

PRE-ELECTION GERMANY

BY EDMOND VERMEIL

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NOTHING is more perplexing than the information we receive concerning contemporary Germany. We Frenchmen in particular confront a problem there that it is our duty to understand in all its aspects. What we need is a complete picture. Now, every observer or historian invariably sees this mysterious country, that is slowly taking on a new form at our very doors, from his individual standpoint. The formula 'Weimar or Potsdam' doubtless contains a germ of fact, and we may assume that a majority of Germans are arrayed under one of these two banners. But which will win, Weimar or Potsdam? That is the real question. What is its answer?

Still, we must not permit ourselves to be hypnotized by two words that are at the same time geographical and symbolical. That is shown by the very just observation made to me a few days ago in a Berlin drawing-room by a convinced and sincere Democrat: 'The only real statesman we have is the Prussian Minister Severing. Now what is Severing trying to do? What he wants, and is energetically working to accomplish, is to make the Prussian administration republican. If he succeeds, will it not be a guaranty for the future?'

In other words, he meant to say that Germany must be made a republic by the same political agencies that Bismarck in his day employed. And why not? Is not the policy of 'first one, then the other' the clearly marked interplay between the policy of the National Government and the policy of Prussia, which is the dominant feature of Germany's political history, as important to-day as it was yesterday? We have all wanted to see a partition of Prussia, if not of Germany. And if democracy takes firm root in Prussia, that great State within a State — if it makes itself a real power by a new and paradoxical Prussianizing of itself — what is to be our attitude? I ask these questions merely to show my readers how complex, how disconcerting for our French minds, the problem of Germany is.

The present Cabinet crisis gives us a striking illustration of this. It has been the subject of debate for a long time at Berlin. I do not mean that it has interested deeply the man upon the street, hastening with a preoccupied air to his place of employment and asking nothing more than to have peace at home and abroad. But it has completely absorbed the parliamentary strategists.

In fact, whenever I talked about the dissolution of the Reichstag to reasonable Germans, they applauded the idea. They know very well that the procrastination of the Weimar Democrats has exasperated us with good reason, and that after our elections last May had inaugurated a new policy

in France we had the right to expect the German people to give us a similarly definite expression of their opinion. But how can we expect that nation to express itself definitely? The Social Democrats and the Democrats — that is, the two parties that stand immediately left of the Centre — are seriously weakened, even though the introduction of the Rentenmark has, I was told on every side, again filled the trade-union treasuries emptied by inflation. The German People's Party and the German National People's Party, on the extreme Right, stick closely together, for they are practically unanimous in their attitude toward the burdens imposed upon Germany by the London Agreement. Between these two groups the Centre, following its old practice, oscillates to and fro, intent on not committing itself to either the Left or the Right. How can we escape from this impasse?

Some people have assured me that the German Nationalists are honest men, who are perfectly sincere in their declaration that they will carry out the Dawes Plan instead of sabotaging it. These optimists appeal to a thousand economic arguments — all of them very forcible — why this should be so. But none the less, if the German National People's Party should accept office in the next Cabinet, the fact will be deplorable. A Democrat asked me, not without some concern: 'What will France do? If we do not show her some evidence of a new state of mind, will she not perforce revert to the policies she abandoned on the eleventh of May?' And I detected this disquiet, doubt, and hesitation in the minds of all the public men with whom I talked. They fear that these delays and uncertainties may destroy the work of the last few months, which they are well aware has been of vast benefit to their country. On the other hand, they

want to wait. They beg us to have patience and to trust them, without being able to give us any proof, any guaranty, of their ultimate course.

Governmental impotence is the curse that weighs heaviest on Germany. Tugged this way and that by parties each of which represents definite and powerful interests, the authorities are incapable of making positive decisions. I discussed this difficulty with a distinguished jurist who took a leading part in the labors of the National Assembly. I also discussed it with an eminent university professor, who in spite of his sixty-five years still works assiduously and publishes widely, and whose powerful features and noble head are themselves testimony to his energy and authority. The first of these gentlemen, after relating at great length the events that followed immediately after the Revolution, the origin of the present Democratic Party, and the important rôle played by President Ebert, concluded: 'So you see, it was the Treaty of Versailles that broke the back of German Democracy' — *hat der deutschen Demokratie den Rückgrat gebrochen.*

The university professor showed utter contempt for British and French democracy. He could see nothing in them except plutocracies. I tried in vain to persuade him that side by side with our plutocracy there still survive our democratic manners and the habits contracted by our people during a long period of self-government. He admitted that the Germans are incapable of expressing themselves politically with clearness and decision. For while this German savant despises our parliaments, he holds German parliaments in still deeper contempt. He said that before the Revolution Germany did have some inkling of true democracy — *die wahre Mitregierung des Volkes*; but to-day the

party system utterly deprives the people of the sovereign authority theoretically granted them. That was the real meaning of the whole Weimar drama.

In this gentleman's opinion the German Revolution merely consecrated a defeat. As to the causes of this defeat and the origin of the war he was adamant: in his mind, Poincaré, Izvolskii, and Grey were the real authors of the tragedy of 1914 — he did not doubt it for an instant. The German people had been attacked. I suggested that the critical moment was in 1904, when Great Britain ceased courting the Triple Alliance and turned toward the Double Entente. The professor assented. 'But why did the English change front?' I said. 'Did not the German army and fleet have some influence there?' The professor admitted that also. We seemed on the point of agreeing. But it made no difference; he stuck to his thesis that Germany fought a defensive war, and you could not shake him from it.

That is the type of man who to-day controls the political destinies of the country. Trapped between the past and the present like Stresemann, who stretches out his hands to all Parties, and whose speeches build wonderful but all too fragile bridges of understanding between them, they hesitate and quibble, while France and all the world, after catching a glimpse during these past months of a great hope, wait for them to decide whether it shall be peace or war, whether Europe is to survive or perish.

But let us leave this disappointing generation, with its clumsiness and indecision, and see what we have to hope for from the Democratic pacifists, and above all, from the rising generation of young Republicans that is growing up side by side with another group of young men of disturbingly

Chauvinist tendencies, but is becoming more confident and clearly conscious of its future task with every day that passes. I do not cherish dangerous illusions regarding these two movements. But we must scan carefully the new signs that are rising over the horizon.

I followed closely the sessions of the Twenty-third International Peace Conference. They were unquestionably very interesting and significant; and let me say at the outset that the German press seemed to attach great importance to this Congress, and discussed at length its debates and resolutions. International pacifism — and German pacifism in particular — is passing through a serious crisis. In fact, the League of Nations has already put into effect a large part of its international-law programme, especially that portion relating to arbitration and disarmament. This has created a sharp division between the moderates, who are looking for positive and rational results, and the extremists, who insist on being discontented with what the League of Nations has accomplished, and demand something more radical. To put it briefly, pre-war pacifism wants to keep alive, and is casting about for something to do. The moderates won their case in the Disarmament Committee by a bare majority, which endorsed the action of the League in regard to the use of armed forces and military resistance. But the report of the Committee was completely overruled in the plenary session. The Germans, backed by the English, insisted upon absolute pacifism.

That throws a significant light upon the German pacifists. I fear that their uncompromising attitude will alienate public opinion and make them a mere sect. Now, the all-important thing is to secure popular backing. The crowds that flocked to the big public meetings

organized by the Congress at Berlin and elsewhere, and the immense success of the Potsdam meeting, which represented a victory of Minister Severing over the reactionaries and the Nationalist Fascisti, prove how deep, albeit unconscious and inarticulate, is the desire for peace among the German masses. A Frenchman who has lived in Berlin for a long time and knows Germany very well indeed said to me one day on the street, as we watched the crowd pass by: 'The war? That's the last thing in the world these people think about. What they want is to work, to earn their living, to have a fair degree of physical comfort. Doubtless there is among them a bourgeois element that continues to meditate ambitious schemes and to dream the wild dreams that the German's gift of technical vision encourages, but it will not be difficult to reach an agreement with that element. And the problem of economic coöperation between France and Germany is the most important problem of all.'

It was a wise and sensible observation. For that reason I regretted keenly that the Peace Conference at Berlin, which brought together Frenchmen, Germans, and Englishmen, did not take up this question in a practical way, with a proper realization of its difficulties, its determining conditions, and also its vast possibilities.

At its last session the Congress debated the interesting thesis of Count Coudenhove-Kalergi, an Austrian who proposes to organize inside the League of Nations itself a sub-group, to which he would give the name Pax-Europa, and from which he would exclude for economic and political reasons both Russia and England.

This is not the place to discuss a proposal like that. Most of the French delegates vigorously opposed it, particularly in so far as it would affect

relations between France and England. None the less, the Franco-German problem lies at the heart of this idea. Count Coudenhove-Kalergi has published an 'Appeal to the French Chamber,' in which he tries to sketch a solution of the latter problem. But that problem was not even raised at the Peace Congress. Its omission was so keenly felt that at the last session someone proposed that the Congress should appoint a special committee upon relations between France and Germany. Better late than never. If the pacifists cannot solve that question, all their other labors will be futile.

But to return to our previous question, what is the mind of the young men of Germany to-day? Is not the Franco-German problem in its last analysis a question of the mental attitude of the coming generation?

No doubt all that we have been told about the chauvinism of the young men in the secondary schools and universities of Germany and the intransigent spirit and instruction of their teachers is only too true. I know intimately a Berlin family whose two children, a boy and a girl, are enthusiastic Republicans and pacifists. They told me confidentially what they had to suffer at school. Their teachers take no pains to conceal their hatred of France and their desire for a war of vengeance. Do not imagine that the Government, particularly in Prussia, is inactive and indifferent in this matter. If the teachers were reported as holding and expressing such sentiments, they might lose their positions, especially now when the authorities are dismissing so many government employees. But except in a few isolated cases, all teaching in that country is imbued with this silent but obstinate Nationalism. The teachers and professors who are Republicans at heart

can hardly be said to have an appreciable influence. They may count for something in primary and secondary schools, but they are a cipher at the universities.

It is precisely this condition that is driving so many of the young people toward radical political methods. I was told by several informants that the Nationalist young people's societies have 800,000 members, but that the *Reichsbanner*, the principal Republican organization, has more than three million on its rolls. What do these societies aim to accomplish? It would take a special article to tell this. Doubtless many of their members do not know as yet. The pleasure of wearing a uniform, the love of military organization always latent in the German heart, probably play a part. But the *Reichsbanner* is a fact — and a fact of potent possibilities.

Everywhere, especially in the big-population centres, active groups are forming to propagate the Republican idea. I was invited to address a meeting of these young Republicans at a hall in Berlin. It was a small gathering of only about forty young men. They had draped the speaker's table with a French flag and in the back of the

hall was the flag of the German Republic. I elucidated at considerable length my ideas of the Franco-German problem. Then followed an eager, passionate discussion that lasted several hours. For these young men, I soon discovered, were no emotional, sentimental youngsters, carried away by vague enthusiasms, but hard-headed, critical, intelligent thinkers, and wonderfully well informed on all current topics, including economic and financial questions.

Such young men are of course the exception. I should never think of drawing a snap conclusion from a single experience like this, although it was one of the most interesting and valuable incidents of my Berlin visit. But I do think that I can say conservatively that a new Germany is slowly taking form, that the great fight between Weimar and Potsdam will be fought out by the young generation just coming on the stage, and that it is the duty of every Frenchman to recognize and to encourage the forces that are slowly mobilizing behind the scenes in Germany against reaction and revenge. For on the issue of that fight depends the safety of France.

EUROPE GETS TOGETHER

BY LUDWIG QUESSEL

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GERMANY has watched with astonishment, during this September, Europe's effort to give herself a Constitution. At last our continent seriously proposes to substitute a reign of law and order for the reign of brute force that has hitherto held sway. What even Liberals and Social Democrats have smiled at tolerantly, as naïve dreams of imaginative idealists and enthusiasts, is actually on the way to be realized. Continental Europe is visibly taking on form and substance as a supernational political entity. Even England, who regards this new development with secret dislike, is compelled to proclaim through the mouth of her Prime Minister that the first duty of the League of Nations is to create a united Europe.

This announcement is, to be sure, slightly misleading, in so far as the foundations of a united Europe have already been laid, not only without England's help, but against England's will. When France created a system of defensive alliances with Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Rumania, and Poland, to guarantee the new order of the continent, she thereby started a transition from anarchy to law. For four years England has fought with all the resources of her shrewd diplomacy this inconvenient innovation, which relegated her balance-of-power policy to the rubbish heap of history. Now she bows before an accomplished and in-

evitable fact. Of course she does not intend forthwith to leave unhampered a political development she cannot altogether prevent. Her purpose is rather to cabin and confine an evolutionary process that is marching forward of its own motion and volition against her will. With this in view she turns her eyes to Germany and Russia. She looks to these two Powers to delay, even though they cannot stop entirely, this evolution, which will ultimately emancipate Europe from Anglo-Saxon tutelage.

What has occurred at Geneva since the fourth of September removes the last shadow of doubt regarding this. Before the League took the recent measures that have set Continental Europe on the road toward unity and freedom under French guidance, a mysterious breakfast occurred in London, at the home of Lord Parmoor, where Marx and Stresemann expected to receive a hint as to the attitude they should adopt toward that body. Stresemann left that breakfast with the impression that England did not want Germany to join the League, even though a section of the British press, in order to save the Government's face at Geneva and Paris, was encouraging our country to take that step.

We all know, to be sure, that Lord Parmoor and Murray later published to the world, through the Social-Democratic Parliamentary Service, that they had urgently advised Stresemann and Marx at the Henley breakfast to apply for Germany's admission to the League,