demonstrate that he was almost eager to forego annexations in the east in exchange for a separate peace with Russia.

Whatever Hertling's private opinions were, his official stance on war aims was influenced by Lerchenfeld during the first year of the war. In the fall of 1914, the Bavarian government demanded the annexation of Belgium. After reading Lerchenfeld's reports on the bleakness of the war and on the negative effects of such an action, Hertling defended the Chancellor's policies to government critics, supported the Chancellor's war aims program in a meeting of the Bundesrat in May, and accepted a modified form of German control over Belgium. Although Lerchenfeld was not able to persuade the Bavarian government to adopt his own view of annexations,

even this degree of moderation of Bavarian policy is a credit to his abilities.

Lerchenfeld's opinions on annexations were, of course, closer to those of Bethmann Hollweg than to those of the Bavarian government, but he did not simply parrot the Chancellor. The letters reveal an almost prophetic analysis of Germany's predicament and a sound judgment of the strengths and weaknesses of the men who had to deal with Germany's problems. His evaluation of civilian-military relations was particularly prescient of future developments. Lerchenfeld's support of Field Marshal von Hindenburg, however, is less praiseworthy, since Hindenburg's eventual appointment as Chief of Staff only increased the overextension of the army's authority, of which Lerchenfeld was so critical. Despite this, Lerchenfeld's talents proved useful to both governments in this initial period and were to be even more helpful in the coming year during the crisis over unrestricted submarine warfare.

CHAPTER III

WAR METHODS: THE DEBATE OVER UNRESTRICTED SUBMARINE WARFARE

During the second year of the war, from the fall of 1915 until the fall of 1916, concern over the slow and uncertain progress of the war, especially on the western front, precipitated a crisis in the central government. It concerned the use of submarine warfare and intensified the debate over war aims since annexations in the west depended upon the success of the U-boat campaign. General Erich von Falkenhayn and Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, instead of working together, took opposite sides on the submarine issue, forcing the different political factions within Germany, including the states, to choose between the two.

The debate over unrestricted submarine warfare first arose with the sinking of the Lusitania in May of 1915. It reached crisis proportions in the winter of 1915-1916 and again during the Battle of Verdun in the summer of 1916. Bethmann Hollweg wished to avoid a confrontation with America, yet he was faced with the demands of the navy, the annexationists, and an increasingly large percentage of the general public to lift the restrictions on the submarine campaign. To refuse them, he would need the support of the federal states.

General Falkenhayn's support of the navy's demands for U-boat warfare, combined with the subsequent blood bath at Verdun, rekindled Bavarian dissatisfaction with his leadership and occasioned a new series of Bavarian complaints in Berlin about his ineffectiveness. These complaints were useful to the Chancellor, whose initial misgivings about Falkenhayn were strengthened by the General's stand on submarine warfare, and to Field Marshall von Hindenburg and General Ludendorff, who had long been conspiring against the General. By the summer of 1916, the grumblings about Falkenhayn's abilities had developed into a full-fledged attack which ultimately led to his resignation.

Added to these problems were the ever present arguments over war aims, which were further complicated by the German occupation of Poland in August of 1915. The basic questions were: should Poland be annexed, and, if so, how much and by whom? If the government's headaches multiplied with the occupation of the eastern territories, so did the possibilities for a settlement between the states, since these new territories could be used as valuable trading objects in the fight over annexations.

Count von Lerchenfeld was once again instrumental in keeping Bavaria informed about these developments and in guiding Bavarian policy towards cooperation with the federal government. His letters, however, were addressed

to an increasingly agitated Minister President von Hertling, who, as he moved closer to the Chancellor's position on some issues, came under mounting pressure from political groups in Bavaria who criticized the government's handling of the war. By the end of the second year of the war, therefore, both the governments in Berlin and Munich were perched atop a growing mound of discontent.

The occupation of Poland in August of 1915 further complicated the war aims issue, since the German and Austrian governments had to decide whether an independent Poland or a Poland under German or Austrian control would best answer the question of what to do with the former Russian territory. This problem immediately captured Hertling's attention, and he advised Lerchenfeld of his opposition to both a German annexation of Poland or the establishment of Poland as an independent buffer state between Germany and Russia. Instead, Poland should be incorporated into the Austro-Hungarian Empire with the same state's rights as Hungary. Germany, Hertling continued, should only receive a small amount of territory necessary for border rectifications, although Saxony might receive some territory as compensation for its war contribution.¹ That Hertling would not want Poland to become a Prussian crown colony is no surprise. His

¹H-L, 19 August 1915, Letter 206, BWHL, I, 517-8.

Catholic and pro-Austrian sentiments would naturally cause him to view the Austro-Hungarian Empire as a perfect "home" for Poland.² By insuring territory for Saxony, Hertling hoped to win Saxony's support for the Bavarian annexation of Alsace.

Lerchenfeld replied on August 21 that the Foreign Office shared his opinions on the Polish question,³ but after talking with Bethmann Hollweg two days later, he reported that the question was still open for debate. He was encouraged that General Hans Hartwig von Beseler had been appointed governor general of Warsaw. Since General Beseler was not "just a military man," he believed that the Polish question would not be handled in quite so military a manner as the rest of the war.⁴

During this same meeting, the Chancellor and Lerchenfeld also discussed the usual Bavarian concern, Alsace. Bethmann Hollweg defended his indecisiveness in the matter by complaining about the difficulties involved in finding a solution that would satisfy everyone.

²Interestingly, Hertling's views on Poland conflicted with the official Austrian stance, which opposed admitting Poland into the Austro-Hungarian empire on an equal status with Hungary, but instead wanted a highly independent kingdom of Poland under Austrian protection. See Fritz Fischer, Germany's Aims in the First World War, trans. unknown (Düsseldorf, 1961; rpt. New York: W. W. Norton, 1967), pp. 203-4f.

³L-H, 21 August 1915, Letter 208, BWHL, I, 520-1.

⁴L-H, 23 August 1915, Letter 211, BWHL, I, 529-

Lerchenfeld, who was sympathetic to the Chancellor's problems, remarked that the issue had been discussed too much and too soon, but he also warned Bethmann Hollweg that he would never find a solution that would please everyone. The Chancellor slipped around this carefully placed hurdle by responding that the matter would be settled quickly when the time came.⁵

The two men also touched upon another subject which had caused the Chancellor some concern in August, an intrigue perpetrated by Ernst Bassermann of the National Liberals. Bassermann had sent a telegram to his political associates on August 1 in which he discussed using Bavaria as a base for agitation against the government's war aims policy. The army censors had forwarded the telegram to Bethmann Hollweg, and he had written to Hertling to warn him about Bassermann.⁶ Hertling assured the Chancellor that Bassermann would not receive support in Bavaria and that it was useless to attempt to get Bavaria to rebel against the federal government.⁷ In light of the tension between the two governments, this statement may have been an attempt on

⁵L-H, 23 August 1915, Letter 211, BWHL, I, 529-31.

⁶BH-H, 14 August 1915, Letter 16, BWHL, II, 980-1.

⁷H-BH, 19 August 1915, Letter 18, BWHL, II, 983-4.

Hertling's part to get back in the good graces of Bethmann Hollweg after their disagreement in July. Hertling would have ample opportunity to test the sincerity of his words during the coming U-boat controversy.

As the struggle between Berlin and Munich over war aims continued, Bethmann Hollweg traveled to Munich on September 13 to seek some agreement about the problem of Alsace-Lorraine. As Hertling knew from reports from Lerchenfeld and Matthias Erzberger, the solution to this problem was still as remote as ever, but he greeted the Chancellor's visit as an attempt by the government to correct the situation. At this meeting, Bethmann Hollweg proposed that Bavaria, Baden, and Württemberg receive northern Alsace, conveniently leaving southern Alsace for annexation by Prussia.⁸

Hertling was opposed to dividing Alsace between more than two southern states and demanded that Bavaria receive either all of northern Alsace or all of Alsace. Bethmann Hollweg could not agree to these conditions, and another meeting ended in a stalemate. Hertling did extract from the Chancellor the promise that he would try to convince Baden and Württemberg to agree to the division of Alsace and that he would continue his policy of cooperation with the states.⁹

⁸Janssen, Macht, pp. 74-6.

⁹Janssen, Macht, pp. 74-6.

As part of its plan to obtain Alsace, the Bavarian government was still campaigning for Prussia's annexation of Belgium as a crown colony, and in October Hertling decided to pay an official visit to Belgium. According to Deuerlein, this decision caused some trouble between Lerchenfeld and Hertling.¹⁰ Lerchenfeld had not changed his position on annexations; if anything, he was even more against them. He wrote another letter to Hertling on October 24 describing the war as illogical and futile. In this letter, he condemned the large west German industries for arousing support for their desire for Belgium among the annexationist groups and in the "educated world." He believed, however, that the followings of these groups were declining because many people were beginning to tire of the war and to doubt the necessity of annexing Belgium.¹¹

If this were true, he continued, then the people might be willing to accept a less ambitious peace. Of course, as some people would always resist such a peace, only a man with popular support, such as Hindenburg, could enact it, because "people would believe him if he said: that and nothing more is to be achieved."¹²

¹⁰Deuerlein, BWHL, I, 76.

¹¹L-H, 24 October 1915, Letter 223, BWHL, I, 574-9.

¹²L-H, 24 October 1915, Letter 223, BWHL, I, 549.

Six days later Lerchenfeld heard that Hertling was planning to tour Belgium. Ironically, Hertling told Lerchenfeld that he did not believe peace could be reached without a shrinking of war aims.¹³ Since a statement either condemning or supporting annexationist plans in the west did not follow this evaluation of the chances for peace, Hertling's stance on the issue remains ambiguous. Perhaps Hertling was commenting on the futility of war aims, or perhaps he simply believed that the chances of peace were so slim that his trip to Belgium would not endanger them.

Although there is no written response by Lerchenfeld in the letters to this news, it is very probable that Hertling's trip displeased him. Certainly, their correspondence sharply decreased in the next two months. Hertling did not write to Lerchenfeld during his stay in Belgium, and the two men did not discuss the matter in the few letters they sent to one another during this period.

The question remains as to why Bavaria continued to support the annexation of Belgium after Bethmann Hollweg had made it clear in July that he was against such an action. Janssen claims that Bavaria was determined to push through the annexation so that Prussia

¹³H-L, 31 October 1915, Letter 224, BWHL, I, 550-1.

would be more agreeable to Bavaria's claim on Alsace.¹⁴ In terms of overall strategy, Janssen's assertion is correct, but one should not imagine that Bavaria was pushing Belgium on a totally unwilling Prussia. After all, factions within the government and the country wanted large annexations, and at the same time that Bethmann Hollweg was arguing against annexations, Bavaria was well aware of Prussian plans for enlargement of its own territory. What Bavaria feared was that Prussia would receive everything - Belgium, the Reichsland, and Poland - and that Bavaria would be left with nothing.

According to Viktor Naumann, a journalist and sometime political emissary of Hertling's, various rumors about Prussian war aims and the government's use of the war as a centralizing process had aggravated Bavarian distrust of Prussia during late 1915.¹⁵ Lerchenfeld himself informed Hertling on November 2 that Berlin was once again considering far-reaching annexations. He reported that since the Kaiser's trip to Belgium, Wilhelm had been supporting Belgium's incorporation into the Reich and that Hindenburg, who had previously opposed territorial enlargement, was now for it.

¹⁴Janssen, Macht, p. 185.

¹⁵Viktor Naumann, Dokumente und Argumente (Berlin: Ernst Rowolt Verlag, 1928), p. 71.

Lerchenfeld, however, was not alarmist in his view of the situation and pointed out that the position on war aims would probably change many times before the war ended.¹⁶

Hertling himself complained to Lerchenfeld about the centralization process in November. He was concerned about the lack of time for examination of the bills which passed through the Bundesrat. In most cases, he wrote, there was no time for debate, and the states had to vote for or against a bill without careful consideration of the issue at hand. He wanted Lerchenfeld to speak to Bethmann Hollweg about what he considered to be a violation of the states' rights.¹⁷ Although no letter from Lerchenfeld survives, one could surmise that he gave Hertling much the same explanation as he had on the economic problem of December of 1914, that the war required quick action and not lengthy debate.

In the midst of all of this uneasiness, Bethmann Hollweg held another meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee on November 30. The Chancellor spoke to the representatives of the states again about war aims, and, as in the previous meetings, his opinions conflicted

¹⁶L-H, 2 November 1915, Letter 225, BWHL, I, 551-3.

¹⁷H-L, 22 November 1915, Letter 227, BWHL, I, 557-8.

with those of the state governments. Bethmann Hollweg proposed that Poland and part of Lithuania and Cour-land be used to form a buffer state to protect Germany in the event of future wars. As for Belgium, he wanted to avoid any definite statement about what Germany would or would not annex and only committed himself to trying to prevent Belgium from coming under French and English domination.¹⁸

The plans for Poland, of course, conflicted with Hertling's ideas about a union of Poland with Austria-Hungary, but Hertling confined his criticism of the Chancellor's proposals to his position on Belgium, which Hertling found too non-committal. Hertling ended the meeting by stating that "under no circumstances" should Belgium become a glacis for France and England.¹⁹

The subject of Alsace did not arise at the November 30 conference, but it did appear during a meeting of the budget committee in the middle of December when Baden and Württemberg spoke out against the union of Alsace with Bavaria. Lerchenfeld told Hertling that he had not tried to defend Bavaria's interests during the session, since that would only have worsened the situation. Lerchenfeld used this episode as a reminder to Hertling that Bavaria could only hope to gain Alsace

¹⁸Janssen, Macht, pp. 87-8.

¹⁹Janssen, Macht, p. 88.

through the good will of Prussia, because the other states would always oppose it unless there was something in it for them. Unfortunately, he continued, Bethmann Hollweg was determined to avoid trouble between the states and would only support a plan which divided Alsace between Bavaria, Baden, Württemberg, and some of the other northern German states.²⁰ In other words, the Chancellor was no closer to a solution to the problem than he had been at the beginning of the war.

These basic disagreements which had so occupied the states and the Chancellor in the fall of 1915 were entangled in the fight over U-boat warfare, which was renewed in the first months of 1916 and which would become the dominant issue throughout the next year. The problem first appeared after the sinking of the Lusitania in May of 1915. As was his usual practice, Lerchenfeld had kept Hertling informed about the development of events but added that:

People had expected everything possible from them [U-boats and zeppelins], and [these machines] have only succeeded in raising the rage against us so much that the talk everywhere has become "to be or not to be."²¹

Since Germany could not complete a successful blockade of England, Lerchenfeld continued one month later,

²⁰L-H, 16 December 1915, Letter 230, BWHL, I, 562-4.

²¹L-H, 18 May 1915, Letter 178, BWHL, I, 446-7.

unrestricted submarine warfare would only antagonize America and other neutrals and make the English even more determined to defeat Germany.²²

The torpedoing of the Arabic in August only worsened the debate, as Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz and his supporters argued for and the Chancellor and Falkenhayn against submarines. The sinking of the Arabic did not change Lerchenfeld's opinions, as he continued to believe that Germany could not afford to antagonize America. Nevertheless, he was angry with the American government for protesting the sinking of an English ship with only three Americans on board. He was also aware of the difficulties of restrictions, not only because of the popularity of the U-boats with the German public, but also because of the strategic limitations of the submarines themselves.²³

Less sympathetic towards Admiral Tirpitz, Lerchenfeld criticized him openly before Hertling even though he knew that the two men were friends. For Lerchenfeld, Tirpitz interfered too much in foreign affairs and was to blame for the bad relations between England and Germany, and, moreover, Germany probably

²²L-H, 24 June 1915, Letter 192, BWHL, I, 465-6.

²³L-H, 4 September 1915, Letter 213, BWHL, I 533-4.

could have had an even larger fleet if the navy had not made such a fuss about it.²⁴

The fight over U-boats, however, was not limited to Berlin, as the U-boat sympathizers sought followers in Munich as well. Ludwig, Hertling proudly reported to Bethmann Hollweg on September 9, had refused their overtures, because accepting them would have meant opposing the government.²⁵ The Chancellor wrote Hertling back warmly thanking him for his loyalty.²⁶ By the time Hertling received this letter, the crisis was resolved, as Falkenhayn had given the Chancellor his support, and the Kaiser had decided in the Chancellor's favor.

This settlement in the fall of 1915 was, however, only temporary, and four months later the fight broke out again. The only difference in round three of the battle was that Falkenhayn, who hoped to use the submarines in conjunction with his planned attack at Verdun, now sided with Tirpitz against the Chancellor. His change of heart prompted Hertling and Lerchenfeld to renew their campaign against him, since they believed that he was using the fight to grab the Chancellor's office for himself.²⁷

²⁴L-H, 8 September 1915, Letter 215, BWHL, I, 537-8.

²⁵H-BH, 9 September 1915, Letter 19, BWHL, II, 984-5.

²⁶BH-H, 10 September 1915, Letter 20, BWHL, II, 986.

²⁷L-H, 21 January 1916, Letter 234, BWHL, II, 571-3.

Lerchenfeld had not changed his opinions about unrestricted submarine warfare, and he repeated his arguments against it in a letter to Hertling on January 28. In his opinion, the only result of submarine warfare would be America's entry into the war. The popular belief that it was the only way to defeat England meant only that Germany could not defeat England by other means. He agreed that the submarines had harmed England but questioned whether or not the campaign had not done more damage to Germany's relations with America.²⁸

Although Hertling had been in favor of the U-boat campaign throughout 1915,²⁹ he was more receptive to Lerchenfeld's criticism of submarine warfare than he had been to Lerchenfeld's opinions on the Belgian issue. Despite his personal dislike of President Wilson, he agreed with Lerchenfeld's assessment of the damage America could do if it entered the war. At the same time, however, Hertling feared the reopening of the debate on the issue, since he believed that another intrigue against Bethmann Hollweg lay behind the renewed agitation. Hertling was uncertain about what he could do to counter this plot. In a letter to Lerchenfeld on February 3, Hertling stated:

²⁸L-H, 28 January 1916, Letter 223, BWHL, II, 569-71.

²⁹Albrecht, "Reichsgründung," p. 369.

I have until now always energetically refused to support in any way an action against the Chancellor; I will also always refuse to take part in an intrigue to support him--I see no way to protect him from an intrigue. . . .³⁰

Janssen claims that Hertling meant to desert Bethmann Hollweg in his hour of need and that only a visit from Erzberger in March convinced Hertling to change his mind.³¹ This assessment is rather unfair to Hertling. The fight over U-boat warfare placed Hertling in a difficult position. To take a stand against submarine warfare, he would have to give up his hope for Belgium, since the submarine campaign was necessary for England's defeat. Furthermore, he would embroil himself and Bavaria in what promised to be a messy political battle. Even Lerchenfeld, who endorsed neither the submarine campaign nor the annexation of Belgium, agreed with Hertling's decision, since he believed that the Chancellor had a good chance of surviving the crisis with the Kaiser's support.³²

Janssen also places too much emphasis on Erzberger's visit. Although the visit had an impact on Hertling's decision to take a stand against submarine warfare, it did not effect a radical change in Hertling's politics. Lerchenfeld and Hertling had already

³⁰H-L, 3 February 1916, Letter 235, BWHL, II, 574.

³¹Janssen, Macht, pp. 89-90.

³²L-H, 5 February 1916, Letter 247, BWHL, II, 578-80.

been discussing the possibility of using the Foreign Affairs Committee as a means of countering the attack on Bethmann Hollweg before Erzberger came to Munich. In his letter of February 3, for example, Hertling had suggested calling a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee so that the states could give the Chancellor their agreement to another year of war.³³ The Chancellor, however, rejected this offer of aid.³⁴

By the end of February, both Hertling and Lerchenfeld were worried about the Chancellor's chances of surviving the crisis. Baron Joachim von Brandenstein, Mecklenburg-Schwerin's representative in Berlin, asked Lerchenfeld if there was any way to rescue the Chancellor. Lerchenfeld relayed this information to Hertling and suggested that Bethmann Hollweg might be willing to call a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee if Lerchenfeld explained to him that it could be used to his advantage.³⁵

Hertling jumped at this suggestion. He insisted, however, that the meeting should not be just a rubber stamp for the Chancellor's policies. To be effective

³³H-L, 3 February 1916, Letter 235, BWHL, II, 573-5.

³⁴L-H, 5 February 1916, Letter 237, BWHL, II, 578-80.

³⁵L-H, 22 February 1916, Letter 238, BWHL, II, 580-1.

in their opposition to unrestricted submarine warfare, the states would have to hear both sides of the controversy and receive access to the naval figures on the submarine campaign.³⁶

By the time Lerchenfeld received this letter, the Chancellor had left Berlin for a short visit to the military headquarters in Charleville, so Lerchenfeld had to wait before acting on Hertling's instructions. He had, however, already talked informally with Bethmann Hollweg about calling the Foreign Affairs Committee to session and had informed him that the states opposed the navy's demands. Bethmann Hollweg had shrugged off the idea of discussing the problem at such a conference because of "certain constitutional reservations."³⁷

Lerchenfeld used the Chancellor's absence as an opportunity to warn Hertling about relying too heavily on the naval figures for any decision about the use of the submarines. He pointed out that the accuracy of these figures was questionable and that the figures themselves did not affect the disagreement about the consequences of unrestricted submarine warfare. The basic question was whether or not it was worth risking the entrance of America into the war or the bad impression

³⁶H-L, 25 February 1916, Letter 239, BWHL, II, 581-2.

³⁷L-H, 26 February 1916, Letter 240, BWHL, II, 583.

such an action would have on Germany's allies. Lerchenfeld advised Hertling to listen carefully to what Erzberger had to say when he was in Munich.³⁸ Through Erzberger's visit, Lerchenfeld could accomplish two goals. First, Erzberger, as an opponent of U-boat warfare, could lend credence to Lerchenfeld's own arguments, and second, Erzberger could satisfy Hertling's craving for statistical information, since Erzberger was well-informed on the subject.

The meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee took place on March 15, and the representatives of the states voted to support the Chancellor's U-boat policy. More importantly, Bethmann Hollweg had been able to use Lerchenfeld's promise of the states' support to win the Kaiser to his side at the Charleville meeting the week before.³⁹ The states, therefore, had played a major role in delaying unrestricted submarine warfare.

If Hertling's decision to give his backing to the Chancellor was "surprising," as Janssen claims,⁴⁰ then Lerchenfeld deserves part of the credit for this "surprise." Lerchenfeld had impressed upon Hertling the dangers of unrestricted submarine warfare, had

³⁸L-H, 26 February 1916, Letter 240, BWHL, II, 582-4.

³⁹Janssen, Macht, p. 90.

⁴⁰Janssen, Macht, p. 91.

warned Hertling about the unreliability of the naval statistics, and had paved the way for Erzberger's visit to Munich. Lerchenfeld had also skillfully negotiated the alliance of the Chancellor and Bavaria against the army and the navy, insuring that the Chancellor did not go to the conference at Charleville empty-handed. One wonders if the Kaiser would have reached a different decision at Charleville if Lerchenfeld had not been working behind the scenes in the Chancellor's favor.

After the March 15 meeting, there was a temporary lull in the storm over submarine warfare, during which time war aims came to the forefront again. According to Janssen, Bavaria and the Center Party attempted to cash in on their support of Bethmann Hollweg through the publication of an article in the Kölnischen Volkszeitung which argued for Bavaria's annexation of Alsace.⁴¹ Although there is no firm evidence linking Hertling with this publication, it is certain that he had not given up his plans for Alsace and was not averse to such open support of them. Hertling was also concerned with another war aims issue, the question of what to do with Poland, during the spring of 1916. Franz von Morawski-Dzierzykraf, a member of the Reichstag, had spoken to Hertling and

⁴¹Janssen, Macht, pp. 92-4.

Lerchenfeld about placing a Bavarian prince on the Polish throne, but neither of the two liked his idea.⁴² Hertling still wanted Poland to become part of the Austrian empire, but he could not persuade Bethmann Hollweg, who refused to make a firm commitment on the future of Poland, to agree to the idea. There was also talk in Berlin about a German annexation of Poland. Lerchenfeld did not favor any of these solutions and told Hertling on April 17 that:

As I hoped for nothing good from the acquisition of Belgium, so I expect no pleasure from the annexation of the Polish people in whatever form it results. In my opinion, it would be better for us to attach this country to Russia in some desirable fashion. If one could receive a separate peace for this price, then one should not think twice about it.⁴³

Although the Foreign Office shared his sentiments, Lerchenfeld could not convince either Hertling or Bethmann Hollweg of the validity of his ideas.

The Chancellor's indecision over war aims, combined with the pessimistic reports about the Verdun battle, provoked Hertling to suggest another meeting of Foreign Affairs Committee on May 5.⁴⁴ Lerchenfeld recommended that Hertling come to Berlin instead and

⁴²L-H, 17 April 1916, Letter 247, BWHL, II, 594-5.

⁴³L-H, 17 April 1916, Letter 247, BWHL, II, 594.

⁴⁴H-L, 5 May 1916, Letter 254, BWHL, II, 609-11.

speak with the Chancellor in private. He also tried to cheer Hertling up about the war situation. He reminded Hertling that despite his own gloomy predictions about the war's outcome in November of 1914, Germany had survived and would continue to do so if the food supply held out and if America stayed out of the war. Germany would simply have to stay in the war until some got tired enough to stop it.⁴⁵

Hertling took Lerchenfeld's advice and arranged a meeting with the Chancellor on May 10. This meeting, however, only led to a dissatisfied Hertling and an angry King Ludwig, since Bethmann Hollweg still had not arrived at a solution to the Alsace dilemma.⁴⁶ As a result, Bethmann Hollweg planned a trip to Munich on May 29 to patch up the disagreement between the two governments.

Before leaving Berlin, the Chancellor discussed the proposals he planned to present to Ludwig and Hertling with Lerchenfeld. Most of Poland was to go to Austria, Germany was to have economic and political control over Belgium, if possible, and the Bundesrat would settle the question of Alsace-Lorraine. If the states could not agree on a course of action on Alsace,

⁴⁵L-H, 6 May 1915, Letter 255, BWHL, II, 612-3.

⁴⁶Janssen, Macht, pp. 94-5.

then Prussia and Bavaria would divide it, since the province was too large for Bavaria to administer alone.⁴⁷

The meeting did not go as well as planned. The Chancellor proposed to Hertling that Bavaria should incorporate only the northern part of Alsace, including Strassburg, and that Baden should receive southern Alsace. Bethmann Hollweg then insured the failure of his compromise by requiring that Strassburg remain under a Prussian military governorship. Aside from his dismay at the idea of Prussian control over Bavarian territory, Ludwig's main objection was the proposed cession of southern Alsace to Baden, since he feared that Prussia would obtain the territory by default if Baden refused it. For these reasons, Ludwig and Hertling rejected the Chancellor's proposal. The only result of the meeting, according to Karl Heinz Janssen, was that the Chancellor finally convinced Ludwig to give up his demand for the total annexation of Belgium.⁴⁸

In Janssen's opinion, the loss of Belgium as a bartering object caused Bavaria to support Prussian annexations in the east in exchange for its demand for Alsace. In June of 1916, Bavaria and Saxony opened

⁴⁷L-H, 29 May 1916, Letter 262, BWHL, II, 623-5.

⁴⁸Janssen, Macht, pp. 96-8.

discussions on possible territorial gains for Saxony in the east, and Bavaria applied pressure to Württemberg and Baden to accept a division of the Reichsland. The Chancellor's lack of enthusiasm for these maneuvers, however, undercut their chances for success.⁴⁹

Preoccupation with Bavaria's territorial dreams had not completely overruled Hertling's concern about the war situation, and after heavy British losses in the Battle of the Somme in July, he suggested that the Chancellor send out peace feelers to the Entente through neutrals such as Holland.⁵⁰ Lerchenfeld advised Hertling not to hope for such a solution. Peace, Lerchenfeld wrote, was no longer a matter of "conditions." Germany "could offer the return of Poland, Belgium, and northern France, and it would be to no avail," because the Entente was determined to defeat Germany. Germany's only hope for escape from this "madness" was if one of the Entente countries collapsed.⁵¹

The German Foreign Office, which was not as pessimistic as Lerchenfeld, drew up a sample of "conditions" for the east in August. Among the many provisos were German retention of Courland, Russian occupation

⁴⁹Janssen, Macht, pp. 101-8.

⁵⁰Stengal-Lerchenfeld, 24 July 1916, Letter 270, BWHL, II, 639-43.

⁵¹L-H, 27 July 1916, Letter 273, BWHL, II, 647.

of east Galicia, the establishment of an independent Poland under German or Russian control, free passage through the Dardanelles, re-establishment of an independent, but smaller, Serbia, and the cession of certain territories in Poland and Italy to Austria. Hertling was pleased with the proposed treaty but suggested that Prussia might want to keep Lithuania as well. Janssen condemns Hertling for this last statement, since "in the German Reich's hour of greatest danger," he was still plotting an exchange of territories which would gain Alsace for Bavaria.⁵² While Hertling's statement is certainly less than commendable, Janssen's assessment is somewhat melodramatic, especially since Hertling was only suggesting an addition to a list drawn up by the German Foreign Office.

Although the Bavarian government was having trouble pushing through its policies on war aims, it finally realized one of its other projects, the dismissal of Falkenhayn, in August of 1916. Hertling and Lerchenfeld had been pressing Bethmann Hollweg to replace Falkenhayn with Hindenburg since the fall of 1914. Their campaign against the General had abated somewhat during the late spring and summer of 1915, when Falkenhayn supported the Chancellor during the Lusitania crisis, but his decision to side with Tirpitz

⁵²Janssen, Macht, pp. 107-8.

in early 1916 reawakened their earlier dissatisfaction with him. By February 5, Lerchenfeld was writing Hertling that Falkenhayn was incompetent in the area of foreign affairs, since he was no longer worried about the consequences of unrestricted submarine warfare on German-American relations.⁵³ The reports from Verdun worsened the situation, and in June, there were rumors that even the Kaiser was displeased with Falkenhayn. As a result, Ludwig decided to broach the subject of Falkenhayn's dismissal to the Kaiser during his visit to Berlin in June of 1915.

Various reports exist as to what actually occurred during this meeting. According to Janssen, Lerchenfeld, who accompanied Ludwig on his trip to military headquarters, convinced the king not to raise the subject during the discussion,⁵⁴ but Bavarian Legation Councillor von Schoen reported to Hertling that Ludwig had asked the Kaiser if Hindenburg's command should not be widened.⁵⁵ One possible answer to this puzzle is that Ludwig might have suggested that Hindenburg's command in the east be extended without pushing

⁵³L-H, 5 February 1916, Letter 237, BWHL, II, 578-80.

⁵⁴Karl Heinz Janssen, "Der Wechsel in der Obersten Herresleitung 1916," Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte, 7 (1959), 348-9.

⁵⁵Schoen-Lössl, 28 June 1916, Letter 265, BWHL, II, 630.

the Kaiser to appoint him in Falkenhayn's place. That Lerchenfeld would be reluctant for Ludwig to broach the subject with the Kaiser is understandable considering the Kaiser's sensitivity on the subject and Ludwig's propensity for tactlessness.

Whatever Ludwig said or did not say to the Kaiser, the problem was still far from being resolved. Less than a week later, Falkenhayn made a tactical error on the western front which only increased Bavarian dislike of him. Crown Prince Rupprecht, commander of the sixth army corps on the western front, had for many weeks offered his troops as reserves to the second army corps in anticipation of an enemy attack. Falkenhayn, who expected the attack to occur in the area of the sixth army corps, had repeatedly refused to authorize such a move. Unfortunately for Falkenhayn, the enemy launched its attack against the second army.⁵⁶ This error prompted another visit by Lerchenfeld to Bethmann Hollweg to denounce Falkenhayn⁵⁷ and transformed Rupprecht into a prominent figure in the anti-Falkenhayn, pro-Hindenburg camp.⁵⁸

⁵⁶Janssen, "Wechsel," 351.

⁵⁷L-H, 13 July 1916, Letter 267, BWHL, II, 634-5.

⁵⁸Janssen, "Wechsel," 355.

By August of 1916, the Chancellor and Hindenburg's supporters in the army had achieved their goal. After the defection of Rumania, the Kaiser accepted Falkenhayn's resignation and appointed Hindenburg as Chief of Staff. Both Lerchenfeld and Hertling were pleased by this action, and Lerchenfeld hoped "that the ruin of Falkenhayn has robbed the navy of its strongest support in the submarine affair and [that] the Chancellor can push through his opinion."⁵⁹ Ironically, just the opposite would be true.

The question remains as to how much influence Bavaria had on the dismissal of Falkenhayn. Janssen states that Bethmann Hollweg first questioned Falkenhayn's appointment after the December 1914 discussion with Hertling and Lerchenfeld.⁶⁰ He also credits Lerchenfeld with encouraging Bethmann Hollweg's belief that he could achieve a peace without annexations under the umbrella of Hindenburg's popularity.⁶¹ Rupprecht, in Janssen's interpretation, convinced the Kaiser that Falkenhayn no longer had the trust of the army.⁶²

⁵⁹L-H, 30 August 1916, Letter 287, BWHL, II, 688.

⁶⁰Janssen, "Wechsel," 340.

⁶¹Karl Heinz Janssen, Der Kanzler und der General (Göttingen: Musterschmidt Verlag, 1967), pp. 93-4.

⁶²Janssen, "Wechsel," 370.

Taken alone, these statements make Bavaria appear more powerful than it really was. Certainly, the conspiracy launched by Hindenburg and Ludendorff contributed its share to the General's downfall, as did Falkenhayn's own actions. If the Chancellor developed a dislike of the General in 1915, its intensity increased when Falkenhayn opposed Bethmann Hollweg on the submarine issue. Nor did the Battle of Verdun help Falkenhayn's popularity with the government or with the general public. A combination of factors led to Falkenhayn's fall from power, and although Bavarian complaints strengthened the case against him, they were by no means the only, or the most important, factor.

The dismissal of Falkenhayn was symptomatic of the political warfare which raged throughout Germany at this time. The struggle over U-boat warfare had divided Germany's political life into two hostile factions which were constantly scheming against one another. Berlin was not the only center in this struggle; the pro-U-boat forces also had a large following in Bavaria, which began to press the government in the summer and fall of 1916.

Since the early part of the war, certain Bavarian groups had greatly resented Prussia and the central government because of the alleged mistreatment of Bavarian soldiers and arguments over food production. Higher food prices and the increasing scarcity of food angered

the Bavarian people, and accusations from the north that Bavaria was hoarding food or not producing as much food as it could inflamed this anger. The length of the war and the rumors of its questionable outcome only heightened these tensions. In February of 1915, for example, a group of university professors formed a club called the Deutsche Wacht, whose purpose was the "'defense of the German national conscience [and the] preservation and strengthening of the German national strength.'"⁶³ Another informal group included the former Transportation Minister von Frauendorfer, Karl Alexander von Müller and Adolf Dirr of the Süddeutsche Monatshefte, liberal civil servants close to members of the cabinet counsel of the Transportation Ministry, and even a member of the Social Democratic Party. Both of these groups criticized both the state and federal governments and their handling of the war. This criticism of the government became entangled with the question of annexations, and the members of these groups began to petition for large annexations in the east or west.⁶⁴

These groups also supported unrestricted submarine warfare. When Hertling tried to combat them by printing an article arguing against submarine warfare,

⁶³Albrecht, Landtag, p. 158.

⁶⁴Albrecht, Landtag, pp. 158-61.

the article's lack of specific data on the number and capabilities of the submarines merely turned these groups against Hertling himself. By July, Hertling's critics had joined together to establish the "People's Committee for the Quick Defeat of England," which attacked Bethmann Hollweg's naval policy. They used this organization to exert pressure on Ludwig and the Bavarian government to act on their opinions.⁶⁵

Hertling warned Lerchenfeld about the problem on July 13 after he had received a visit from Prince Bertram von Quadt and Count Kaspar von Presying, members of the Privy Council, who were accompanied by Baron Georg von Guttenberg, a naval officer. These men accused the government of holding back the navy because the government did not really want to defeat England. They blamed the losses on the western front on the government's U-boat policy and wanted to solve the problem by replacing Bethmann Hollweg with Admiral Tirpitz. Hertling also reported that Dr. Georg Heim, a member of the Bavarian Center Party, had made a speech to the Christian Farmer's Organization in which he had blamed the food shortages on the Chancellor's policies and had claimed that the Chancellor had "150,000 (dead) men on his conscience." Hertling was disturbed by the intrusion of such sentiment into the higher echelons of government

⁶⁵Albrecht, Landtag, pp. 162-4.

and asked Lerchenfeld if there was any way to combat it.⁶⁶

Lerchenfeld consulted the Chancellor, who suggested that Hertling inform Heim that Tirpitz and his supporters could not guarantee the success of their plan. Hertling should also tell Heim that Bethmann Hollweg was not against submarine warfare but that he simply wanted to wait until the time was right to initiate it.⁶⁷

Lerchenfeld's news depressed the Chancellor, and he mentioned the possibility of resigning his position in face of the opposition against him. Lerchenfeld advised the Chancellor not to resign and not to let the U-boat supporters undermine his confidence. Bethmann Hollweg went so far as to suggest Governor Nicholas Dallwitz of Alsace as his replacement, an idea which Lerchenfeld rejected. Lerchenfeld then pointed out to the Chancellor that there was no one skilled enough to be his successor. Among the likely candidates, Helfferich was too young, and Tirpitz was undesirable both to the states and to the Kaiser. The only solution was for Bethmann Hollweg to remain in office.⁶⁸ This

⁶⁶H-L, 13 July 1916, Letter 266, BWHL, II, 631-4.

⁶⁷L-H, 16 July 1916, Letter 269, BWHL, II, 636-8.

⁶⁸L-H, 16 July 1916, Letter 269, BWHL, II, 636-8.

incident demonstrates the importance of Lerchenfeld's position in Berlin. That the Chancellor would consult Lerchenfeld in such a matter illustrates his confidence in Lerchenfeld's advice and abilities.

Lerchenfeld relayed Bethmann Hollweg's message to Hertling, and Hertling attempted to do as the Chancellor suggested, but Heim did not appear for the arranged meeting. As an alternate solution, Hertling proposed to a receptive Lerchenfeld another meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee.⁶⁹ After receiving a letter from Bethmann Hollweg asking for advice and help, Hertling wrote to the Chancellor on August 1 that a meeting of the committee would be useful in combatting the problem if Hertling were able to get specific information on the U-boat question. In this letter Hertling also addressed the problem of food production and shortages which had been fueling the fire of anti-government sentiment in Bavaria. Hertling informed the Chancellor that the problem was only worsened by negative comments from Prussia about Bavaria's unwillingness to share its supply of food. He also complained about the creation of a Reich commission for economics which was violating the states' rights to control their own economies. Hertling had heard rumors that this commission

⁶⁹H-L, 27 July 1916, Letter 272, BWHL, II, 644-5.

was to remain after the war, and he warned the Chancellor that the existence of such a commission, which was "most painful" now, would be "intolerable" after the war.⁷⁰

Despite all these complaints, Hertling responded favorably to the Chancellor's suggestion that Hertling use the church's influence to try to quiet some of the antigovernment sentiment in Bavaria.⁷¹ Hertling sent Viktor Naumann to Cardinal Bettinger to convince the Cardinal of the limitations of unrestricted submarine warfare and of the danger of agitation against the government. Naumann was unable to persuade the Cardinal of the validity of these views, and this attempt, like the one with Heim, fell through.⁷²

As Lerchenfeld had predicted, Bethmann Hollweg agreed to call a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee, but the Chancellor was hesitant about giving Hertling any specific information about the submarine campaign.⁷³ In the end, his agreement was a moot point. The meeting was delayed until October 30, and by that time the

⁷⁰H-BH, 1 August 1916, Letter 24, BWHL, II, 990-2.

⁷¹BH-H, 28 July 1916, Letter 23, BWHL, II, 989-90.

⁷²Naumann, pp. 118-9.

⁷³L-H, 2 August 1916, Letter 277, BWHL, II, 654-6.

situation had changed. Hindenburg had replaced Falkenhayn and had agreed to a temporary truce in the submarine issue. Consequently, when the committee met in October, the major issue was not submarines but a possible peace initiative.

In the meantime, Hertling was left to face the government's critics in Bavaria without aid. The Chancellor did call a special meeting of the Bundesrat in August and warned the representatives that the pro-U-boat groups were trying to arouse particularism in the states in order to oust him from office. Lerchenfeld notified Hertling of this fact and urged him not to meet with such people.⁷⁴

The warning came too late, since members of the "People's Committee for the Quick Defeat of England" had already met with Ludwig on August 5. Dr. Max von Gruber, a member of the privy council, was the head of this organization, and he was accompanied by several prominent politicians, including Graff Preysing, Franz von Buhl of the Reichsrat, Einhauser of the Center party, Karl Huebach of the Progressives, and Anton Conereck of the Liberal party. They essentially asked the king to use Bavaria's influence to force the government to declare unrestricted submarine warfare.⁷⁵

⁷⁴L-H, 9 August 1916, Letter 279, BWHL, II, 658-60.

⁷⁵Albrecht, Landtag, pp. 164-5.

Lerchenfeld had known about this meeting at the time of the Bundesrat meeting and had used it to Bavaria's advantage. He told the other representatives that Ludwig had denied the group's request and argued that "'At this point of the German Reich, unity is altogether a necessity. . . .'"⁷⁶ Lerchenfeld then stated that if the other monarchs made the same reply when approached, the agitators would be forced to end their scheming.

This statement may have impressed the Chancellor with Bavaria's loyalty, but it did nothing to halt the flow of criticism against Hertling in Bavaria. In fact, the situation was so serious in late August that Paul von Stengal, Hertling's secretary, was forced to write to Hertling urging him to return early from vacation, since the agitators were using his absence as an opportunity to persuade the king that their position, not Hertling's was the correct one.⁷⁷

In the wake of all these problems erupted one of the worst scandals the Bavarian government faced during the war. The Streiflichter scandal, as it was known, occurred when a copy of the notes of the August 5 meeting between Ludwig and the U-boat supporters made

⁷⁶L-H, 9 August 1916, Letter 279, BWHL, II, 659.

⁷⁷Stengal-Hertling, 23 August 1916, Letter 283, BWHL, II, 669-70.

its way into the governmental circles in Berlin. The Bavarian government never discovered who was responsible for leaking this information, but the two prime suspects were Dr. Buhl, who was present at the meeting, and Dr. Heim, who was not.⁷⁸ Ideally, according to what Lerchenfeld had reported to the Bundesrat in the special meeting in August, the minutes of this discussion should not have caused any problems in Berlin. The catch was that the minutes contrasted greatly with Lerchenfeld's version.

Instead of calling for unity and loyalty to the federal government, Ludwig complained that he could not influence governmental decisions, since the constitution provided that the Kaiser held all power during wartime. In fact, continued Ludwig, Bavaria's influence was so minimal that it could not even acquire the territory it wanted and was actually threatened with losing control over its railroads and postal system.⁷⁹

Furthermore, talking to the Kaiser personally was impossible. Ludwig cited his recent visit to the Charleville headquarters as an example of his mistreatment by the Kaiser. He claimed that he had had several important items to discuss with the Kaiser but that the

⁷⁸L-H, 6 October 1916, Letter 311, BWHL, II, 738-9.

⁷⁹Beilage, L-H 23 September 1916, Letter 298, BWHL, II, 714-9.

Kaiser had spoken only three or four minutes with him and had then spent three or four hours talking with other officials.⁸⁰

At this point in the minutes, Hertling chimed in with another example which had occurred in Nuremburg in early 1915. At this meeting, the Kaiser had also given only three or four minutes of his time to Ludwig and had talked with Lerchenfeld for hours.⁸¹ This statement, which indicates some jealousy on Hertling's part, is probably accurate. The Kaiser had a high regard for Lerchenfeld and valued his advice, a fact which would be most clearly illustrated by his reliance on Lerchenfeld during the July crisis of 1917.

Needless to say, this document caused trouble for Bavaria in Berlin. As soon as Lerchenfeld obtained a copy of the report, he forwarded it to Hertling, who was outraged that a member of the meeting had betrayed his trust in that way. He told Lerchenfeld that the document presented a false picture of the meeting and that much of it was taken out of context.⁸² He did admit that Ludwig had spoken a little too freely at

⁸⁰Beilage, L-H, 23 September 1916, Letter 298, BWHL, II, 714-9.

⁸¹Beilage, L-H, 23 September 1916, Letter 298, BWHL, II, 714-9.

⁸²H-L, 24 September 1916, Letter 299, BWHL, II, 719-20.

the time, but he excused Ludwig's behavior as disappointment over the small role that he was forced to play in the war. In the end, Hertling chose to interpret it as further evidence of a conspiracy against him because of his support of Bethmann Hollweg in the fight over U-boat warfare.⁸³ Certainly, this might explain its chance appearance in Berlin, but it is doubtful that the Streiflichter document grossly distorted the nature of the interview.

Lerchenfeld received the job of smoothing over the problems caused by the scandal. Hertling, who had been planning to attend the Reichstag session in late September, cancelled his trip as a result of the adverse reaction and told Lerchenfeld that he was better equipped to handle any mention of the problem during the session anyway.⁸⁴ Contrary to Lerchenfeld's expectations, the affair was mentioned during the meeting of the Reichstag by Socialist Party member Philip Scheidemann, who denounced such incidents as intrigues by the U-boat supporters to further their cause. With this opening, Lerchenfeld repeated Hertling's assertion that the protocol distorted the actual tone of the meeting and condemned the appearance of the protocol

⁸³H-L, 25 September 1916, Letter 301, BWHL, II, 721-3.

⁸⁴H-L, 25 September 1916, Letter 301, BWHL, II, 721-3.

as an attempt to make trouble at a time when unity and trust between the states was needed. Lerchenfeld claimed that his speech was well-received.⁸⁵

Although there is no record of what Lerchenfeld did behind the scenes to dampen the effect of the scandal, it is certain that his presence in Berlin prevented this affair from being blown out of proportion. Hertling acknowledged as much in a letter to Lerchenfeld on October 11 in which he said that "it is thanks to you [Lerchenfeld] that the thing has progressed without disagreement with Berlin."⁸⁶

The Streiflichter affair was an appropriate climax to Bavarian-Berlin relations during the second year of the war. Under attack from some of its own members because of its commitment to the Chancellor's submarine policies, the Bavarian government aggravated the central authorities through Ludwig's remarks about his dynastic and state's rights. The incident epitomizes the strange mixture of Bavarian cooperation and conflict with the federal government.

The Bavarian stance on submarine warfare was helpful to Bethmann Hollweg during the crisis of 1916. Without Hertling's support, the Chancellor might not

⁸⁵L-H, 5 October 1916, Letter 310, BWHL, II, 737-8.

⁸⁶H-L, 11 October 1916, Letter 315, BWHL, II, 743.

have been able to withstand the pressure from the army and the navy to institute unrestricted submarine warfare. That Hertling changed his opinions of U-boat warfare and stood by the Chancellor in the face of mounting opposition indicates that he had some flexibility and some ability to look beyond purely Bavarian concerns.

Hertling was less willing to compromise on the war aims issue. He continued to demand the Bavarian annexation of Alsace and conspired with the other states to gain their approval of the measure. Publicly, at least, Hertling clung to some form of German control over Belgium until the Chancellor convinced Ludwig to relinquish that dream. In the east, he supported an Austrian annexation of Poland but agreed to government proposals which did not include it. That Hertling had hopes of some annexations in the east is certain, but, compared with the war aims of the right wing groups, his views were moderate.

Lerchenfeld's influence upon Hertling remained significant during this second year of the war, especially in forming Hertling's submarine policy. He also played an important role in smoothing over difficulties between Berlin and Munich and was a valuable advisor to the Chancellor. His view of war aims did not change; his condemnation of the annexation of Poland was based on the same principles as his

objection to the incorporation of Belgium. His insight into the futility of possible peace offerings was also as accurate as his early predictions about the futility of the war. His analytical abilities failed him, however, in his assessment of Falkenhayn's character, since Hindenburg and Ludendorff possessed the political ambitions and the disregard for civilian authority which Lerchenfeld attributed to Falkenhayn. The resulting shift of power into the hands of the High Command was to become a major concern of the Bavarian government during the next year of the war.

CHAPTER IV

WAR GOVERNMENTS: THE RISE TO POWER OF THE OHL AND THE REICHSTAG

During the third year of the war, from September of 1916 to October of 1917, the German government underwent drastic changes and two major governmental crises. Although the issue of whether or not to institute unrestricted submarine warfare was finally resolved, the problem of war aims, especially those concerning Poland, remained and was intensified by such events as the Russian Revolution, various peace attempts, and the annexationist plans of Hindenburg and Ludendorff. The government also had to contend with the increasing demand for power from the Reichstag and the insidious rise of the army's power. The tug of war between these two forces over war aims and the constitutional structure of the Reich caused the fall of Chancellors Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg and Georg Michaelis.

All of these events had an impact on the Bavarian government, which continued to seek a voice in any decisions. Its biggest concern, however, was the shifting power structure of the Reich, since the growing influence of the Reichstag and the OHL meant a lessening of the states' control. The Bavarian

government feared the army's new status, because it had no control over the army and because the army represented Prussian interests. The Reichstag's demands for reform heralded the "dreaded" democratization and threatened the power of the Bundesrat. A change of Chancellors also upset Bavaria, since the Chancellor decided how important a role the states would play in governmental affairs.

Lerchenfeld's role as a mediator between Berlin and Munich was not as crucial as it had been during the first two years. Several reasons account for this change. Perhaps because of Hertling's support for the Chancellor during the U-boat crisis or their mutual distrust of the army's increasing power, a more stable relationship evolved between Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg and Minister President Hertling. Lerchenfeld consequently did not have to intervene as often to convince Hertling of the correctness of the Chancellor's policies. During some of the critical moments when intervention might have been helpful, illness forced Lerchenfeld's absence from Berlin. The new power of the army and the appointment of Georg Michaelis as Chancellor also altered the situation, since Lerchenfeld was not a close advisor to the OHL or to Chancellor Michaelis. This change, however, was only one of degree. Lerchenfeld continued to serve as a valuable aid to the two governments, and his importance as a consultant for the

central government actually increased during the two Chancellor crises of 1917.

According to historian Gerhard Ritter, the beginning of the end of the debate over unrestricted submarine warfare occurred in August of 1916 when Bethmann Hollweg began questioning his position on U-boat warfare. The war was not going as well as had been expected, and a new strategy was needed. The Chancellor had also lost the support of one of his strongest allies in the Naval Department, Admiral von Holendorff. In spite of all of these difficulties, Bethmann Hollweg still did not want to risk war with America, so he decided to make overtures to the Entente for peace negotiations, which might enable him to avoid implementing unrestricted submarine warfare.¹

Any decision over U-boat warfare and peace negotiations had to be discussed with the OHL, so Bethmann Hollweg arranged a meeting with Hindenburg and Ludendorff in August. Although Hindenburg and Ludendorff refused to be connected with any public statement against U-boat warfare, they agreed to the Chancellor's suggestion. With their help and the support of the Reichstag, which placed the decision for unrestricted submarine warfare in the Chancellor's

¹Gerhard Ritter, The Sword and the Scepter, trans. Heinz Norten, 4 vols. (Coral Gables, Florida: The University Press, 1970), III, 264-7.

hands, Bethmann Hollweg gained time to try for peace. Yet the OHL was determined to push through submarine warfare if the negotiations failed, and the Reichstag gave the generals some legal justification for this action by asking the Chancellor to confer with the OHL when making a decision on the issue.² Consequently, by the late fall of 1916, the Chancellor, and thus the states, were losing control over submarine warfare.

Any peace negotiations meant a reopening of the debate over war aims, since a set of minimum aims had to be drawn up before negotiations could proceed. One item which was not subject to negotiation after October of 1916 was Poland. The German government had been considering various alternatives for Poland since its occupation in August of 1915. As a tentative solution, Germany and Austria had agreed to separate occupation zones, but the Austrians had always wanted Poland under their protectorate. The German government had been reluctant to accept such a plan, since they wanted to use Poland as a bargaining point with the Russians and since they did not have a high opinion of the Austrians' military abilities.³

²Ritter, III, 264-74.

³Ritter, III, 100-17.

By the summer of 1916, the German government and, in particular, General Falkenhayn began to push for German control of Poland. Since the Austrians were just as opposed to German control of Poland as the Germans were to an Austrian protectorate, the two sides compromised in July of 1916. The two occupation zones were to be continued, but the two countries agreed to establish an independent Poland, minus certain territories claimed by Austria and Germany, after the war.⁴

After Hindenburg and Ludendorff replaced Falkenhayn in August, Ludendorff revived Falkenhayn's plan for a German controlled, "independent" Poland, which would provide troops for the German army. To institute such a plan, the generals convinced the Kaiser to call another meeting between the Austrians and the Germans so that the OHL could convince the Austrians of the benefits of this plan. The Austrians remained unconvinced but were forced to agree to a compromise of a gradual coordination of the two occupation zones. The two governments also agreed to issue the Polish Proclamation, which promised the restoration of a kingdom of Poland. Hindenburg and Ludendorff were unable to "win" Poland for Germany until May of 1917 when the Austrians agreed to relinquish their claim to Poland in exchange for Rumania. At that point, the OHL announced its

⁴Ritter, III, 214-8.

desire for an "autonomous" Polish state under a German protectorate, which in practical terms meant annexation of Poland by Germany.⁵

Count von Lerchenfeld followed the developments in the Polish situation in the fall of 1916 with great interest. Writing to Hertling on October 19 about the proposed meeting in Pless between the Germans and the Austrians, he stated that Ludendorff intended to take a "strong hand" with the Austrians. Lerchenfeld was critical of Ludendorff's approach in the Polish issue, since he did not think the situation merited such tactics. He went on to argue against an autonomous Poland under German control, stating that:

As you [Hertling] know, I am not religiously, but politically minded, sometimes even to the point of heresy, and so it seems to me that the most favorable solution to the Polish question would be an autonomous Poland under [the rule of] a Russian grand duke.⁶

According to Lerchenfeld, this solution would be advantageous to Germany, because if Russia ruled Poland, the Poles would use Berlin as the headquarters for their intrigues against Russia, but if Germany ruled Poland, the Poles would intrigue in St. Petersburg against Germany.⁷

⁵Ritter, III, 218-35.

⁶L-H, 19 October 1916, Letter 319, BWHL, II, 757.

⁷L-H, 19 October 1916, Letter 319, BWHL, II, 757-8.

This idea of Lerchenfeld's, which was shared by the Foreign Office, was not even seriously considered at Pless, but when Lerchenfeld met with Bethmann Hollweg upon his return from the Pless meeting, he asked the Chancellor to reconsider Poland's fate if an opportunity arose for a separate peace with Russia. Bethmann Hollweg said he would, but he downplayed the possibility of such an offer from Russia. He then told Lerchenfeld that he wanted to delay the meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee, planned since August, until he had something more to report.⁸

The Chancellor, however, called a meeting of the committee only two weeks later on October 30 to discuss his planned peace offering. Although the states had hoped to gain some definite statement on German war aims, they were disappointed, since the Chancellor remained vague on the subject. In spite of the Chancellor's evasions, the states voted to give Bethmann Hollweg a free hand in setting up any negotiations with the Entente.⁹

Hertling had a chance to try to pin down the Chancellor in a private meeting on November 1. At this meeting, the Chancellor promised to put more pressure

⁸L-H, 21 October 1916, Letter 322, BWHL, II, 760-3.

⁹Janssen, Macht, pp. 114-5.

on Württemberg to accede to Bavarian demands for Alsace, but he also raised the question of autonomy for the Reichsland as a price for peace.¹⁰ Ludwig was so disturbed by this news that he brought up the subject of Alsace in a meeting with the Kaiser on November 18. He stressed that Bavaria would be very displeased if it did not receive Alsace. The Kaiser, however, was noncommittal, and the Alsace question remained, as it had since the beginning of the war, unanswered.¹¹

Bethmann Hollweg made public his bid for peace on December 12, six weeks after the Foreign Affairs Committee meeting. As had been true in this conference with the states, however, the Chancellor couched his peace proposal in general terms and made no mention of the terms Germany would consider acceptable for peace. Wilson's response was to demand these specifics, a request which the German government refused. That refusal gave the Entente justification for its rejection of the German peace initiative on December 30, which in turn prompted the OHL to recommend on January 9 the instigation of unrestricted submarine warfare at the appointed February 1 deadline.¹²

¹⁰Janssen, Macht, pp. 115-6.

¹¹Janssen, Macht, pp. 118-9.

¹²Karl Dietrich Erdmann, Der Erste Weltkrieg, Vol. XVIII of Gebhardt Handbuch der deutschen Geschichte, ed. Herbert Grundmann (Stuttgart, 1954; rpt. Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1980), pp. 133-64.

Bethmann Hollweg still did not give up hope for some type of negotiations, and Lerchenfeld and the Chancellor discussed the possibility on January 11. Bethmann Hollweg told the envoy that he wanted to postpone another meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee until he heard more from Wilson. He also explained to Lerchenfeld that Germany's position at a peace conference would be difficult and that he could not afford to reject every proposal which the Entente offered Germany. He consequently asked Lerchenfeld to prepare Hertling for the possible loss of Alsace, although he requested that Hertling not mention the matter to King Ludwig.¹³ Clearly, Bethmann Hollweg wanted to avoid upsetting Ludwig before anything definite was decided and to forestall another direct appeal of the Bavarian monarch to the Kaiser.

The Bavarian government was also concerned about the military's resolution to enact unrestricted submarine warfare, and it made one last effort to stop the inevitable. Several Bavarian ministers approached Hertling during the end of January and suggested using Ludwig to deter the army's plan. Hertling refused to involve the king in such a highly

¹³L-H, 11 January 1917, Letter 340, BWHL, II, 790-1.

charged issue, but he did ask Lerchenfeld to make the Bavarian wishes known in Berlin.¹⁴

Lerchenfeld directed his appeal to Under Secretary of State Arnold Wahnschaffe, who promised to try to use the information to persuade the navy to change its mind about U-boat warfare. Lerchenfeld also took the case to the Chancellor on January 25, and although Bethmann Hollweg agreed to bring the matter up in his meeting with the military at Pless, he was not optimistic about the results. Bethmann Hollweg then asked Lerchenfeld if he thought it would be better for him to resign rather than accept unrestricted submarine warfare. Lerchenfeld advised against such an action, since it would not prevent the submarine campaign and would only worsen the relationship between the government and the socialists.¹⁵

The Chancellor's pessimism about the Pless meeting was well founded. The army refused to reconsider its decision on U-boat warfare, and the government prepared to notify the American government of its intentions on January 31. Bethmann Hollweg made one final effort for peace by sending Wilson a list of the terms Germany would consider acceptable for peace on January

¹⁴H-L, 21 January 1917, Letter 342, BWHL, II, 793-4.

¹⁵L-H, 24 January 1917, Letter 343, BWHL, II, 794-5; L-H, 25 January 1917, Letter 344, BWHL, II, 795-6.

29, but when the German declaration of unrestricted submarine warfare followed two days later, the result was predictable. Instead of inviting the Germans to talk peace, Wilson broke off relations with Germany.¹⁶

The Bavarian reaction to this diplomatic crisis was a combination of anger towards Wilson and resignation to the inevitable. The army's handling of the U-boat issue, however, heightened the Bavarian government's feeling of uneasiness about the increasingly large role of the military in civilian affairs and about the subsequent weakening of Bethmann Hollweg's position.

The army's involvement in food production, the passage of the Labor Auxiliary Bill, and the transportation of Belgian workers for forced labor during the next few months confirmed Bavarian suspicions about the army's drive for power. In October, Edler von Braun of the War Food Office sent Hertling a report on the problems of food production and informed Hertling that Hindenburg wished to discuss the low morale in Germany with the states. The indirect nature of the proposal and Braun's complaints about Bethmann Hollweg's "lack of energy" aroused Hertling's distrust, and he asked Lerchenfeld to investigate Braun's story.¹⁷ Although

¹⁶Erdmann, pp. 133-64.

¹⁷H-L, 17 October 1916, Letter 318, BWHL, II, 746-56.

Lerchenfeld discovered that Braun's proposal was indeed legitimate,¹⁸ the incident probably lowered Hertling's opinion of the army, since the OHL had directed its appeal through an official who made disparaging comments about the Chancellor.

In late November, Lerchenfeld began commenting on the increased tension between Bethmann Hollweg and the OHL. The Bavarian envoy told Hertling that the Chancellor had been warned when Hindenburg took office to draw a clear line distinguishing the responsibilities of the military and civilian authorities, but the Chancellor had not done so, depending instead on his good relations with Hindenburg. What he had not considered, according to Lerchenfeld, was that:

Behind Hindenburg stands General Ludendorff, who is known to possess a difficult and powerful character and who supposedly very much dominates his superior.¹⁹

One wonders if Lerchenfeld had considered this important aspect of the Hindenburg-Ludendorff team when he recommended to Bethmann Hollweg that Hindenburg replace Falkenhayn as Commander of the German army.

The army's actions in Belgium also upset Lerchenfeld. He disapproved of the army's appeal to

¹⁸L-H, 22 October 1916, Letter 323, BWHL, II, 763-4.

¹⁹L-H, 22 November 1916, Letter 326, BWHL, II, 769.

Flemish nationalism through the creation of a Flemish university and of the transportation of Belgian workers to Germany, an action which Lerchenfeld considered questionable in theory and ill planned in practice. In both of these cases, he believed that the army had acted without considering the political implications of its deeds.²⁰ Finally, Lerchenfeld was disturbed by the methods the army had used in pushing through the Labor Auxiliary Bill, which enacted compulsory labor for men between the ages of sixteen and sixty.²¹

The events of late 1916 and early 1917, therefore, were enough to trigger Bavarian criticism of the military in another scandal involving Hertling. This scandal resulted from remarks allegedly made by Hertling in a meeting of the Bavarian Financial Commission in the middle of February. According to a report sent by army Colonel Mertz von Quirnheim to Major von Kress, Hertling stated that:

"Ludendorff has made peace in the east impossible through the Polish Proclamation, and now he makes peace in the west impossible through the submarine campaign."²²

²⁰L-H, 6 December 1916, Letter 335, BWHL, II, 779-80.

²¹L-H, 4 December 1916, Letter 334, BWHL, II, 777-9.

²²Beilage a, H-L, 28 February 1917, Letter 354, BWHL, II, 815.

As he had done in the Streiflichter affair, Hertling claimed that he had been misquoted, and he told Lerchenfeld that the trouble was the result of intrigues directed against him.²³ Because this particular incident involved the military authorities exclusively, however, the Bavarian War Minister von Hellingrath, not Lerchenfeld, assumed the responsibility of writing to Mertz to deny the allegations.

Hellingrath's explanation that Hertling had been misquoted did not impress Mertz.²⁴ In his letter to Hellingrath, Mertz admitted that the OHL was responsible for the failure of the military recruitment in Poland, but he rejected the idea that the OHL was answerable for Poland's political problems. Mertz then stated that Hertling had brought this trouble upon himself by his support of the Chancellor. Through such an action, he continued, Hertling had involved himself in a "purely Prussian conflict," since the Chancellor's problems were not problems of foreign policy but of internal political relationships. His advice to Hertling was to stay clear of these matters in the future.²⁵

²³H-L, 28 February 1917, Letter 354, BWHL, II, 813-20.

²⁴Beilage b, H-L, 28 February 1917, BWHL, II, 813-20.

²⁵Beilage c, H-L, 28 February 1917, Letter 354, BWHL, II, 813-20.

This startling letter was followed by a letter from Hindenburg to Hellingrath which included a passage from the report of the meeting of the Financial Commission which Hindenburg found offensive. The above mentioned attack on Ludendorff did not appear in the report, but it quoted Hertling as criticizing the military for its actions in Poland as well as questioning the government's transportation of Belgian workers. As a counterbalance to these negative remarks, Hertling did state that if the Chancellor had appointed Hindenburg one year earlier, the war would already be over.²⁶

Hellingrath told Hindenburg in a return letter that although some of the contents of Hindenburg's report had been taken out of context, the bulk of the report was more or less accurate. He insisted, however, that Hertling had not meant his remarks to be an attack on the OHL but had instead merely responded to a question from one of the commission members about the relationship between the military and civilian authorities. In answering this question, Hellingrath continued, Hertling had admittedly been blunt, but he had managed at the same time to instill a renewed confidence in the government and the military.²⁷

²⁶Beilage d, H-L, 28 February 1917, Letter 354, BWHL, II, 813-20.

²⁷Beilage e, H-L, 28 February 1917, Letter 354, BWHL, II, 813-20.

This explanation did not placate Hindenburg, and he demanded to know what evidence Hertling had to link the OHL with the problems in Poland and in Belgium. The sharpest attack in his letter, however, was to accuse Hertling of undermining the monarchical principle by telling the commission that Bethmann Hollweg had appointed Hindenburg as head of the OHL.²⁸

In his reply, Hertling was careful to point out to Hindenburg that he gave equal responsibility to both the civilian and military authorities for the problems in Belgium and Poland, a claim which Hindenburg's copy of Hertling's statements supports. He then quoted Foreign Secretary Jagow and a report of the administrative head of the governor general's staff in Belgium as giving the OHL the decisive influence in the actions taken in Poland and Belgium. Hertling was also not above sharp retorts, and he reminded Hindenburg that his compliance with his request was purely voluntary, since the statement he had made had been in his capacity as Bavarian Minister President and was, therefore, outside the OHL's jurisdiction.²⁹ This reply elicited a long justification of the army's policies in Poland and Belgium by

²⁸Beilage a, H-BH, 4 March 1917, Letter 35, BWHL, II, 1001-4.

²⁹Beilage b, H-BH, 4 March 1917, Letter 35, BWHL, II, 1001-4.

Hindenburg, a letter which Hertling wisely did not deign to answer.³⁰

Not surprisingly, Hertling received support for his actions from Bethmann Hollweg³¹ and a congratulatory letter from Lerchenfeld who described Hertling's reply to Hindenburg as a "classic letter."³² After noticing that both of Hindenburg's letters had a small "L" at the bottom, Lerchenfeld remarked: "What is the meaning of that small "L" at the bottom of both of the letters? Is perhaps Hindenburg unable to write letters alone?"³³ Underneath this sarcasm was the knowledge that Ludendorff did indeed dominate his superior, and neither Lerchenfeld or Hertling overlooked that point.

One might well ask why the OHL would create such a "tempest in a tea pot" in the middle of a war. Certainly, the High Command had better things to do with its time than to engage in verbal battles with the Bavarian Minister President. Although Hertling did in one sense provoke the attack by his "outspokenness" about the army's mistakes, the correspondence indicates that the OHL was doing much more than reacting to Hertling's political faux pas.

³⁰Beilage, H-BH, 19 March 1917, Letter 28, BWHL, II, 1006-9.

³¹BH-H, 6 March 1917, Letter 37, BWHL, II, 1005-6.

³²L-H, 12 March 1917, Letter 355, BWHL, II, 820-1.

³³L-H, 24 March 1917, Letter 358, BWHL, II, 826.

The key to this puzzle is Mertz's letter to Hellingrath in which he accused Hertling of bringing trouble upon himself by supporting Bethmann Hollweg. It is possible that the High Command, in its struggle to gain control of the government, used Hertling's statements as a means of challenging and intimidating one of Bethmann Hollweg's more influential allies. That the army's attempt at intimidation was successful to some degree is indicated by Willy Albrecht's claim that Hertling refused the position of Chancellor in July of 1917 after Bethmann Hollweg's resignation because of this conflict with the OHL.³⁴

Another probable goal of the army was to challenge the states' claims to a decisive voice in governmental affairs. By accusing Hertling of involving himself in a "purely Prussian conflict," the OHL seemed to be saying that such matters as war aims and U-boat warfare were Prussian, not German, concerns, a statement which makes sense when one considers that the Prussian army believed that Prussia was Germany. When the states chose to give their opinions on these matters, therefore, they were meddling in Prussian affairs and deserved to be chided. This attitude was, of course, exactly what Hertling had been fighting against throughout the war, and it must only have strengthened his

³⁴Albrecht, Landtag, p. 256.

conviction that a strong Bavaria was needed to counteract a Prussian domination of Germany.

The excitement over the strife between Hertling and the OHL was soon overshadowed by the March Revolution in Russia. The revolution brought with it the hope of a separate peace in the east, which, in turn, reopened the discussion over war aims, since the government had to decide what it wanted to do with the occupied eastern territories before it could conclude a peace with Russia.

On April 4, Hertling suggested to Bethmann Hollweg that he call a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee to discuss peace possibilities.³⁵ Hertling followed his request on April 23 by sending the Chancellor a report by the Bavarian War Minister Hellingrath on the eastern question. In this report, Hellingrath argued for a lenient peace with Russia, since he believed that a future friendship with Russia was more important than any territorial ambitions. A quick and reasonable peace, he continued, would have the additional benefit of allowing the German army to concentrate on the western front.³⁶

³⁵H-BH, 4 April 1917, Letter 42, BWHL, II, 1013-4.

³⁶Beilage, H-BH, 23 April 1917, Letter 44, BWHL, II, 1019-20.

Shortly after this letter reached Bethmann Hollweg, Count Ottokar von Czernin, Chancellor of Austria, gave Hertling a chance to play an important role in determining just what Germany's eastern policy would be. During the last part of 1916, the Austrians had begun to tire of the war and to press the German government to make a serious attempt for peace negotiations. As the Austrian government's fears of revolution and collapse became acute in the spring of 1917, its pressure on the Germans increased. As part of this attempt to get the Germans to take the Austrian problems seriously, Count Czernin invited Hertling to Vienna to discuss the situation.³⁷

This invitation was a dream come true for Hertling, who had been eager for the chance to have a major impact on foreign policy. Upon receiving Czernin's offer, he notified the Foreign Office of his intentions,³⁸ and, consequently, Bethmann Hollweg advised Hertling that the Austrians desired peace so badly that they were willing to make any sacrifice, including giving Alsace-Lorraine back to France. The problem with this attitude, continued the Chancellor, was that Austria wanted Germany to make all of the sacrifices and had no intention of giving up any of its own

³⁷Ritter, III, 423-5.

³⁸Ritter, III, 425.

territory. The purpose of Hertling's trip, therefore, should be to "strengthen Count Czernin's resolve" and to inform him that if Germany and Austria made a weak peace, Austria would probably have to relinquish its hold over Trentino and Galicia.³⁹

If Bethmann Hollweg had hoped to prejudice Hertling against the Austrian government, he did not succeed. Hertling did not find the situation in Vienna as serious as the Chancellor had described it, and he told Bethmann Hollweg as much in a telegram dated April 30. Arguing that the two governments were actually quite close on the eastern question, Hertling suggested that Germany and Austria-Hungary draw up a joint declaration of their intentions in the east. He submitted a draft statement, to which Czernin had already agreed, for the Chancellor's approval. The key phrase of this draft stated that:

"Just as Austria-Hungary renounces any annexation of Russian territory, Germany will also not allow the possibility of a peace settlement with Russia to be frustrated by the demand for annexations, but will be content with those border rectifications which it needs as a defense of its border with Russia."⁴⁰

Since Bethmann Hollweg's "policy of the diagonal" precluded any open statement on war aims which might destroy the Burgfrieden, or the peace between the parties,

³⁹BH-H, No date, Letter 45, BWHL, II, 1021.

⁴⁰H-BH, 30 April 1917, Letter 46, BWHL, II, 1022.

the Chancellor rejected Hertling's proposal. In one of the classic understatements of the war, he patiently explained to the Bavarian Minister President that "the difference between annexations and border rectifications is ambiguous."⁴¹ The publication of such a statement, he continued, would simply ignite the fight over war aims. The right wing groups would say that the terms were too lenient, while the Entente would claim that it was a trick and that Germany was using the term "border rectifications" as a cover for annexations.⁴² As a result, Hertling's trip ended in failure. Unable to effect an agreement between Austria and Germany, he did not convince the German government to take a stand on the eastern question.

Although Bethmann Hollweg did not want to commit himself publicly to Hertling's peace terms, he was willing to agree to them in the privacy of a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee in May of 1917. At this meeting, the Chancellor stated that although he wanted certain border rectifications in the east, he would forego even these terms and accept the status quo ante bellum if it were necessary to end the war with Russia. The states supported Bethmann Hollweg's conditions, and, as had been true in October, the Chancellor was ready

⁴¹BH-H, 3 May 1917, Letter 47, BWHL, II, 1023.

⁴²BH-H, 3 May 1917, Letter 47, BWHL, II, 1023.

to negotiate a peace without annexations with the states' approval if the opportunity arose.⁴³

At this point, it would be worthwhile to examine Hertling's views on the eastern question. Janssen claims that from the summer of 1916 until his resignation from the Chancellor's office in October of 1918, Hertling pursued a consistent policy in the east of using the eastern territories, such as Poland, Courland, and Lithuania, as trading objects in his attempt to gain Alsace for Bavaria. According to Janssen, Hertling's support of independence for Poland and Courland in the spring of 1917 did not contradict this plan, since it was possible that Hertling hoped that the other states would accept the thrones of these countries as their compensations for Bavaria's gain.⁴⁴

This explanation is rather simplistic. Hertling's feelings about the war in the east had always been ambivalent. For Hertling, the real war was the one against the western democracies, and even as early as June of 1915, Hertling was trying to evolve a plan whereby Germany could make peace with Russia.⁴⁵ The issue becomes more complicated when one examines his attitude towards the Russian satellites, such as Poland.

⁴³Janssen, Macht, pp. 125-8.

⁴⁴Janssen, Macht, pp. 123-4.

⁴⁵See above, pp. 66-7.

For Hertling, the ideal solution to the Polish question was the admittance of Poland as a third member of the dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary. By the fall of 1916, Hertling must have realized that the German government was not going to agree to this solution. The remaining options were a German-controlled Poland, the return of Poland to Russia, or the establishment of an independent Polish state. Hertling's trip to Vienna and the May meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee demonstrate that Hertling was willing to give Poland back to Russia if Germany and Russia negotiated a separate peace. If not, only two options remained, virtual annexation, which if the OHL achieved its goal, would mean Prussian control of Poland, or independence for Poland. Hertling supported the second option; the pertinent question is why.

Hertling discussed his ideas about Poland in two letters to Lerchenfeld in June of 1917. He believed that the German government should allow the Polish people to set up whatever type of government they wanted. Germany should only interfere to get the necessary border rectifications.⁴⁶ Lerchenfeld encouraged Hertling to write to the Chancellor about his

⁴⁶H-L, June 1917, Letter 370, BWHL, II, 848-50.

opinions,⁴⁷ but Hertling expressed doubts about his ability to influence the Chancellor, since he believed the military would oppose his plan. Then in a style closely resembling that of Lerchenfeld's, Hertling suggested that it was time for the government to make up its mind about Poland, because Germany could not be both a "liberator and a conqueror." The chances of Germany's being a liberator, however, were limited because "the army believes we should not give back anything that we have, but the possession of Poland is not a gain but a danger [for Germany]."⁴⁸ To realize this fact, Hertling argues, one needed only look at what happened when Russia possessed Poland.⁴⁹

The contents of these letters indicate that Hertling supported independence for Poland because it was best for Germany, not because it would benefit Bavaria, a fact which throws doubt upon the validity of Janssen's thesis. This is not to say that particularism might not have played a role in Hertling's considerations. The desire to prevent Prussia from annexing Poland, thereby increasing its own power, could very well have been an important factor for Hertling. What seems unlikely is that Hertling planned on

⁴⁷L-H, 15 June 1917, Letter 373, BWHL, II, 852-4.

⁴⁸H-L, 22 June 1917, Letter 374, BWHL, II, 855.

⁴⁹H-L, 22 June 1917, Letter 374, BWHL, II, 855-6.

Poland's electing a king from Saxony or even from Württemberg or Baden, as he did one year later as Chancellor when there was no longer any question of real independence for Poland. To say that Hertling's eastern policy was totally consistent, therefore, is erroneous, since it varied in accordance with outside events and governmental policy.

At the same time that Hertling was worrying about the eastern situation, the German government was dealing with the Reichstag's demands for a reform of the constitution. The majority parties of the Reichstag had formed a constitutional committee for such a purpose in October of 1916, and by the spring of 1917, they began to demand legislation which would make the Chancellor and the state secretaries answerable to the Reichstag. The Reichstag also wanted appointments in the army to depend upon the War Minister's approval, since the War Minister was already responsible by law to the parliament. The Kaiser and the OHL opposed this plan, and Bethmann Hollweg consequently found himself trapped between the Kaiser and the army on the one side and by the Reichstag on the other. His solution was to offer the Reichstag a compromise, the reform of the three class voting system in Prussia.⁵⁰

⁵⁰Erdmann, pp. 176-85; Rosenberg, pp. 153-60.

Both Lerchenfeld and Hertling were concerned about this issue, which could possibly erupt into civil strife and which could threaten Bethmann Hollweg's position. Ever the realist, Lerchenfeld wrote to Hertling about the situation on April 2 and criticized the Prussian Conservative Party for opposing the reform. According to Lerchenfeld:

In light of the powerful democratic surge, which, as a result of the lengthy continuation of the war, passes and must pass throughout the entire world, it is a pity that the Prussian Conservatives learn nothing and have no leader who understands the signs of the times. Through their foolish agitation against the Chancellor, they only succeed [in assuring] that he will be pushed even farther to the left.⁵¹

The responsibility of the Conservative Party, continued Lerchenfeld, was to stand behind the government during the war and not to lose its head over changes that had to be made.⁵² After submitting this opinion, Lerchenfeld left Berlin on a month's vacation.

Hertling did not share Lerchenfeld's view of the situation. Worried that the reform of the Prussian voting system was the first step towards a parliamentary system, Hertling informed Bethmann Hollweg on April 4 that the Bavarian government was going to watch the development of the reform very carefully. He also sent the Chancellor a report written by Bavarian War Minister

⁵¹L-H, 2 April 1917, Letter 359, BWHL, II, 827.

⁵²L-H, 2 April 1917, Letter 359, BWHL, II, 826-9.

von Hellingrath which emphasized the disruptive influence which the reform could have on the morals of the Bavarian people.⁵³

Bethmann Hollweg thanked Hertling for this information and then asked Hertling to do anything he could to avoid an adverse reaction to the Kaiser's Easter message on April 7,⁵⁴ which promised to eliminate the three class voting system and to assure direct and secret voting after the war. The Kaiser's speech, however, did not promise universal male suffrage.⁵⁵

The Chancellor followed this request with a letter on the eleventh in which he explained to Hertling the necessity of some type of reform. According to Bethmann Hollweg, some attempt at reform was essential because "one must offer some sacrifice to the raging sea [i.e., the demand for reform]. . . ." ⁵⁶ The Chancellor believed that the Kaiser's Easter message had been an effective method of dealing with the problem because it allowed the government to gain some control over the situation. Instead of being forced to make many drastic changes, the Kaiser had volunteered to make one small

⁵³H-BH, 4 April 1917, Letter 42, BWHL, II, 1014-6.

⁵⁴Beilage c, H-BH, 4 April 1917, Letter 42, BWHL, II, 1014-6.

⁵⁵Erdmann, p. 185.

⁵⁶BH-H, 11 April 1917, Letter 43, BWHL, II, 1017.

one and thereby had succeeded in establishing a temporary truce in Germany's political life. Although the Chancellor did admit that the formation of a constitutional committee to oversee the reform could pose some problems for the government, he did not believe that it would lead to democratization.⁵⁷

Hans von Schoen, the Bavarian chargé d'affaires, echoed the Chancellor's opinions in a letter to Hertling on the same day. According to Schoen, the change of the voting system was necessary to prevent revolution. Postponing it until after the war was good strategy, because people might lose interest in it once peace was declared. He did, however, inform Hertling that the proposed combination of the Chancellor's office with that of the Prussian Minister President could have an effect on the federal structure of the Reich. The states, for example, would have more influence in Prussian affairs through the Chancellor, but conversely, the Prussian House of Representatives could also have more influence on the politics of the Reich, since its members could force the resignation of the Chancellor, their Minister President.⁵⁸

⁵⁷BH-H, 11 April 1917, Letter 43, BWHL, II, 1016-8.

⁵⁸Schoen-Hertling, 11 April 1917, Letter 361, BWHL, II, 831-4.

Although this point may seem at first like a technicality, it is not. Although the same person generally held both the position of Chancellor and Prussian Minister President, the duties and responsibilities of the two offices were clearly defined, often producing a schizophrenic effect on the person holding those offices. It could happen, for example, that the Chancellor might agree to a proposal in his position as Minister President and veto that same proposal in his position as Reichskanzler or vice versa. Or he might also resign from one office and remain in the other, as was suggested in the case of Chancellor Michaelis. The combination of the two offices would prevent this type of duality, thus causing the conditions which Schoen described.⁵⁹

The arguments in Schoen's and Bethmann Hollweg's letters must have convinced Hertling of the need for reform, since he gave his approval of the measures taken to the Chancellor on April 23. He believed that they provided an ideal solution to the problem because they promised to reform the system, preserved internal peace, and, most importantly, delayed any reform until after the war.⁶⁰

⁵⁹Röhl, *passim*.

⁶⁰H-BH, 23 April 1917, Letter 44, BWHL, II, 1018-9.

Unfortunately for the Chancellor, Hertling's approval did not guarantee the success of his compromise, and by May, Bethmann Hollweg was facing mounting opposition from both the left, which wanted more reforms, and from the right, which wanted to prevent any reform at all. Schoen informed Hertling on May 3, for example, that the left was now insisting that the reform be instituted in all of the states which had an antiquated voting system, while it was rumored that the army was planning to place a strong military man in charge of the government after the war to prevent any reforms.⁶¹

Added to this disagreement over internal affairs was an increasing desire for peace. By the late spring, many people realized that U-boat warfare was not the miracle weapon which would bring England to its knees and that Germany might have to settle for a less than victorious peace. As a result, the left, supported by the Center Party, began to press the government to negotiate a peace without annexations. The army staunchly refused to accept such a proposal, and, once again, the Chancellor was caught in the crossfire between the two extremes.

All these problems came to a head in July of 1917 when both the army and the Reichstag withdrew

⁶¹Schoen-Hertling, 3 May 1917, Letter 365, BWHL, II, 839-40.

their support from Bethmann Hollweg and demanded his resignation. The ultimate decision lay in the Kaiser's hands, but he was reluctant to dismiss the Chancellor. Unable to make a decision, he turned to Lerchenfeld for advice. During the first meeting between the two on July 8, the Kaiser asked Lerchenfeld if Bethmann Hollweg still had the confidence of the Bavarian government, and Lerchenfeld told him that he believed that the Chancellor had the support of all of the southern states. Lerchenfeld did acknowledge that Bethmann Hollweg had problems making decisions, but his other qualities made up for this fault. In his opinion, it would be impossible to find a replacement whose qualifications were as good. He believed that it was definitely the wrong time to appoint a conservative Chancellor, and the Kaiser agreed.

Concerning the issues facing the Chancellor, the Kaiser stated that he did not agree with the Erzberger peace proposal. He was willing to agree to an independent Belgium if it did not become "an English stronghold," but he felt that Germany had done its part in suing for peace and it was now the Entente's turn. He then affirmed that he stood behind his Easter message as long as any changes were delayed until after the war and they did not interfere with the rights of the states.

Lerchenfeld thanked Wilhelm for his concern for the states, but he advised the Kaiser not to be afraid to compromise if necessary. One compromise which Lerchenfeld suggested was allowing Bethmann Hollweg to use parliamentary members as "co-workers" to help him with his work load, since such an action might improve his relations with the Reichstag. The Kaiser was not very receptive to this suggestion, and the two men ended their discussion with talk of the war developments.⁶²

The Chancellor's situation worsened during the next week. Lerchenfeld informed Munich on the ninth that the Chancellor crisis was almost certain, if not because of the reform of the voting system then because of disagreements between Bethmann Hollweg and the OHL over war aims. He also advised Hertling to come to Berlin because the growing discontent in the Reichstag could erupt in the direction of parliamentary development, which could, in turn, result in a loss of the states' power.⁶³

The next day his letter assumed a tone of urgency. According to Lerchenfeld, the Chancellor was now convinced that the only way to avoid the crisis

⁶²Lerchenfeld-King Ludwig III, 8 July 1917, Letter 378, BWHL, II, 860-3.

⁶³Lerchenfeld-Lössl, 9 July 1917, Letter 381, BWHL, II, 870-2.

was to pass the reform of the Prussian voting system immediately. The problem was that many people, including three Prussian ministers, opposed such an action because they believed that giving in to the Reichstag endangered the rights of the states. No one knew what position the Kaiser would take, but at that point he was resisting any attempt by the states at mediation. It was now imperative, continued Lerchenfeld, that Hertling come to Berlin, since he might have to use his authority to make the Kaiser overturn his policy of protecting the states' rights in order to avoid the impending crisis.⁶⁴

On the surface, these two letters appear to present two contradictory points of view, since Lerchenfeld was asking Hertling to come to Berlin to protect the states' rights and to prevent the Kaiser from being overprotective of the states' rights. Although Lerchenfeld did not explain this contradiction, closer examination reveals a common denominator between the two, the fear of an increase in the Reichstag's power.

In the first letter, Lerchenfeld worried that, because of its dissatisfaction with the Chancellor, the Reichstag might take matters into its own hands

⁶⁴Lerchenfeld-Lössl, 10 July 1917, Letter 382, BWHL, II, 872-4.

and force the government to accept its decision on the reform bill and on a change in Chancellors. Such an action would lead to further development of parliamentary powers and to a curtailment of the states' rights. The second letter demonstrates Lerchenfeld's concern that the Kaiser's and the Prussian government's intransigence could provoke a revolt by the Reichstag. The basic argument behind both letters was the same one Bethmann Hollweg used in April to justify the reform of the Prussian voting system: better to compromise on a small point than to face a possible overthrow of the whole system.

Another possible reason why Lerchenfeld supported the introduction of the reform bill was the chance of retaining Bethmann Hollweg in his position. After all, states' rights did not mean very much if the Chancellor was unwilling to work with the states. One should also remember that although the Kaiser claimed that he was protecting all of the states' rights, Bavaria did not stand to lose that much if the reform bill were passed, since Bavaria already had universal male suffrage.

In the end, Lerchenfeld's fears about the Kaiser's rigidity proved to be unfounded. The Kaiser informed Lerchenfeld on July 12 that in order to save Bethmann Hollweg, he had authorized the Chancellor to draw up a draft of the reform bill, including a passage

on universal suffrage. Through this measure, the Kaiser could prevent the Reichstag from forcing such a resolution on the government, an action which would endanger the rights of the states, especially those of Prussia. According to Wilhelm, the Reichstag had, upon hearing his proposal, agreed to stop movement on its reform bill.

Lerchenfeld asked the Kaiser if the decision to keep Bethmann Hollweg in office was firm, and Wilhelm replied that the Imperial Council still had to discuss the matter. Lerchenfeld told King Ludwig at the end of his report on the meeting that he believed that the members of the Council would vote against the Chancellor. Even if they did not, Bethmann Hollweg still might not survive the crisis, because he had lost the confidence of all of the parties in the Reichstag except the Socialists and Independent Socialists.⁶⁵

Lerchenfeld's prediction was correct. The Chancellor did not manage to overcome his opposition. The decisive blow, however, came not from the Council or the Reichstag but from Hindenburg and Ludendorff, who threatened to resign if the Chancellor did not. Lerchenfeld met once again with the Kaiser after he had made his decision, and the Kaiser asked Lerchenfeld

⁶⁵Lerchenfeld-King Ludwig III, 12 July 1917, Letter 384, BWHL, II, 875-7.

to offer the Chancellor's position to Hertling. He had chosen Hertling, the Kaiser said, because he was respected in the international community and because Bethmann Hollweg had suggested him as his replacement.⁶⁶

Because of his earlier troubles with the military, Hertling refused the offer, and Georg Michaelis became the next Chancellor. According to Lerchenfeld:

The new Chancellor does not have a personality which makes him an obvious choice [for the position]. He does not have an impressive appearance and, up until now, has held himself aloof from foreign matters.⁶⁷

The reason he had been chosen, Lerchenfeld continued, was his reputation of having an honest character, his dedication and efficiency in his previous positions, and the fact that he had held a variety of posts within the government.⁶⁸ In short, Lerchenfeld was not impressed by Michaelis.

The appointment of Michaelis as Chancellor created problems for Bavaria. It meant an end to the close relationship between the Bavarian government and the Chancellor and that Bavaria would have to renegotiate its position on Alsace. The rising power of the

⁶⁶Lerchenfeld-King Ludwig III, 14 July 1917, Letter 385, BWHL, II, 878-80.

⁶⁷Lerchenfeld-King Ludwig III, 14 July 1917, Letter 385, BWHL, II, 879.

⁶⁸Lerchenfeld-King Ludwig III, 14 July 1917, Letter 385, BWHL, II, 878-80.

Reichstag further complicated the issue. After the passage of the Peace Resolution in July, the Reichstag began to exercise more influence on war aims, and consequently the states had less control over such matters than they had formerly had.

The situation grew serious for Bavaria in July when the majority parties in the Reichstag took a stand against the division of Alsace-Lorraine and recommended that it be established as a federal state. The only concession which the parties made to Bavaria was to suggest that a member of the Bavarian royal family, the Wittelbachs, be given the throne of Alsace. After receiving the Chancellor's agreement, the Reichstag was ready to have a showdown with the states.⁶⁹

Initially, Hertling would not accept the opinions of the Reichstag and the Chancellor, and he did his best to dissuade Michaelis by sending him a report arguing in favor of division.⁷⁰ Hertling also considered allying himself with the OHL against the Chancellor, but he decided against it when he realized that the High Command really wanted the entire Reichsland for Prussia.⁷¹

⁶⁹Janssen, Macht, pp. 147-8.

⁷⁰Hertling-Michaelis, 1 August 1917, Letter 48, BWHL, II, 1024-5.

⁷¹Janssen, Macht, pp. 149-52.

Upon the urging of the Center Party, however, Hertling resigned himself to the situation. He informally notified the Chancellor in late August that although Bavaria's maximum demand was the incorporation of Alsace into Bavaria, he would settle for a Wittelbach on the throne of Alsace. Hertling then made a trip to Berlin on September 30 to assure the success of this plan, and the problem of Alsace-Lorraine seemed to be nearing a solution.⁷²

The remaining obstacle was the OHL, because without its approval the plan was unlikely to succeed. The solution to the Alsace-Lorraine problem was, therefore, built upon shaky ground, because the only way the OHL would agree to autonomy was if the Reichsland were set up as an "independent" state under the control of Prussia. The OHL announced its opposition to the plan in October, and upon hearing of its decision, Hertling also withdrew his endorsement of the plan, leaving the problem's solution to his own chancellorship.⁷³

At the same time that Michaelis was dealing with the ever present dilemma of Alsace-Lorraine, he also faced a new challenge, a papal peace initiative. During the last month of Bethmann Hollweg's

⁷²Janssen, Macht, pp. 157-8.

⁷³Janssen, Macht, pp. 161-2.

chancellorship, Pope Benedict XV attempted to persuade the opposing nations to discuss peace terms. Since any declaration of war aims would lead to open warfare between the two political extremes in Germany, Michaelis' government tried to draft a response to the papal note which would demonstrate Germany's willingness for peace without committing the government to any specific program. The less than successful result, combined with the equal intransigence of the Entente governments, doomed the Pope's efforts to failure.⁷⁴

This issue must have been an important one for the Bavarian government, although the letters do not reflect it because Lerchenfeld took an extended vacation during the crucial last two weeks of July and the first weeks of August. During the war, Munich often served as an "embassy" for papal-German affairs with Viktor Naumann, Hertling, Erzberger, and Czernin serving as leading "ambassadors."⁷⁵ Although the German government rejected many of the Pope's suggestions for an easing of tensions, Hertling's contacts in Rome were of some use. In the spring of 1917, for example, Bethmann Hollweg had credited Hertling with

⁷⁴Ritter, IV, 5-67.

⁷⁵Ritter, IV, 18.

helping to avoid papal condemnation of unrestricted submarine warfare.⁷⁶

Being "politically, not religiously, minded," Lerchenfeld remained relatively uninvolved in papal-German affairs. His main service was to relay Bethmann Hollweg's reactions to Hertling's occasional suggestions. What is known of Lerchenfeld's actions during the peace initiative is consistent with this policy. In a series of three letters from September 14-27, Lerchenfeld informed Hertling about the government's determination not to discuss war aims with the Pope, a policy with which Lerchenfeld agreed, and about the formation of a set of conditions for the possible peace talks with Britain.⁷⁷ Since neither of these efforts produced positive results, an analysis of the approaching Chancellor crisis in October soon assumed precedence over these other matters.

On October 10, Lerchenfeld informed Hertling that Michaelis' days were numbered because of his inability to get along with the Reichstag. Although Lerchenfeld believed that Michaelis had created most of his own problems through his attack on the

⁷⁶BH-H, 27 March 1917, Letter 41, BWHL, II, 1012.

⁷⁷L-H, 14 September 1917, Letter 396, BWHL, II, 899-927; L-H, 15 September 1917, Letter 397, BWHL, II, 928-9; L-H, 26-7 September 1917, Letter 398, BWHL, II, 929-31.

Independent Socialists, he was sorry to see him go because the Chancellor was basically "federally-minded" and because it would be difficult to find a replacement for him.⁷⁸ Once again, Lerchenfeld was correct in his predictions. The next two weeks before Michaelis' fall were filled with wild rumors about who his successor would be, and political careers rose and fell as the German government foundered in its attempts to find a replacement for the short-lived Chancellor.

Lerchenfeld kept Hertling abreast of all developments. The main candidates in the running on October 10 were Bülow, Tirpitz, and Richard von Kühlmann, the Foreign Minister. Lerchenfeld belittled the chances of Bülow and Tirpitz, neither of whom he liked either personally or professionally--Bülow because he was not "federally-minded" and Tirpitz because of his nationalistic naval policy. He was more sympathetic to the Bavarian Kühlmann, but he doubted his success because of his personality and his Bavarian citizenship. In Lerchenfeld's opinion:

. . .the next Chancellor must be a Prussian Conservative without blinders, if there is one, and certainly [this would be] in our best interest, because without Prussian particularism it is hard to lead the struggle against centralization.⁷⁹

⁷⁸L-H, 10 October 1917, Letter 400, BWHL, II, 932-4.

⁷⁹L-H, 10 October 1917, Letter 400, BWHL, II, 933.

By October 13, Lerchenfeld had lost his sympathy for Michaelis, and he informed Hertling that the Chancellor's resignation would be in Bavaria's interest because of Michaelis' political ineptitude. The rumors now had Count Johann von Bernstorff as the lucky candidate with Michaelis remaining as Prussian Minister President. Lerchenfeld approved of Michaelis' retention in that office, since he might be able to pass the voting reform, but opposed Bernstorff's appointment on the grounds that he would not protect the rights of the states and that he might promote parliamentary development.⁸⁰

Two days later the situation had changed again, and Lerchenfeld listed Count Siegfried von Roedern and Bülow as the top contenders. Roedern was unlikely to win, because he had too many enemies. Bülow had the support of the Reichstag, but Lerchenfeld believed that the Kaiser would veto him. If the Kaiser asked his opinion, Lerchenfeld assured Hertling that he would explain to Wilhelm that Hertling could not work with Bülow.⁸¹

Despite Lerchenfeld's reservations, Bülow began to emerge as the strongest contender. Bülow's main

⁸⁰L-H, 13 October 1917, Letter 403, BWHL, II, 941-2.

⁸¹L-H, 15 October 1917, Letter 404, BWHL, II, 942-3.

advantages were the support of the army and the Reichstag and his political acumen. According to Lerchenfeld, Bülow had promised everyone something in order to win the position. To the Reichstag he promised the passage of the Prussian voting reform and positions for parliamentary leaders in his government. To please the army and the states, he was taking a stand against further parliamentary development and against the autonomy of Alsace-Lorraine. Lerchenfeld did not comment on the contradictory nature of these promises, but he did warn Hertling that Bülow's chances of doing what he wanted with Alsace-Lorraine were very slim. As a sidelight on the reform of the Prussian voting system, Lerchenfeld noted that the Prussian Conservatives were planning to walk out of the Prussian parliament if and when the reform bill came to a vote. Lerchenfeld doubted that they would really do it, since "it would be too smart."⁸²

Bülow continued his election campaigning by visiting Lerchenfeld on October 22. During his visit, he denied promising Trentino to Italy during his stint as Italian ambassador, a sore point between Bülow and the Bavarian government. Then, according to Lerchenfeld, he came "immediately" to the subject of Alsace-Lorraine. Bülow stated that he considered autonomy

⁸²L-H, 20 October 1917, Letter 406, BWHL, II, 945.

for the Reichsland dangerous and that he supported the division of Alsace-Lorraine between Prussia and Bavaria.⁸³ Obviously, Bülow hoped to win Bavaria's agreement to his appointment as Chancellor through such a move.

This play for Bavarian support accompanied yet another development in the situation in Bülow's favor. The Reichstag sent the Kaiser a petition requesting a change of Chancellors, and according to a letter of Lerchenfeld's, Bülow seemed to be the only choice. Although Bülow did face opposition in Vienna, Lerchenfeld did not think that Vienna could prevent his appointment, since the OHL did not care what Vienna thought.⁸⁴

Just as Lerchenfeld was beginning to resign himself to Bülow as Chancellor, however, events took a critical turn. The Socialists, Independent Socialists, and part of the Center Party suddenly voiced their opposition to Bülow.⁸⁵ Even more importantly, the Kaiser, angered by the Reichstag's demands, began to reconsider Michaelis' resignation. When Karl

⁸³L-H, 22 October 1917, Letter 408, BWHL, II, 946-9.

⁸⁴L-H, 22 October 1917, Letter 408, BWHL, II, 946-9.

⁸⁵L-H, 22 October 1917, Letter 408, BWHL, II, 946-9.

Helffferich, the Vice Chancellor, spoke to Lerchenfeld about keeping Michaelis in office, Lerchenfeld advised him against it. Stating that he understood the Kaiser's feelings, he nevertheless warned Helffferich that the Reichstag was determined in its opposition to Michaelis and that if the government did not act, the next step by the parties might be much more serious than just a politely phrased note to the Kaiser voicing their dissatisfaction.⁸⁶

Helffferich then asked Lerchenfeld if Hertling would be willing to accept the position, and Lerchenfeld replied that he would.⁸⁷ This information must have decided the issue, because the next day Lerchenfeld asked Hertling to come to Berlin.⁸⁸ Although no one has done a study on why the government chose Hertling for the chancellorship, Viktor Naumann claims that Hertling's good standing and experience with the Reichstag qualified him for the job.⁸⁹ This theory fits the situation, since the government definitely needed someone who could handle himself in the Reichstag.

⁸⁶L-H, 25 October 1917, Letter 411, BWHL, II, 953-4.

⁸⁷L-H, 25 October 1917, Letter 411, BWHL, II, 953-4.

⁸⁸Karl Graf von Hertling, Ein Jahr in der Reichskanzlei (Freiburg im Breisgau: Otterdersche Verlagshandlung, 1919), p. 4.

⁸⁹Naumann, p. 291.

Lerchenfeld's response to Hertling's appointment was tinged with both optimism and pessimism. The day before the summons Lerchenfeld advised Hertling that even if he were appointed, he would not be able to solve the government's problems.⁹⁰ In his telegram to Hertling, however, he urged Hertling to accept the position, since, in his opinion, it was not possible to refuse this time.⁹¹ In his final letter to Minister President Hertling on October 26, the Bavarian envoy stated:

As for me, I do not like to lose such a genial employer. In spite of that, I am pleased to be able to greet you soon as Chancellor and send my contratulations.⁹²

Unfortunately for Hertling, Lerchenfeld's pessimism aptly predicted the year ahead.

In reviewing the third year of the war, one can see that Bavaria and the federalist system in general were threatened by both the Reichstag, in the guise of impending democratization, and the OHL, in the form of a virtual military dictatorship. Although Lerchenfeld displayed a more flexible attitude towards the Reichstag than Hertling, both men feared and worked to

⁹⁰L-H, 25 October 1917, Letter 411, BWHL, II, 953-4.

⁹¹Hertling, Reichskanzlei, p. 4.

⁹²L-H, 26 October 1917, Letter 413, BWHL, II, 956.

prevent any drastic increase in the Reichstag's power. Both Minister President and envoy opposed the army's assumption of more political power. Hertling's confrontation with the military in February of 1917 demonstrated clearly his distaste for the OHL's political maneuvers. Hindenburg and Ludendorff, however, were not as vulnerable to attack as Falkenhayn had been, and as the year continued, Lerchenfeld and Hertling were forced to accept the army's new role in governmental affairs.

One constant in this period of change was the relationship between the Bavarian government and Bethmann Hollweg. Hertling continued his support of the Chancellor in his times of need, such as during the reform of the Prussian voting system, and the two continued to disagree about war aims. Although Hertling still pressed both Bethmann Hollweg and Michaelis about the annexation of Alsace, his bid for a peace without annexations in the east revealed to him that Bethmann Hollweg could no more guarantee a status quo ante bellum peace than he could a peace with annexations. But even the positive side of the Berlin-Munich relationship suffered a loss in productivity with the weakening of the Chancellor's position, since the combined forces of the Chancellor and the states were not enough to override the demands of the Reichstag and the OHL.

Although Lerchenfeld was absent from Berlin during the critical period surrounding the Kaiser's Easter message and during the early summer of 1917, he was still important in facilitating better relations between Bavaria and the central government. As had been true in the first two years of the war, Lerchenfeld provided Hertling with a different perspective from which to view the situation and gave him penetrating analyses of such problems as the possible annexation of Poland, the reform of the Prussian voting system, and the two Chancellor crises. Lerchenfeld's opinions were no less valuable to high ranking officials of the central government, and he gave sound, practical advice to Bethmann Hollweg, Helfferich, and even the Kaiser. Viewed from hindsight, Lerchenfeld's performance during these three years of the war inclines one to agree with Karl Georg von Treutler's assessment that Lerchenfeld would have been a better choice as Bethmann Hollweg's successor.⁹³ Unfortunately, Lerchenfeld did not have the experience with the Reichstag which was so necessary at that time, but even if he had, it is doubtful that he would have been able to overcome the army's stronghold on civilian affairs.

⁹³Treutler, p. 54.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The Germany which entered into a world war in 1914 was ill equipped to handle the problems accompanying total war. The empire lacked the economic and bureaucratic centralization and the internal unity necessary to withstand a prolonged conflict, and as a result, instead of strengthening and unifying the system, the war collapsed it.

Many of Germany's problems during the war grew out of the Bismarckian constitutional structure. Established to promote Prussian politics and power, the system encouraged competition among its different parts. Since Bismarck wanted to retain the dominance of Prussia within Germany, he could not admit the states as equal partners in a federalist union. Instead he based the states' representation on land size and population, thus encouraging rivalries over territorial acquisitions between them. Since further democratization threatened all of the states, but especially the more conservative Prussia, he pitted the states against the Reichstag, thereby linking the fate of the other states with that of Prussia. His refusal to give the Reichstag any control over the central government's offices and officials, combined with his inability to curtail

the power of the Prussian army, created a situation ripe for conflicts between all levels of the government.

That the stress of the wartime situation produced problems between the states and the central government is, consequently, not surprising. Such a governmental structure logically gave birth to squabbles over war aims, attempts at centralization, and the rising power of the army and the Reichstag, and such matters could affect the position of the states within the Reich. Bavaria's active role in these disagreements was also to be expected, because although all the states were threatened by centralization and further parliamentary development, as Prussia's closest rival, Bavaria stood to lose the most from an increased Prussian domination of Germany.

Given the structure of Imperial Germany, what is surprising is that more serious conflicts did not erupt between Bavaria and the central government. Bavaria's close relationship with Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg partially explains the Bavarian desire to cooperate with Berlin, but a substantial amount of credit must also be given to Count Hugo von Lerchenfeld, the Bavarian envoy to Berlin from 1880-1918. His cosmopolitan outlook, fostered during a childhood spent in diplomatic circles in Berlin and Vienna, enabled him to look beyond particular Bavarian

concerns to the larger issues of national and international politics.

Count von Lerchenfeld gained new significance and importance as a result of the wartime arguments between Munich and Berlin. The Bavarian government relied upon Lerchenfeld to impress upon the Chancellor the necessity of its demands, and the Chancellor turned to the envoy for help in persuading the Bavarian government that his policies were in the nation's best interests. Fortunately for Bethmann Hollweg, Lerchenfeld often agreed with his assessment of the situation and acted as a moderating influence upon Bavaria.

The bitterest disagreement between the two governments concerned war aims and particularly Alsace-Lorraine. For King Ludwig, the acquisition of Alsace was undebatable; Bavaria would quite naturally increase its territory as a result of the war. Minister President von Hertling's opinions and motivations were less obvious. Although it is possible that Hertling was personally opposed to annexations, as Deuerlein attests,¹ his official actions revealed a moderate annexationist. Certainly he campaigned for Bavarian possession of the province throughout the war and justified its incorporation into the state, as Viktor

¹Deuerlein, DK, p. 204.

Naumann points out,² on constitutional grounds. Bavaria could not allow Prussia to increase its territory as a result of the war at the expense of the other states' political power in the Bundesrat. To retain its power ratio with Prussia, Bavaria needed Alsace. Karl Heinz Janssen characterizes this argument as a clever ploy to whitewash Bavarian greed for territory, but Naumann's explanation makes sense in the context of the governmental structure and of the prewar arguments over Alsace-Lorraine.

Lerchenfeld had little influence over the formation of Bavarian policy towards Alsace. He never attempted to convince Bavaria to give up this demand and, in fact, believed that Bavaria should receive its share of the province if it were divided. He did, however, try to tone down Munich's approach to the problem, hoping to ease the tension between Berlin and Munich over annexations.

Ludwig and Hertling also endorsed German control over Belgium during the first two years of the war. Although Ludwig would have relished a Bavarian annexation of Belgium, Hertling's motive, other than the desire for a larger Germany, was a trade of a Prussian Belgium for a Bavarian Alsace.

²Naumann, p. 126.

Lerchenfeld opposed the incorporation of Belgium into the Reich on realistic grounds. Germany could not defeat England, and Germany could not assimilate the Belgian population. His rational pleas did not convince the Bavarian government to give up its demands, but they made the government more open-minded about the Chancellor's policies, thus preventing the conversion of the Munich government to the right wing annexationist cause.

The question of annexations in the east was a more complicated one. Although Ludwig was not as interested in the eastern territories as he was in Belgium, he was less willing to compromise on the issue than Hertling. Hertling's attitudes towards the east vacillated according to his perception of the chances of a separate peace with Russia. When the chances were slim, as in the early summer of 1916, he planned territorial exchanges with the other states which would benefit Bavaria's drive to obtain Alsace. When peace seemed possible, as after the March Revolution in Russia, he was willing to forego annexations except for certain border rectifications, and he even agreed to sacrifice this stipulation in the meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the spring of 1917.

Although Lerchenfeld never commented on Courland or Lithuania, he certainly opposed the annexation of Poland for the same reasons that he denounced the

demand for Belgium. Since Hertling supported the annexation of Poland by Austria-Hungary, not by Germany, one cannot say that Lerchenfeld persuaded him to decide against German control over Poland. Hertling's letter of June of 1917 in which he castigated the army for its policies concerning Poland, however, mirrored Lerchenfeld's style and arguments against the annexation of Belgium and Poland.

Although the central government and Bavaria disagreed over war aims, their arguments never led to an open break between the two, and they were able to work together on other projects, such as the reform of the Prussian voting system. This reform was a compromise by Bethmann Hollweg with the Reichstag which began to press the government to liberalize the German government during the fall of 1916. Initially, Hertling was wary of the reform, since he was opposed to further democratization, but the Chancellor and Schoen were able to prevent Hertling from overreacting to the situation. Lerchenfeld, who was more open to compromise with the Reichstag than Hertling, did not influence the Bavarian decision on this issue as much as he might have because of his absence from Berlin during the critical days of April of 1917, but he did play an important role during the July crisis when he notified the Kaiser that Bavaria was willing to accept some reforms rather

than lose Bethmann Hollweg as Chancellor or face a possible revolt of the Reichstag.

The most impressive teamwork displayed by Berlin and Munich was during the submarine warfare crisis in the winter of 1916 when General Falkenhayn decided to support the navy's demand for unrestricted submarine warfare. Hertling was hesitant to involve Bavaria in this heated issue because of its controversial nature and because of his uncertainty about the capacity of German U-boats. He certainly could not afford to speak out against the miracle weapon which could defeat England without first considering the consequences. Lerchenfeld's warnings about the inaccuracy of the naval figures and about the risk of war with America, combined with a visit from Matthias Erzberger, convinced Hertling to oppose the submarine campaign and laid the groundwork for an alliance of the states and the Chancellor against the military and the right wing groups on this issue.

The two governments also worked together to try to limit the power of the military. Tension between the military and civilian authorities had existed in prewar Germany, and the war's extension of the army's authority worsened the situation. Naturally, the two governments directed most of their complaints at the commanders of the OHL. In Falkenhayn's case, the major concerns were his inability to secure victory

on the western front and his endorsement of unrestricted U-boat warfare. In the case of his successors, Hindenburg and Ludendorff, the problem was the more serious one of a virtual military dictatorship.

The united objection of Berlin and Munich to Falkenhayn reflects unfavorably upon all those involved. It is tragically ironic that Hertling, Lerchenfeld, and Bethmann Hollweg deceived themselves into believing that Hindenburg and Ludendorff would handle wartime problems in a less military fashion than Falkenhayn and that they would be more open to pursuing the Chancellor's policies. Their hope that Hindenburg's popularity would secure a moderate peace without the dangers of revolution hardly compensates for this lack of judgment; it only shows that they recognized the seriousness of wartime conditions. Lerchenfeld, in particular, deserves criticism for his part in the scheme. He was aware of the Chancellor's inability to assert himself in military headquarters. He should have realized that this defect in Bethmann Hollweg's character would be lethal to the German government when combined with Hindenburg's public support and Ludendorff's ruthless ambition. At least Hertling made an attempt in February of 1917, however unintentional and ineffective, to challenge the military's foray into the political scene, but by that time it was too late. Viewed from hindsight, the Bavarian

government would have better served Germany by taking Lerchenfeld's advice on war aims and ignoring his recommendation of Hindenburg as the best candidate for head of the OHL.

Lerchenfeld's reports, therefore, influenced to some extent Bavarian decisions on annexations, submarine warfare, the demand for parliamentary reform and the suitability of military commanders. Lerchenfeld was well aware of this facet of his position, and his reports to Bavaria were written with the intention of helping form policy. In his opinion, the diplomat shared equal responsibility with the government for any action taken in his area,³ and part of this responsibility meant painting a large enough picture of German and international events that Bavaria could put its own policies into perspective.

At the same time that Lerchenfeld worked to moderate Bavarian policy, he also protected Munich's interests in Berlin. He defended the Bavarian claim to Alsace with the caution and tact which the Bavarian government often lacked and brought any problems which its officials had to the Chancellor's attention. When disagreements or scandals did occur, Lerchenfeld was there to keep such matters from escalating out of proportion. He was so successful in this dual role

³Lerchenfeld, Errinerungen, p. 179.

that in Berlin he "was disparaged as a short-sighted particularist and in Munich as a proponent of centralization."⁴

Such diplomatic finesse was essential for the operation of the system. Without Lerchenfeld, the Bavarian government could easily have become isolated from Berlin and either rebelled against the central government or fallen prey to the polemics of the right wing groups. Bavaria also needed someone within government circles in Berlin to promote its interests and protect its rights. Conversely, Bethmann Hollweg had to be aware of any potential problems with Bavaria and to solve them before they threatened internal unity. One well-informed, rational Bavarian official, such as Lerchenfeld, could accomplish this task much more easily than three Prussian envoys.

Lerchenfeld's importance in Berlin, however, did not end with his duties as a Bavarian envoy. Well respected for his political savoir faire, he served as an advisor to the Chancellor, Kaiser, and other governmental officials during times of unrest. He lent a sympathetic ear to Bethmann Hollweg's tales of woe concerning his political adversaries and encouraged the Chancellor to stand by his principles when feasible and to remain in office despite his failures. His

⁴Lerchenfeld, Errinerungen, p. 216.

special relationship with the Kaiser was evidenced by no less than three conferences with Wilhelm II during July of 1917, and he probably stiffened the Kaiser's resolve to try to save his chancellor.

Lerchenfeld also has significance as a figure of his times. Possessing the grace and charm of a Metternich and the realism of a Bismarck, he represented the culmination of nineteenth century diplomacy. His prescient analysis of the war, couched in caustic wit, illustrates that voices of reason did exist during the war, or during the "stupidity of the millenium,"⁵ as Lerchenfeld so aptly termed it. What is unfortunate is that men such as Lerchenfeld did not have the power to enforce their opinions because of the demand for a victorious war and because of the excessive power of the military. With such men Germany might have been able to make the transition into the twentieth century a less painful one. Instead men like Wilhelm II, Admiral Tirpitz, and General Ludendorff steered German policy, and what was initially perceived as a nineteenth century war ended in a twentieth century defeat. The dramatic changes enacted by the revolutions in Germany made Lerchenfeld an anachronism, as he himself well knew.

⁵L-H, 24 October 1915, Letter 223, BWHL, I, 548.

"I have even today not lost my joy in hunting; eyes and ears and arms still perform their functions, yes, even to a certain extent, the legs. If I, in spite of that, hunt very seldom, the fault lies not in me but in the hunting, which since the war has become terrible almost everywhere. Will it ever be better again? I doubt it, for hunting and democracy do not go well together. Also in this respect, I am glad that I belong to the older generation. Nothing better is coming afterwards."⁶

Count von Lerchenfeld died on June 29, 1925 in Köfering.

⁶Deuerlein, BWHL, I, 66.

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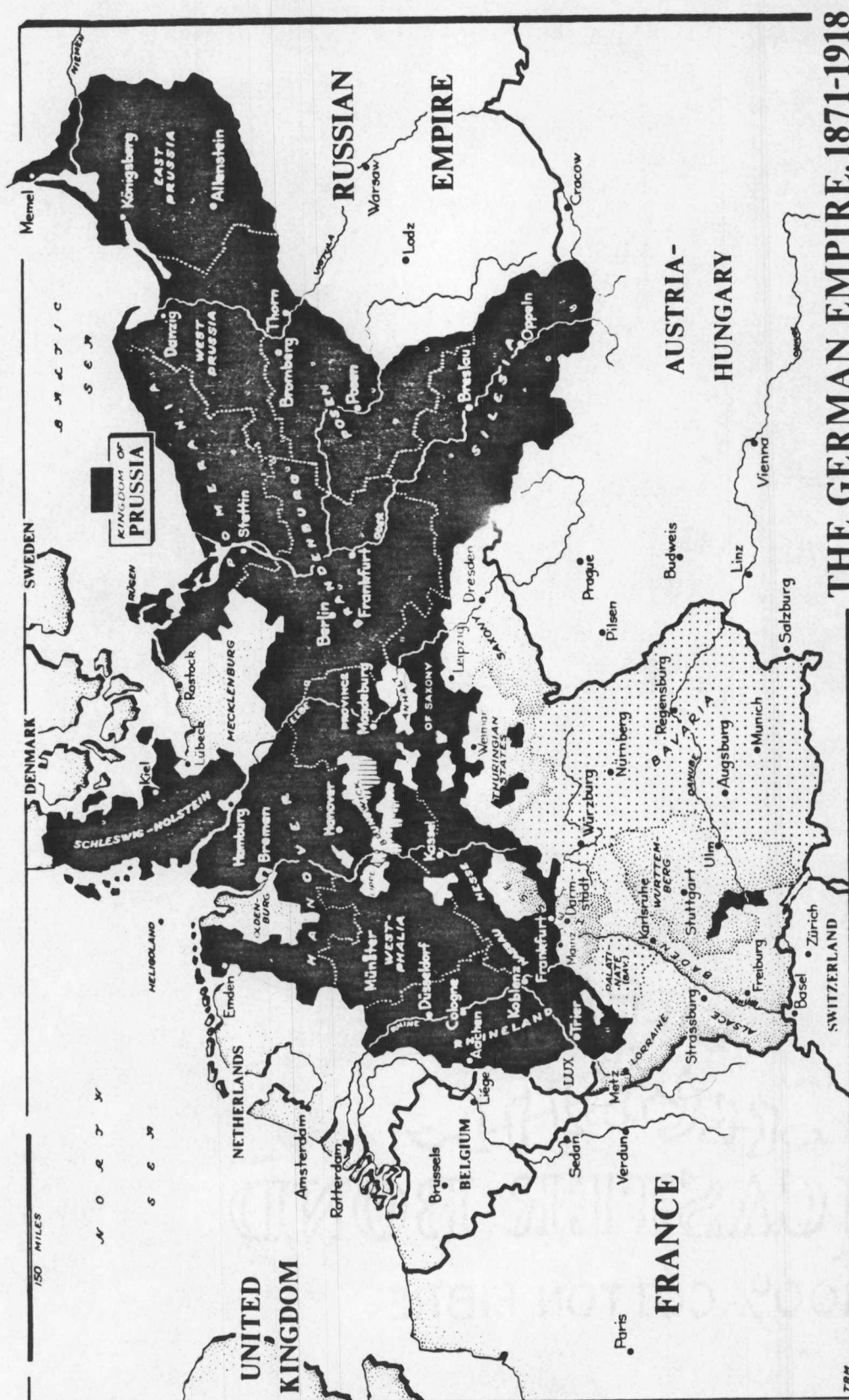
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APPENDIX



Source: Hajo Holborn, *A History of Modern Germany, 1840-1945* (New York, 1969; rpt. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), p. 235.

VITA

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