RECONSIDERATIONS

THE END OF THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC

By Sir John Wheeler-Bennett

THE most remarkable thing about the Weimar Republic is not that it existed for only fifteen years but that it ever survived the circumstances of its nativity. Never was the idea of a republican form of government less welcome. The birthpangs of the ill-fated French Third Republic in 1870 were at least suffered to the accompaniment of demonstrations of enthusiasm, but the natal processes in November 1918 of what came to be known as the Weimar Republic were not only lacking in acclaim but were attended by more “bad fairies” than darkened any of Grimm’s gruesome tales. Some there were, however, who pursued the dangerous illusion that a change of régime would ensure a “soft peace” from the Allies—and especially the Americans. This insincere opportunism brought into the ranks of the supporters of the Republic many who would otherwise have been among its strong opponents.

Inimicality, reluctance and lack of enthusiasm were among the “evil spirits” with which the infant Weimar Republic had to contend, but these were not all. From the first it was tagged with two terrible indictments which rendered it vulnerable to attack from all quarters. In the first place, because the Provisional Government was largely composed of Socialists at the outset—the right and left wings of the Social Democratic Party—it came to be held responsible for the stab-in-the-back which, by undermining the loyalty of the home front, had betrayed the front-line soldiers and rendered defeat in the field inevitable. This in turn engendered the complementary myth that Germany had not been defeated by the Allies but only by the machinations of her own traitors.

The second indictment was that this new democratic form of government, so alien and unsuited to the German political way of thinking, had been forced upon Germany by the victorious Allies, led by President Woodrow Wilson, whose demands for the abolition of the monarchy and the substitution of a democratic republic were held by many in Germany to have been welcomed all too warmly and implemented all too pliantly by the Social Democrats.

To all Germans the Weimar Republic soon became identified with the acceptance and execution of the crushing terms of peace imposed upon Germany by her former enemies and present conquerors. It was the “Men of November” and their system who were widely held to be responsible for the humiliations of the Treaty of Versailles. From a struggling, impoverished and resentful Germany the cry went up: Anathema sint.

Thus the Weimar Republic—initially hailed as a means of saving Germany’s skin after a lost war—rapidly became unwanted and unacclaimed, despised and denigrated, the target of armed attack from the extreme Left and the extreme Right. Under such unfavorable auspices the chances of the Republic for survival, let alone success, appeared slim indeed.
II

Having set off to as bad a start as any in recorded history, the Weimar Republic seemed to justify all of the presentiments and gloomy prognostications which were so manifold. Miraculously, however, it did survive, though it cannot be said, except for the haleyon if deceptive period between 1924 and 1929, that it flourished. Not until it had somewhat bloodily suppressed the two Spartacist uprisings and had reduced the Kapp Putsch to a thing of ridicule could the writ of the republican government of Friedrich Ebert be said to run; but thereafter the Republic was not seriously assailed by armed assault either from the Left or from the Right, though this did not prevent it from being savaged from within.

Yet there was always a sense of impermanency surrounding the Republic, as if a kind of apology were being offered for some act of expediency which would be expiated as soon as possible. The possibility of a restoration of the monarchy was ever present in the back of the minds of the founding fathers, to some a hope, to some a consolation, to some a source of fear, and this was nowhere more apparent than in the Weimar Constitution itself which was designed to facilitate the transition from republican to monarchical government should this prove feasible.

In spirit, moreover, the Weimar Assembly was far from being a revolutionary body. Well knowing that, for the moment, nothing could be done against the will of the victors, the founders of the new Reich looked forward to a day when Germany should have regained her strength. Provided that their future possibilities were not restricted, such parties as the Center, the Bavarian Peoples' Party and the Democrats (and to some extent the Social Democrats) were prepared to resign themselves for the moment to the fait accompli. What they really feared—and this anxiety they shared in common with the High Command of the Army—was the disunion and partition of the Fatherland. The object of their immediate and ardent desire was to recoup those territorial losses, which they knew to be inevitable, by compensatory additions in the union of Austria, and possibly of the Sudetenland, for they knew well that nothing would be irretrievably lost to them as long as a large and populated territory formed a German unitary state.

Nowhere was this more clearly demonstrated than in the contemporary writings of Friedrich Naumann, calling for a "strong German unity such as had already been delineated on August 4, 1914," and concluding with an appeal to his "brother Germans in Alsace, Bohemia and Austria" to participate in this unity. Though their aims were not achieved until after the fall of the Republic and its replacement by the Third Reich, the aims themselves were being adumbrated and encouraged from the earliest days in Weimar.

It was a remarkable tribute to Bismarck—and also a most revealing commentary on the German political character—that the German unity which he achieved by military triumph should survive and even be strengthened by military defeat. His two guiding principles, German unity and State power, were those which inspired the large majority of the deputies to the National Assembly. What they achieved was not like the German Empire after 1815, a Staatenbund (a federation of States) nor, like the Second
Reich, a Bundestaat (a federal State); it was a superficially decentralized unitary state and an infinitely closer approximation to Bismarck's ideal than that statesman could have dared to hope for.

III

The history of the Weimar Republic falls more or less distinctly into four periods, each dominated by a "hero" or "non-hero." The first of these periods, which may be called the period of Precarious Existence, begins with the proclamation of the Republic on November 9, 1918, and continues through the suppression of the two Spartacist risings of January and March 1919 to the successful liquidation of the Kapp Putsch in March 1920. Its "hero" is Friedrich Ebert, the saddler's son who rose to lead the Social Democratic Party to its tragic destiny of power.

Ebert has been much criticized by the hindsighted school of historians for taking his first major action, the making of a deal with the High Command. While it is true that by his historic "telephone alliance" with Gröner on the night of November 9-10, Ebert set the revolution along lines which were ultimately to lead to its undoing, he could not at that moment have known this. What he did know was that there was a very real threat of insurrection in the streets of Berlin and that his only hope of maintaining law and order and the tenuous authority of his government appeared to lie in the cooperation of the military, themselves in a precarious condition and anxious to secure the support of the government of the day. The government needed force, the Army needed authority. Both recalled with fear and horror the happenings in Russia, then less than two years distant.

The second period of the Weimar Republic—that of Obstinate Resistance—extended from 1920 to 1923. It had two "heroes" of a very different nature: one, Hans von Seeckt, a Prussian general of the strongest national and patriotic tendencies; the other, Walther Rathenau, a Jew of intellectual though no less patriotic proclivities. Between them they represented much of what was most at stake at that time in the Weimar Republic.

Though separated intellectually and socially by a wide gulf, their approach to the Republic was relatively the same. Von Seeckt, the Prussian military aristocrat, unfaltering in his allegiance to the monarchic principle, and Rathenau, the head of the immensely rich and profitable AEG, the cultivated man-of-the-world, tremendously proud of his permitted association with the Kaiser and his court, and as different in his Jewishness from those semitic members of the Social Democratic and Independent Socialist Parties as it is possible to be, had both been originally antagonistic to the idea and principle of a republic.

The futility of the Kapp Putsch and the demonstrated ability of the Reich government to liquidate it, had established the fact that the Republic, whatever its detractors might think of it, had acquired an indefinite lease on life. If, therefore, they wished to serve Germany and so effect its rehabilitation in the status of a European power, they must do so by working through the Republic and not against it.

Thus the Weimar Republic entered upon a period during which its internal fortunes were increasingly in the safe custody of General von Seeckt and
the Reichswehr and its external affairs were conducted with great ability by Walther Rathenau—but for all too brief a period. The fact that the reparation issue reached an impasse was more the fault of the French than the Germans in the earlier part of this period of Obstinate Resistance. Rathenau’s negotiations with Loucheur were conducted in a spirit of genuine desire for a settlement, and it was only after he had been replaced by less capable men that the matter became one of mutual intransigence resulting in the inflation of the mark and the nugatory occupation of the Ruhr Basin.

Von Seeckt during this period became the guardian of the Reich, suppressing firmly a series of communist risings, though unfortunately adopting an ambivalent attitude toward the Nazi Beerhall Putsch. He utilized the extraordinary emergency powers vested in him by the cabinet with wisdom, restraint and impartiality and relinquished them without hesitation when the emergency had passed. Simultaneously he planned and executed the clandestine rearmament of the Reichswehr.

Both Rathenau and von Seeckt pursued their own negotiations with Russia and achieved, each in his own sphere, remarkable success. By the signature of the Treaty of Rapallo in 1922, under the noses of the European powers assembled at the Genoa Conference, Rathenau achieved a diplomatic coup of the first water; while, through his secret contacts with the Red Army, von Seeckt achieved a degree of cooperation in his program of rearmament which was to prove of the greatest possible assistance. Though Germany made little progress toward an agreement with the Western Allies, in the East she had achieved a measure of recognition and mutual assistance with Soviet Russia which was to prove an effective weapon in her future dealings with the West.¹

It seemed as if the fortunes of the Weimar Republic had reached their nadir during this period of uncompromising intransigency. As a result of the failure (or refusal) of the Germans and the Allies to reach any basis of agreement on reparation payments a major crisis developed. On January 9, 1923, the Reparation Commission declared Germany to be in default on her deliveries of coal and two days later French and Belgian troops occupied the Ruhr Basin by way of sanctions and to enforce coal production. Ebert replied by proclaiming a general cessation of all work throughout the Ruhr, adding that Germany would be unable to make payments of any kind until the occupying troops had been withdrawn. In consequence, the Reparation Commission declared Germany to be in general default (January 26) and the French and Belgian governments made it known that they would continue to occupy the Ruhr until reparation payments were resumed. A seemingly unresolvable deadlock ensued.

Meantime an economic and financial crisis had gripped Germany. At the beginning of the year, when the first French and Belgian troops entered the Ruhr, the mark stood at 50,000 to the pound sterling. By the end of Jan-

¹ The efforts of both General von Seeckt and Walther Rathenau rendered them targets for assassination by the extremists of the Right. Rathenau was gunned down by Nationalist gunmen on June 24, 1922 as he drove to his office in the Wilhelmstrasse, and a little over a year later, in September 1923, an attempt to murder von Seeckt was discovered and frustrated.
In January the pound was worth 250,000 marks and continued to rise catastrophically. By June it was worth half a million marks; by July one and a half million; by August 20 million; and thereafter it virtually disappeared as a serious medium of exchange. "We no longer have a choice between capitulation and chaos," lamented Dr. von Rosenberg, Rathenau's successor as Foreign Minister. "The alternative now is chaos with honor or chaos without honor."

It was at this moment in August 1923 that the tide turned for a variety of reasons. In the first place the leading actors in the European melodrama suddenly changed. In Germany, Gustav Stresemann became Chancellor and Foreign Minister; in France, Edouard Herriot replaced Raymond Poincaré; and Ramsay MacDonald gave Britain its first experience of a Labour Government. Coincidentally came the realization in Berlin and in Paris that the Ruhr deadlock must be broken and that passive resistance was ruinous in its results as was the futile French attempt "to dig coal with bayonets."

To Stresemann's credit be it said that, faced with the threat of complete chaos in the Ruhr, he took the first step to break the deadlock. The printers had declared a strike and the bank-note presses failed to produce; there was no money to be had even in its debased and depreciated condition. As an alternative to the virtual inevitability of civil war and the overthrow of the Republic by the forces of the extreme Right or the extreme Left, Stresemann advised Ebert on September 26 to declare a cessation of Passive Resistance. Though the response of the French government was neither as immediate nor as forthcoming as Stresemann had hoped, his action had, in effect, changed the course not only of German but of European history. By his momentous decision he had taken the first step along the road on which the great milestones were the Dawes Plan, the Locarno Treaties, the entry of Germany into the League of Nations, the Kellogg-Briand Pact, the Young Plan, the Hague Agreement and—his greatest ambition—the final evacuation of the Rhineland by Allied troops, the consummation of which he was not destined to see.

At one stroke he had brought to an abrupt conclusion the calamitous period of Obstinate Resistance and had opened the door to the period of Reconciliation which was to give the Weimar Republic its few bright moments of halcyon success.

IV

One of the most important aspects of the period of Fulfillment was that it coincided with the first steps of the United States—tentative and halting though they might be—to emerge from its carapace of isolation and to make a return to Europe. On December 29, 1922, the American Secretary of State, Charles Evans Hughes, in a speech to the American Historical Association at New Haven, had sketched out a plan for the solution of the reparation problem by means of a commission composed of men of the highest financial authority, prestige and experience in their respective countries who would approach the problem from the expert as distinct from the political point of view and produce a practical plan for working out the amount to be paid by Germany and also the method of payment. On such a commis-
sion, said Mr. Hughes, "I have no doubt that distinguished Americans would be prepared to serve."

It was some ten months later (October 13, 1923) that the British government, anxious to capitalize on the Stresemann decision to abandon passive resistance and disappointed at the failure of the French to respond to it, asked the American government whether it was prepared to stand by Mr. Hughes’ informal proposal. The reply was favorable and by the end of the year an international commission under the chairmanship of General Charles G. Dawes had been appointed. By the beginning of April 1924 they had presented their report to the Reparation Commission and, on August 30, to an international conference in London adopted what became known as the Dawes Plan.

The essential characteristic of the Plan was that for the first time it had considered the reparation problem not, as heretofore, from the aspect of the Allies “squeezing Germany till the pips squeak,” but on the more realistic basis of Germany’s capacity to pay. It was not claimed by the Dawes Committee that the fruits of its labors constituted a final solution of the reparation problem. It marked a penultimate not an ultimate phase. But the adoption of the Plan had two results of outstanding importance. It had rehabilitated Germany in the eyes of the world because Stresemann had demonstrated her willingness to meet her financial obligations and it was hoped in all quarters—and not unjustifiably—that this would be followed by a similar readiness to fulfill her political liabilities under the Treaty of Versailles.

Secondly, the adoption of the Dawes Plan re-established American confidence in Europe, as a result of which the international financial situation improved appreciably and the European states began to fund the loans which they had received from Great Britain and the United States during the war. Within Germany herself the moment of crisis and despair eased immeasurably. The authority of the government of the Republic, of which General von Seeckt had been the guardian and trustee during this critical period, emerged greatly enhanced. Moreover, thanks to the confidence and hope engendered by the adoption of the Dawes Plan and the financial wizardry of Dr. Hjalmar Schacht, the viability of the mark was re-established and the economic condition of the country progressed with astounding—and, to some, alarming—rapidity from abject poverty to gross affluence, albeit of a somewhat artificial nature.

There followed the spectacularly successful career of Gustav Stresemann as diplomatist and statesman. The conclusion of the Locarno Treaties in October 1925—in the negotiation of which he had played so vital a part—coincided with the evacuation of the First Zone of Occupation and it was Stresemann’s great hope that the renewed sense of security consequent in both Western and Eastern Europe as a result of these agreements, and of the friendly conversation which followed at Thoiry between Aristide Briand and himself, would result in the acceleration of the evacuation of the two remaining Zones and a far-reaching reappraisal of the disarmament issue by similar methods as those of the Dawes Plan. In the achievement of both these aims he was disappointed, but as a result of the Locarno Pact Germany
was ultimately admitted (after the preliminary fiasco of March 1926) to the
League of Nations and to a permanent seat on its Council.

The unexpected expansion of the Kellogg-Briand Pact for the outlawry
of war from its original conception as a Franco-American gesture to a serious
(or semi-serious) international instrument, provided Stresemann with a fur-
ther opportunity to demonstrate Germany’s desire to be regarded as a bona
fide member of the world comity of nations. German acceptance of the prin-
ciple of the outlawry of aggression as an instrument of national policy was
among the first to be received by the joint sponsors and Stresemann made
an impressive appearance at the somewhat farcical ceremony of signature
at the Quai d’Orsay on August 27, 1928, which, though heralded as the
nativity of a nominal war-less world, in reality ushered in a period in which
aggression stalked nakedly across Europe, Asia and Africa more unashamedly
than at any previous time in modern history.

However, in the conversations which now took place in Paris Stresemann
was informed in no uncertain terms that the question of further evacuation
of the Rhineland prior to the end of the statutory period fixed by the Treaty
of Versailles was inextricably bound up with the final settlement of the
reparation problem. It was also made clear that the same was true of any
reexamination of the disarmament issue.

There were increasingly numerous indications that such a final settlement
was of pressing urgency and the euphoric climate of ideas which followed the
signing of the Kellogg-Briand Pact was adjudged auspicious for its advocacy.
The condition of the Reich budget and of the general economic life of Ger-
many, which had blossomed into such illusory prosperity in the post-Locarno
years, was now far from healthy. There were certain dangerous tendencies
in the conduct of the government’s finances which alarmed such enlightened
and experienced observers as Parker Gilbert, the Agent-General for Repara-
tion Payments appointed under the Dawes Plan. A constantly mounting
level of central, state and municipal governmental expenditure and borrow-
ings coincided with increasing evidence of over-expansion and over-estima-
tion of internal activity and with growing signs of tension in economic life,
to which the increased expenditure had given an artificial stimulus.

Attention to these danger signals was drawn by the Agent-General in his
annual reports. He also stressed repeatedly the need of a review by the pow-
ers concerned of the whole reparation problem with the object of reaching
a “final settlement.” By the close of 1928 Mr. Gilbert’s advice had been taken
and agreement had been reached that the Reparation Commission should
appoint experts from the five creditor countries, together with those from
Germany and the United States. The committee thus constituted met under
the chairmanship of Owen D. Young and by June 7, 1929, it presented its
report in the shape of what has become known to history as the Young
Plan. The Plan was a highly intricate and complicated document which in
effect provided for German payments until 1988, at which time the matter
of reparations was to be regarded as closed.

At the first of the Hague Conferences, summoned in August 1929, to con-

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3 Stresemann was thus the first German Foreign Minister to visit Paris since Bismarck. Count von Brockdorff-Rantzau never got beyond Versailles.
sider the Young Plan, Gustav Stresemann fought the final battle of his life for the evacuation of the Rhineland. He was dying, and in order to achieve his heart's desire he may well have assented to additional burdens being placed on the German economy which he knew it would be impossible for it to bear. He did not live to see the full attainment of his ambition, for he died on October 3, 1929. But he knew that it was virtually assured. In a joint note, dated August 30 and addressed to him personally by the British, French and Belgian Foreign Ministers, it was declared that the evacuation of the Second Zone would begin during the month of September, and of the Third Zone after the ratification of the Young Plan by the German and French governments. This was finally achieved on May 17, 1930; it was the last act of the Era of Stresemann.

The hero (or non-hero) of the last period of the history of the Weimar Republic—which may be called the period of Fatalistic Desperation—was Heinrich Brüning, who dominated the German political scene from the spring of 1930, when he was appointed Chancellor, until his dismissal in the early summer of 1932.

Coincidentally with the death of Stresemann the fortunes of the Weimar Republic seemed to shudder and crumble. The Young Plan was accepted by Germany with the greatest reluctance and the battle in the Reichstag for its ratification disclosed the bitterest cleavage within the German body politic. The Communists joined with the Nationalists and the new political phenomenon of the National Socialists in attacking the government for accepting the Young Plan, and the aged President of the Reich, Marshal von Hindenburg (whom the votes of the Right had brought to office as Ebert’s successor in 1925) for supporting his Ministers. Finally the battle for ratification was won and the Chancellor, that historically accident-prone Social Democratic leader Hermann Müller, who had courageously signed the Treaty of Versailles, was adjudged guilty by many of his countrymen of having betrayed his country a second time in forcing the acceptance of a Plan which condemned Germany to pay reparations for another 60 years. Both the Right and the Left plotted to bring him down together with his coalition of Social Democrats, the Center Party and the German Peoples’ Party.

Nor was the Republic threatened by political strife only. The economic cyclone which had struck the American economy in October 1929 made its way slowly across the Atlantic to wreak disaster upon the countries of Europe. Comparatively healthy economies, such as those of Britain and France, found difficulty in withstanding the storm, but that of Germany, to the deficiencies of which Parker Gilbert had so frequently and forcefully drawn attention, was rocked upon its foundations. Confidence in the mark waned and with it the credibility of the Republic’s government. Fear spread that a second depression, with all the horrors of inflation so vividly in the minds of even young Germans, menaced the Reich. Even men of practical common sense and high ideals, in view of the evident malaise in Germany, began to search the political pharmacoepia for remedial means which might lie, if necessary, a little outside the Constitution—or at best just within it.
In addition, there was a general disenchantment among the young and rising generation with the whole political party system. The fault here lay largely with the caucuses of all parties which had steadfastly refused to admit youth into their ranks. The National Assembly elected in 1920 had contained none of the young front-fighters and it was not until the election of 1924 that this important element of national life attained representation. Even then, however, no attempt was made to interest or enlist the youth of the country in party organizations, until the Communists and the National Socialist Party made youth one of their principal targets—and with great success.

It was at this critical juncture in German history that the “Field-grey Eminence” of the Reichswehr, General Kurt von Schleicher, a man who so admirably justified his name—in English, Schleicher is “creeper”—a man who had already betrayed many benefactors and friends and would betray many more before his murder at the hands of Adolf Hitler, began his search for a Chancellor who might beguile the President, control the Right, restrain the Left and persuade the parties immediately right of center to combine their efforts in order to maintain law and order and restore the economic fortunes of the Reich. The important aspect of von Schleicher’s political planning was that the salvation of the Reich should be brought about without the aid of the Social Democrats, who were anathema equally to the President, the army and the Right.

His choice fell upon Heinrich Brüning.

VI

Heinrich Brüning was at that time 44 years old, a young man if judged either from the standards of German political leaders or world statesmen. His career had been rapid, and he had been early marked out for office. Of a very sensitive nature, he was at once a romantic and a paladin, a dreamer of dreams and a man of courage. A devout Catholic, he came of a middle-class Westphalian family, and, a delicate, shy and brilliant young man, he was about to complete his doctoral thesis at the University of Bonn when the outbreak of the war destroyed the sheltered life which till then had been his. The glamor of war appealed to him; the paladin and the romantic in him merged into one and sent him unhesitatingly to volunteer. To his dismay he was rejected for defective eyesight, and returned disheartened to complete his doctoral thesis. The subject of his choice had been the comparative study of private and state ownership of railroads, and the thesis disclosed a remarkable knowledge of the British railway system. A brilliant degree in economics was his reward, but still he hankered for the opportunity to fight for the Fatherland. He volunteered again. The inroads of war upon the manpower of Germany had made the medical authorities less particular and Brüning was accepted. It was May 1915 and he was then 29.

His first sojourn at the front was brief. He was wounded almost immediately and invalided home. His recovery completed, he trained for a commission, specializing as a machine gunner, and returned to the front line as a lieutenant in time to take part in the great battles of ’16 and ’17, in the offensive of March 1918, and in the bitter retreat in the summer of the
same year. Brüning was a good soldier and a capable officer. Whether as adjutant or in active command, he displayed a natural ability and a cool courage which belied his studious appearance. His machine-gun squadron achieved a notoriety and fame wherever it was engaged, and was cited on more than one occasion for "unparalleled heroism;" Brüning himself received the Iron Cross (First Class). In the last phases of the struggle he was constantly in action, his company forming part of the famous "Winterfeldt Group"—a formation of units picked for their fighting qualities and their endurance—and with them he participated in the revolutionary actions around Aix-la-Chapelle and Herbesthal, his squadron remaining loyal amid the surrounding hordes of mutineers. What his men thought of him may be gauged by the fact that when Soldiers' Councils were formed on the orders of G.H.Q., he was unanimously elected as his squadron's representative.

His war experiences had wrought a great change in Brüning. Much of the romanticism of youth had been burned out of his soul and in its place there was a certain mysticism of comradeship. He had learned to command men, and to earn their respect and loyalty; and he himself had come to know the spiritual satisfaction of following a leader in whom he had confidence. Military discipline in its finest sense appealed to him and he carried out of the war an abiding devotion to duty and public service.

In the chaos of the revolution Brüning gradually developed for himself a political credo. His religion and his upbringing influenced his decisions, and he found himself inclined to the life of a civilian rather than that of a member of the Free Corps. Though respectful of the Republican Constitution, there was enough of the "realist-romantic" left in him, as well as his Catholic beliefs, to make him regret the disappearance of the monarchy, with its wealth of traditions and its welding force of unity. To the end he remained a conservative and a monarchist at heart.

Brüning's interest lay in politics and social work. Chance threw him in the path of Stegerwald, the leader of the Catholic Trade Unions and at that time Prussian Minister for Social Welfare. Brüning became secretary to the Minister and a member of the Center Party; he also became an expert on trade union affairs. His genius for organization found full scope, and was used with great effect at the critical period of the Ruhr occupation. With headquarters just outside the "frontier," Brüning forged and wielded the weapon of Passive Resistance with such excellent results that the machinery of occupation was paralyzed and such advantages as accrued were rendered sterile.

In the election of 1924 he entered the Reichstag on the Center Party list in Silesia, and at once achieved a reputation as an expert in economics and finance. His speeches in the budget debates commanded respect and admiration even from his bitterest opponents, for it was obvious that this tall, slight figure, with the thin lips and nose, the receding hair and clear, blue eyes twinkling through gold-rimmed spectacles, knew what he was talking about. He soon came under von Schleicher's notice, and his relations with the Reichswehr, established and maintained through his friendship with von Willisen, the good genius of the Reichswehr, grew rapidly cordial. His personal efforts, both with the Reichstag and the Army, facilitated the passage of the military budget of 1928-29, and when in December 1929 he became
leader of the parliamentary group of the Center Party, von Schleicher hesitated no longer.

But Brüning was not easily persuaded. He was loyal to Hermann Müller, whose friend he was, and would enter no cabal to bring him down. He did make it clear to the Chancellor, however, that the Center Party would only support the government in its struggle for the ratification of the Young Plan on condition that the more urgent of the many necessary financial reforms were presented to the Reichstag at the same time.

In the meantime von Schleicher arranged for Brüning to be received by the Marshal. They made a strange contrast. Eighty-three faced forty-four; the gigantic military bulk of the President confronted the slight, studious figure of the statesman; the Field Marshal looked into the eyes of the company commander. Brüning was deeply moved. Here before him was that great figure which had been an object of veneration to every German soldier. He was surprised at how little the Marshal showed his age. His eyes were clear and blue, and his skin as smooth and ruddy as a child’s. He looked, as he sat behind the great work-table with the sunlight of early spring shining on him through the windows, a grand and lonely figure. Brüning was touched by his evident sincerity; both his admiration and his affection were aroused.

They talked of the war days, and the Marshal spoke with high praise of the Winterfeldt Group. The years seemed to slip away and it was as if they were only two soldiers comparing their experiences. Von Hindenburg began to think of Brüning less as a Catholic party leader and more as an ex-officer. The basis of a strange comradeship was gradually forming.

From the war they passed to politics and von Hindenburg gave full expression to his disgust and disappointment. Suddenly he began to weep, those facile tears of old age, and with that historic gesture which had begun, and ended, so many of his relationships, he clasped Brüning’s hand in both his own: “So many have forsaken me; give me your word that now, at the end of my life, you will not desert me.” And Brüning told him that the Center Party would always support him so long as he remained loyal to the Constitution.

Müller continued his struggle in the Reichstag and eventually won it on March 13, 1930, when the President signed the Bill of Ratification, but in the course of the battle he had lost much authority in parliament and had again brought the fury of the Right against von Hindenburg, thereby earning the Marshal’s cordial dislike.

On March 27 Müller gave his resignation to von Hindenburg. On the following day Brüning accepted the mandate to form a government of his own friends, a cabinet which should be above party alignments, loyal only to him.

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8 Hermann Müller was the last Social Democrat to lead a national government in Germany until the appointment of Willy Brandt as Bundeskanzler in 1969.

4 In this the Brüning cabinet was unique in being 100 percent Kanzleitreu. Virtually all previous governments of the Reich had been party coalitions, remarkable for the degree of the disloyalty and lack of support accorded by the party caucuses in the Reichstag to their representatives in the cabinet. The Brüning cabinet rested for support on the Center, the German and Bavarian People’s Parties, the Economic Party and to some unpledged extent the Social Democrats, but these groups were not represented as such in
self and, like himself, pledged to support the President as long as he remained true to the Constitution. In return he demanded the unqualified support of the President in his attempts to cope with the financial and economic crisis which he forecast as continuing for at least three or four years.

“Yes, yes,” was the Marshal’s reply. “You shall be my last Chancellor and I will never give you up, but you must make those fellows in the Reichstag come to heel.” And soon he was agreeing with old Oldenburg-Januschau, the veteran Conservative leader, that “Brüning is the best Chancellor since Bismarck.”

Brüning came to office at a homeric moment in German history, though there were few who recognized its true tragic significance. Though he himself saw further than most of his countrymen and certainly than most of those in Europe and America, he did not see far enough. He failed to gauge accurately the pace of the historical events with which he was contending; he failed to estimate the abysmal villainy of the Nazis and the growth of their grip upon the imagination of the German people, and he failed to convince the statesmen of the world of the consequences which would attend his own failure. Curiously enough he was a better statesman than a politician but he was not conspicuously successful as either—though largely not through his own fault.

The essential problem with which the new Chancellor was faced was simple to define but hideously complex to deal with. The immediate task was to cure the ailing German economy. This necessitated a most extreme treatment in the shape of reforms and taxes and sacrifices more drastic than the German people had ever endured before. To make this treatment the more palatable, the more endurable, Brüning sought to give his countrymen compensation in the sphere of foreign affairs by bringing off diplomatic successes in the fields of reparation and disarmament which should at once expand the ego of the German people and afford them economic relief.

What he sought, in effect, was the abandonment of the Young Plan schedule of payments, which extended into the distant future of the eighties, and to replace it by an agreement for a final settlement of reparation on the basis of “the clean slate.” At the same time Brüning hoped that this termination of the provisions of Part VIII of the Treaty of Versailles might be accompanied by some declaration mitigating the stark accusation of war guilt contained in the preamble to these articles.

The cabinet. Within the cabinet and the Reichstag Brüning could depend on the old comradeship of his fellow ex-officers, for example Treviranus, the dashing naval lieutenant-commander and Bredt, the company commander, both of whom with Brüning had entered the Reichstag in the election of 1924 and would never allow their common bond of union as holders of the Iron Cross to be submerged in the controversies of party politics. Another who gave him unswerving fealty was General Wilhelm Groener, whose presence in the cabinet was, for various reasons, a source of annoyance and embarrassment to Marshal von Hindenburg.

In his memoirs (“Memoiren, 1918–1935,” Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlage-Anstalt, 1971) Brüning reverses this order of the relation between his home and foreign policies, saying that his main aim was to obtain Treaty revision and that harsh economic measures were necessary for this purpose. This, however, was not the argument presented at the time.
In the field of armaments Brünинг essayed the abandonment of Part V of the Treaty of Versailles, with its provision for the compulsory disarmament of Germany as a preliminary to the voluntary disarmament of the other great powers. Since it was obvious that the great powers had no intention of reducing their armaments to the level imposed upon Germany in the Treaty, it was Brünинг's thought that a new start should be made at the forthcoming General Disarmament Conference at Geneva with the adoption of an agreed scale, down to which the former Allied powers would reduce their armaments and up to which Germany would increase hers.

So much for Brünинг's hopes. At the outset his position was very strong. The President was his active supporter, and that little group—Otto Meissner, Oskar von Hindenburg (the President's son) and Kurt von Schleicher—known as The Camarilla (so reminiscent of The Hydra of Wilhelm II's day)—who controlled Hindenburg's thinking, saw to it that he "thought right." Moreover the Reichswehr, under the influence of von Schleicher, was among his allies. Thus encouraged, he embarked upon a drastic and not uncourageous course of action.

Brünニング presented his first proposals for coping with the economic crisis to the Reichstag in June and when a month later the dilatory tactics of the political parties had resulted in no decisions having been taken and, by reason of the delay, the economic conditions of the country daily worsened, the Chancellor advised President von Hindenburg to invoke the provisions of Article 48 of the Constitution and promulgate the necessary measures by decree. This the President did.

Article 48 also provided that presidential decrees must be at once submitted to the Reichstag and withdrawn if it so demanded and this the Reichstag did, by refusing the decree a two-thirds majority by eight votes. Brünニング promptly asked the President to dissolve the Reichstag and, as soon as this was done, reissued the decree. In the general election which followed the Nazi Party obtained 18 percent of the votes cast and 107 seats in the new Reichstag (as against 12 in the old) becoming the second largest political party in Germany. The communists also made big gains.

Bruning has been much criticized for these two drastic decisions and has been accused, by his use of the decree powers of Article 48, of undermining the democratic foundations of the Constitution, thereby paving the way for the "phony" democratic claims of Hitler that he too had governed under the provisions of Article 48. It is also said that he erred in requesting the dissolution of the Reichstag which resulted in so spectacular a success for the Nazis.

It would appear that both these criticisms are largely based on hindsight and leave out of consideration the situation as it then existed. What else could the Chancellor have done? The economic condition of the Reich was such that it demanded drastic remedial measures. Indeed, if Brünニング is to be criticized at all it is for his failure to prescribe a sufficiently rigorous remedy (for example, the July decree had budgeted for 1,600,000 unemployed and six months later the figure was well over four million). There was no indication, either, that the Reichstag would abandon its irresponsibly dilatory tactics which had brought German parliamentary institutions into
disrepute and had driven many men who were certainly not revolutionary by nature to seek in desperation the less reputable and more heady nostrums of the radicals of the Right and of the Left. Moreover time was of the essence.

There is no doubt that in requesting a dissolution of the Reichstag Brün- ing's political intelligence was at fault. He underestimated the potential strength of both the National Socialists and of the communists. Yet again, faced with a parliament which would neither pass his budget nor ratify his decree, what else could he do? What he did see, and more clearly than most, was that the sands of life for the German economy were running out far more quickly than even he had originally anticipated and that to halt the flow demanded the most draconian of measures. He took them.

But it cannot be denied that the general election of September 1930 was a vitally important climacteric in the history of the Weimar Republic. From that moment onwards Brünning was engaged in a race against time in which he knew he was competing against the Nazis. What he did not know, or even suspect, was that he was also competing against General von Schleicher, who, with the emergence of the Nazi Party as the second largest in the Reichstag, began the intrigues with Hitler which were ultimately to lead to his own murder. A first step was to undermine Brünning's standing with the aged President and this he set about doing.

Faced with the challenge he so fully recognized, Brünning displayed a dynamic vitality. He flung himself into the battle for German democracy with immense energy though his views and his methods were not entirely orthodox. One thing was patently clear: the whole German people were in revolt against the Treaty of Versailles. At the September elections almost every party went to the polls with Treaty revision in its program. To the German electorate it seemed that Stresemann's Policy of Reconciliation had proved barren of success, and there arose a low but menacing rumble in favor of a Policy of Repudiation. Brünning, in his conduct of foreign relations, linked this with the absolute necessity of giving his countrymen some quid pro quo for the economic sacrifices and burdens which he was demanding of them, and he also added the argument that if he failed and was compelled to resign, he would be succeeded by the policies of Adolf Hitler who would certainly be less nice in his conduct of Germany's external relations.

But fail he did both at home and abroad. When the ghastly summer of 1931—during which the Chancellor toured Europe in a vain attempt to awaken understanding of the catastrophe with which Europe was faced in Germany—had shaded into autumn, the Brünning government had become the most unpopular ever known in Germany and he himself was universally known as the Hungerkanzler. His only successes were the brief "lift" afforded by the Hoover moratorium and that his decrees were now ratified by the Reichstag. This, however, was only because of the support of the Social Democrats whose fears were now thoroughly aroused by threats of a dictatorship of the Right. In London, Paris and Geneva during the years 1931–32 Brünning's attempts to obtain treaty revision in the fields of reparations and disarmament were unsympathetically received. He found no bacon to bring home.
And at home the situation was daily worsening. Civil violence was on the increase between Nazis and Communists. The Nazis were gaining popular support in many directions. Their appeals to the masses in terms of promises grew more and more reckless and all-embracing. Brüning had explored the possibility of admitting them to his government as a tactical gambit, hoping that a taste of responsibility would make them less presumptuous, but he recoiled when their terms for cooperation were made known. Later he made a frontal attack on them in a series of emergency decrees issued between March 1931 and April 1932.

Now, however, Brüning centered all his hopes on persuading von Hindenburg to stand for reelection to the presidency in 1932 and then to get him re-elected. There was no other alternative to Hitler.

In his political thinking in these momentous days Brüning disclosed himself as a democrat but not necessarily a republican. He was by nature a romantic and a monarchist and if the only means of preserving the constitutional form of government in Germany was by jettisoning the Republic he was prepared to regard it as expendable. He visualized, as the only way of checking and harnessing the wave of Nazi success, the restoration of the German monarchy, not in the framework of 1914, not even on the basis of the “Revolution from Above” of October 1918, but as a constitutional monarchy on the British model, with Hindenburg as Reichsweser until his death and then the accession of the eldest son of the German Crown Prince.*

It is remarkable that, in the secret soundings which he took on the acceptability of his idea among party leaders in the Reichstag, Brüning received support not only from the parties of the Center and Right-of-Center (neither the Nazis nor the communists were, of course, consulted) as might be expected, but also from the Social Democrats and the Catholic Trade Unions who were now panic-stricken at the prospect of a Nazi dictatorship.

Brüning’s scheme for a monarchist restoration was shattered on the rocks of von Hindenburg’s rigidity, conscience and senility. The Marshal’s sense of guilt concerning his part in the Kaiser’s decision to go into exile in November 1918 had always been heavy upon him and Wilhelm II had seen to it that its burden was in no way lightened. He was therefore not inimical to the basic idea of restoring the monarchy; but for him there could be no question of constitutional monarchy. There must, above all, be no emasculation of the royal prerogative. Hindenburg’s thinking went back even be-

*In his memoirs Brüning seems to imply that the constitutional changes which he had in mind would have been more reactionary than I have stated. It is possible that his desire to establish himself as a good German nationalist affected his assessment of the past.

It is not without interest that Brüning’s monarchist romanticism was apparent also in his forward-planning in foreign affairs. Had his attempts to gain mitigation for Germany in reparation and disarmament proved successful, he had intended to inspire the summoning of an international conference which should consider Treaty revision on a major scale, including, among other items, provision for a political truce for ten years; an agreement with Poland over the Corridor; the encouragement of common enterprise between German and French industry and an agreement for international cooperation in a system of European electrification. Brüning was convinced that his plan held the key to the economic and political stabilization of Europe, and in searching for a sponsor he turned to one who to him was the remaining figure of outstanding and compelling dignity, the roi-chevalier, Albert of the Belgians.
yond the imperial constitution of 1871 to the concept of the reëstablishment of the warrior-state as it had existed in Prussia before 1848. Thus Brüning's plan foundered.

Nevertheless the Chancellor pressed forward with his battle to get von Hindenburg reëlected and he succeeded in doing so, almost single-handed but at considerable cost to himself. For, whereas in 1925 the Marshal had been elected as the candidate of the Right, in 1932 he was in every sense the candidate of the moderate elements of the Center and Left, and his erstwhile supporters of the Right campaigned against him in support of Hitler. The campaign had been a bitter one and von Hindenburg had been subjected to vile insults from the Nationalists—his own people—who were allied with the Nazis. Even the German Crown Prince denounced him and campaigned for Hitler.

Stung and wounded by this vilification, the Marshal vented his resentment on his Chancellor, who had done so much to win the victory for him. He became all the more receptive of the whispered advice of his son Oskar and of Otto Meissner, both egged on by the inveterate intriguer Kurt von Schleicher, who now dreamed of harnessing the strength of the National Socialist Party to the chariot of a presidential government which should rule the country without the Reichstag.

The President liked the idea and accepted von Schleicher's view that Brüning was not the man to lead such a government. On May 29, 1932, the Chancellor came to convey the congratulations of the cabinet to the Marshal on his reëlection. He might have been forgiven for expecting a word of gratitude but it was speedily made clear to him that he had lost the confidence and the favor of the President. He resigned with his cabinet on the following day, and as he left the audience chamber he heard von Hindenburg mutter, "Now I can have a cabinet of my friends."

The end of the Brüning government may be said to be the end of the Weimar Republic, for the pale transitory administrations of Franz von Papen and Kurt von Schleicher which filled the penultimate gap between Brüning's resignation on May 30, 1932, and the appointment of Hitler as Reichskanzler on January 28, 1933, were certainly not representative of any type of government envisaged under the Weimar Constitution. Brüning's last public act, and among his most controversial, was taken on March 23, in connection with the passage of the Enabling Act.

The general election of March 5, 1933, had given Hitler and his coalition government of Nazis and Nationalists only a 51 percent majority. Subsequently the Communist Party was outlawed and some 26 Social Democrat deputies were either arrested or terrorized into flight and hiding, thus giving the Führer a possible two-thirds majority for any legislation he might be pleased to enact. The Chancellor proposed to enact emergency legislation for a period of four years which would transfer the power of legislation from the Reichstag to the government of the Reich which would be even empowered to change the Constitution if it saw fit in order to legalize such measures as might otherwise be held as unconstitutional. A nominal safeguard,
one which appealed to legalists rather than to apprehensive men of good will, was contained in the Enabling Act, namely that the rights and powers of the President should remain untouched, but this provision was virtually nullified by vesting in the Chancellor the principal presidential prerogative, that of rectifying legislation, in order, it was explained, "to relieve the President of unnecessary work."

The government could count on a simple majority in the Reichstag, but Hitler desired a two-thirds majority to give the Enabling Bill full legal flavor and this he could not obtain without the votes of the Center Party. The decision as to how the Center should give its voice was debated and voted upon in party caucus but the leader of the Party could override the vote. His was the final responsibility. The leader of the Party, at this juncture, was not Heinrich Brüning but a wily cleric, Monseigneur Ludwig Kaas, and though Brüning undoubtedly exercised immense prestige and influence, it was Kaas who was the boss.

The discussions within the Zentrum were centered upon the provisions for safeguarding the presidential prerogatives and in endeavoring to gain from Hitler an assurance that he would respect the President's power of veto. This assurance Hitler gave in verbal form, but Kaas and Brüning demanded, as the price of the Center Party vote, a written confirmation of this promise before the vote was cast. This too the Chancellor promised; a letter to this effect should reach Kaas before the final voting.

On the morning of the fatal session in which the vote should be taken (March 23, 1933), no letter had arrived. Inquiries were made, an apology was forthcoming and a further promise that the letter would arrive in time. It did not do so and the Center Party caucus, summoned in hasty and secret session, debated their action. Kaas advocated a "yes" vote for the Bill, placing reliance upon the Chancellor's verbal promise and the renewed assurance that its written confirmation was on the way. He was supported by the right wing of the Party, which also voiced a definite fear, which they had good reason to entertain, of what would happen if the Bill failed to pass. Brüning steadfastly and vehemently opposed any such action. "No letter, no vote" was his argument and he received the support of the left wing of the Party. The final decision to vote in favor of the Bill was taken by Kaas, who cast it. Only the Social Democrats voted against the Bill, after a magnificently courageous speech by Otto Wels.

The promised letter from Hitler never arrived, but a few days later (March 28) Brüning received a letter from the Marshal telling him that Hitler had assured him "that, even without being formally obliged by the Constitution, he will not use the powers conferred on him by the Enabling Act without having first consulted me." When he left Germany in May 1934 this was the only document Brüning carried with him.

Much criticism of Brüning has centered on this decision of the Center Party. Should he not have done more to make his opposition to the vote decisive? Should he not have spoken in the Reichstag and there challenged

8 It is of interest that of the deputies who supported Brüning in this inner party conflict were some who never left Germany and who survived to take part in the plot against Hitler of July 20, 1944, paying for their complicity with their lives.
the authority of Monseigneur Kaas to speak for a united party? Again these strictures smack of hindsight. It must be remembered that at this moment it was not known, though it may have been suspected, that one of the first acts of the new government would be to order the compulsory dissolution of all political parties but their own, and it was therefore essential to preserve both party discipline and party unity. Though Brüning might have made his gesture it would have availed nothing except to have created for history a better image for himself and for the Center Party, as it did for the Social Democrats. Under the prevailing Zeitgeist—however wrong this may have been in his concept—it was hoped to exercise restraint on Hitler's government through the President, through the Nationalist representatives in the coalition and through individual intervention. This may seem to be excessively naïve, even purposely self-delusory, but it was a blindness which affected many.

I suppose I knew Heinrich Brüning as well as any Englishman. We met shortly after he had been elected leader of the Center Party's Reichstagsfraktion and before he was appointed Chancellor. Thenceforward our relations were on the basis of close friendship. When I was in Berlin during his chancellorship, as I was very frequently, I saw him nearly every evening, when I would walk across from the Kaiserhof Hotel to the side door of the Reichskanzlei, and in our subsequent talks he always spoke very freely. I heard him speak in the Reichstag and at political meetings in his own Silesian constituency. I travelled back with him on the Europa from Southampton on June 9, 1931 (after his abortive talks with Ramsay MacDonald at Chequers) when the American Ambassador, Frederick Sackett, told him that there was nothing to be hoped for from President Hoover. On the following morning I watched the frustration by the police of an attempt to assassinate the Chancellor as he stepped ashore at Bremerhaven.

After Brüning's dismissal from office I visited him more than once in St. Hedwiga's hospital, whither he had gone into retreat, and, as the political atmosphere "hotted up" after Hitler's advent to power, I once drove him across Berlin one stifling summer afternoon in 1933 from one hiding place to another, on which occasion his composure was considerably greater than mine! When, a year later, the danger signals had become too clear for him to remain in Germany, I was one of the group of English friends who arranged his escape across the Dutch frontier.

Thereafter I saw him in nearly all his places of exile. He visited me in my family home in Kent and in my London apartment, and we met in the homes of his other English friends; in Switzerland and America, in Lugano, New York and at Harvard University. Always he spoke frankly, sometimes self-critically and always curiously without rancor.

When I was writing my life of Marshal von Hindenburg I made full use of the information which Brüning had given to the British and American Ministers at Chequers and which had been relayed to Washington.

9 Some ten days later, on June 29, President Hoover changed his mind and made his proposal for a year's moratorium on payment of reparation and Allied debts. His decision was much influenced by the information which Brüning had given to the British and American Ministers at Chequers and which had been relayed to Washington.

of all that Brüning had told me in our many talks both when he was in office and afterwards, and I sent him for his approval the proofs of that part of the book which concerned his chancellorship. This he gave unhesitatingly and asked me to make only one alteration. He thought I had been too unkind to Kurt von Schleicher! I replied that to me this was impossible and in the interests of history I could not modify what I had written—and I didn’t. I may add that nothing of what I wrote about Brüning and his government 35 years ago has been disproved by the subsequent publication of the relevant documents and studies since the war. As a result of my intimate knowledge, gleaned over a period of some 15 years (for I did not see him after 1943 though we corresponded for some years after that), I held Brüning in both admiration and affection. I considered him a man of courage and deeply honest, if not always of entirely wise judgment—as, for example, in the matter of the German-Austrian Zollunion which, though well conceived, was clumsily handled. I held him to be a man of sufficient political integrity not to allow his religion to impede his patriotism, and this was more than clear from his dealings with the Vatican through the Papal Nuncio (then Monseigneur Pacelli), who endeavored to bulldoze him into making a concordat in terms which he considered too unfavorable to Germany. Though superficially cold and shy, he was a man of warmth and friendship, with an unexpectedly delightful and even frivolous sense of humor.

It is because of my long and close friendship with Heinrich Brüning that I must confess to considerable regret and disappointment concerning his recently published memoirs. Though they are to some degree an improvement on his first autobiographical fragment published some 24 years ago,11 these recollections portray their author as unappealing, patronizing and petulant, with a strong inclination to be “too clever by half,” and a pronounced tendency to place the onus of blame for his ultimate failure on every one but himself.

His bravery and his intellectual integrity are made apparent but these qualities are accompanied by a whiff of lofty superciliousness which is exceedingly unattractive—though I am glad to find that he is no kinder to von Schleicher than I was.

“The picture of Brüning which emerges from his memoirs,” a British critic has written, “is of an honest, courageous but intellectually arrogant and limited man, who was never able to adapt his political beliefs to the realities of twentieth-century industrial Germany.”12 With this judgment I am reluctantly but inevitably driven to agree. It is rarely that an artist paints a self-portrait with more warts than those with which God has endowed him, but Brüning has succeeded in doing this and so successfully that one is almost impelled to defend him against himself.

For this is not the man I knew; not the man whom I saw in moments of acute crisis and of searing self-examination; not the man of whom I wrote admiringly 35 years ago. This is not the man for whom I would have claimed the words of Theodore Roosevelt: “We stand at Armageddon and we battle for the Lord.”

12 Anthony Nicholls in a review to appear in English Historical Review.
What, then, is the explanation? I have no specific answer save the passage of time and the corroding process of rationalization in exile. Brüning began to dictate his memoirs to my secretary in my flat in London during the summer of 1934, after his escape from Germany. I have no idea when he finished them.

But the change in his personality was apparent within a few years of his leaving his Fatherland. He developed a persecution mania which, very understandably, derived from the attempts of the Gestapo to assassinate him. I know, of my own knowledge, of two such attempts, one in Holland and one in Switzerland, and I am credibly informed that there were several others. This danger, acting upon an intellect which was by nature suspicious and apprehensive, produced a state of angst which manifested itself in speaking in a subdued voice, which was often very hard to hear, and in constantly looking over his shoulder lest he be overheard.\(^\text{13}\)

When war came this obsession increased and in addition Brüning found himself torn by the internal conflicts which assailed all patriotic German exiles. While bitterly anti-Nazi, he was fearful of what a victory for the Allies would mean for Germany. He would in no way lend himself in support of the activities of other German refugees in America, nor would he respond to the blandishments of Adam von Trott zu Solz. For this aloofness he was much criticized by Americans and also by his fellow exiles. But he was unmoved by their criticism. He kept himself purposely uncompromised in the belief (or at least the hope) that at the conclusion of the war he would be able to assist his country to a mitigation of the severe terms which he believed would be imposed on her, and for this reason he was fundamentally opposed to the doctrine of unconditional surrender.

The course of history frustrated Brüning's hopes and justified his fears. When he returned to Germany in 1951, as a Professor of History at Cologne University, it was to find himself virtually unremembered in his native land and to be recalled by those who did remember his name as the "Hunger Chancellor." Nor was the rise to power of Konrad Adenauer a favorable circumstance for him. The two had never been on friendly terms. Brüning left Germany for the United States for the last time in 1955, a saddened and a disappointed man and for the last years of his life lived an increasingly hermit-like existence in his Vermont retreat. From all accounts he reverted during the latter period to early extremes of nationalist—almost chauvinistic—sentiments. He even developed a degree of anti-semitism, telling a mutual friend of ours that it was impossible for his memoirs to appear in America because all the publishing houses were owned or dominated by Jews! In the same way he became estranged from me (though not I from him) because in my postwar writings\(^\text{14}\) I had criticized the German military caste, whose memory he revered more and more deeply as sacrosanct.

It is this change of mien and thinking which offers to me the only explana-


tion for the tone and *Stimmung* of Brüning’s memoirs. For to me it is still an article of faith that the tragedy of Brüning is the tragedy of Weimar. He wished to do so much, he was allowed to accomplish so little. He was fated to be the undertaker rather than the physician. In his desire to carry on the Policy of Reconciliation he was no less eager than Rathenau and Stresemann, yet it was his role to initiate the Policy of Repudiation. There was no greater believer in German parliamentary institutions than he, yet under the irresistible pressure of events it was he who struck the first blow at their foundations. None desired more passionately the welfare and happiness of the German people, yet he became known as the “Hunger Chancellor,” and was forced to impose upon them the most crushing of burdens. It would have been hard to find a greater German patriot, yet he was hounded from office and from his country for “lack of patriotism.” He played the game according to the rules and failed, but to his less scrupulous successors was conceded all that he had sought to achieve—and more. One fundamental error Brüning committed at the outset. He trusted President von Hindenburg.