

Situation In Germany

By FRANK H. SIMONDS
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Washington, May 17—Two weeks after the German election calculations as to the real meaning of the vote are still to be heard on all sides. For Americans, faced with the possibility of a third party in the coming campaign, the uncertainty which exists in Europe following elections as a consequence of a multiple party system is thus emphasized. And the difficulty is the more acute because not only are there many parties, but not a few members of each of these drift across party lines almost at will.

Yet the more closely the composition of the new Reichstag is studied the more obvious is the fact that not only is it going to be difficult for any group of parties to form a government, always provided the old Marx-Stresemann combination does not remain, but also that there are almost innumerable combinations which may be made, combinations with the moderate parties with the Nationalists or with the Socialists, that is with republican or monarchial sympathizers.

The election represented a success for the two extremes, one of which derives its inspiration from Moscow and is revolutionary, the other of which bases its programme upon the tradition of Potsdam and is reactionary. The losses were made by precisely those parties which might be regarded as accepting the regime created by the post-war conditions, accepting the republic not with enthusiasm, not as a finality, perhaps, but as the best thing discoverable at the moment.

If you will look for a moment at the composition of this new Reichstag, as compared with the old, something of the problem will be disclosed. In the old the four moderate parties were thus represented: Socialists 173, Centre 68, Peoples 66, Democratic Party 39 and Bavarian Peoples Party 20, that is 366 in all. Actually the Socialists were not represented in the Marx Ministry, but sustained the Cabinet.

As a consequence of the recent popular decision the situation is this: Socialists 100, Centre 62, Peoples 44, Democratic 25, Bavarian Peoples 16, that is 247 in all, showing a total loss of the moderate elements of 119 or almost exactly a third. Of this loss the Socialists is the greatest, namely 73, while the Bourgeoisie parties lost 46. In the new chamber, with a membership of 465, it would still be possible for these four parties with a combined total of 247 to control, and in point of fact they would be aided by the votes of certain groups.

By contrast with the moderates, the extremists fared as follows: The Nationalists, who had 67 seats in the old house, count 96 in the new. The volkische Party, the extreme, fire-eating nationalists, who hardly existed before, number 32. Thus the nonarchical groups have increased from 70 to 128, a gain of 58. As for the Communists, they have expanded their numbers from 15 to 62, a gain of 47. The gain for the two extreme parties is thus from 85 seats in the old chamber to 190 in the new, or 105 seats as compared with 119 lost by the moderate groups, the difference representing accessions of minor parties.

Roughly speaking, then, four parties in the new chamber pledged to acceptance of the Dawes report as the basis for settlement count 247 seats while three parties, committed to oppose it counted 190, while some 29 seats have fallen in minor parties. But it must be perceived at once that while the two Nationalist Parties and the Communists can agree in opposing the settlement, they cannot combine on any other single issue, for one represents revolution and the other reaction.

Now the first question has been as to how the next cabinet would be formed. Obviously there might be a cabinet of the moderates with the 247 votes of the Socialists, the Centre, the Peoples and the Democratic Party supporting it. But there might just as easily be a cabinet based upon the combination of the Nationalists and the three Bourgeoisie parties, with 96 votes for the former and 147 for the latter, or 243 in all, with the certainty of acquiring additional votes from the minor parties.

This latter combination would be more natural, for there are more points in common between the moderates and the nationalists than between the moderates and Socialists, provided only the nationalists would accept the moderate view as to the Dawes report as a basis for negotiation and for settlement. And here, it would seem is the real centre of all present German political manoeuvring. Not only would such a coalition be more natural but on the whole it would be far better representative of the actual sentiment of Germany as disclosed by the recent election.

What the election really meant

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would seem to be that, while not rejecting the Dawes Report, it severely disciplined those parties which had declared openly for the acceptance of the experts' report or added greatly to the strength of those which had openly antagonized it. Germany it would appear, then, from this point of examination is willing to discuss the Dawes report with a view to reaching a settlement but is in no mood to accept it unconditionally or without great concessions.

A Socialist-Moderate combination would certainly approach the Allies in a far more conciliatory spirit than a Nationalist-Moderate coalition, but the latter would seem far more accurately to represent the present temper of the German people. Actually the sticking point might very well be the question of the evacuation of the Ruhr. Under the Dawes Report the French and Belgians are asked to abandon the economic exploitation of the Ruhr, but not to withdraw their military garrisons, but nothing seems more certain than that no German government can possibly accept the Dawes report unless military occupation as well as economic exploitation is ended.

Measured by the recent test Germany is by no means in the mood of 1919, when the Paris Conference met, she is not in the least in the temper of 1923, when the Ruhr conflict ended in her unconditional surrender. On the contrary her economic and financial recovery since that time has had its political and patriotic consequences; Germany feels stronger and she not only feels stronger but she demands that her leaders represent this new spirit and that her former conquerors deal with her as an equal.

As I see it, the situation in Germany turns upon two facts. In the first place, despite the temporary recovery following the stabilization of exchange through the rentenmark, real rehabilitation depends upon a foreign loan and no considerable foreign loan is conceivable save as it is a detail in a general liquidation of the reparations tangle. In other words Germany can get no money abroad as long as she refuses to accept the Dawes Report. And in the end she cannot maintain her present domestic, economic and financial balance without a foreign loan.

Thus a German rejection of the Dawes Report outright would be in the nature of a domestic disaster. The rentenmark would collapse, there would be a return of all the old phenomena of inflation and all the circumstances of chaos. Patently this is something big business in Germany would avoid and on the other side masses of the people would wish to escape. And an open rejection would not only end Franco-Belgian occupation of the Ruhr but it would certainly prolong it indefinitely. That, on the whole probably explains why the parties advocating rejection failed to get a majority.

On the other hand it is patent that in the new temper of Germany prolonged occupation of the Ruhr would be intolerable. Masses of Germans believe sincerely enough that the French are planning to remain permanently in the Ruhr and on the middle and lower Rhine; for them the evacuation is quite as vital a matter as was the liberation of the north and east of France for the French during the World War, itself. Since the Dawes Report did not deal with this question, any German Cabinet is bound to seek to have this question also resolved and resolved in a German fashion, before the Dawes Report is accepted.

Germany, then, has voted to accept the Dawes report as a basis of discussion, but she has given the largest increase in votes to precisely those parties which have denounced this report because of its failure to meet the outstanding German demand; and if the Nationalist Party now or later consents to form a ministry, it will be with the avowed intention of wringing a complete concession from the Allies on this point. The sine qua non of German acceptance of the Dawes report is the evacuation of the Ruhr by the French and the Belgians, the complete evacuation.

On the other hand, despite their

pre-election thunderings it is plain that the Nationalists have no desire to provoke a new war or bring about fresh and more extreme reprisals from the French. They have already given fairly clear proof of their change in tone with respect of the Dawes report and they remain totally incapable of enlisting the necessary aid from the moderate parties, save as they scrap their unconditional rejection of this plan.

We are pretty sure then to have a new German ministry—or to see the old ministry continued, pledged to go to new conferences with the Allies and discuss the terms of the Dawes report. The chances that Germany will not run all the risks incident to flouting the sentiment of the world and driving off all possible financial aid by an unconditional rejection of the Dawes plan are slight in the extreme. In that direction lies suicide. If the real purpose of Poincare were as Germans allege, to destroy Germany, nothing could make his task easier than such a course.

But Germany is coming to a new conference neither repentant nor submissive, she is coming to bargain and she is going to demand concessions. She is going to make a new effort to divide her conquerors and above all to reopen the breach between France and Great Britain. And obviously the whole manoeuvre will turn upon the military occupation of the Ruhr, which Britain has steadily held to be illegal and MacDonald very frankly seeks to bring to an end.

The German game must be, unless madness again dominates, to offer rather complete acceptance of the economic phases of the Dawes Report, but to make acceptance conditional upon French evacuation. This evacuation, as I have said, is not discussed in the Dawes report because it lay outside the field of the experts therefore the French can quite fairly decline to discuss it with the Germans. But it will hardly be as easy to refuse to discuss it with the British and the Belgians, provided the latter incline to such a discussion.

This would be a hopeless situation if the French were actually resolved to stay in the Ruhr until Germany paid up, if the words of Poincare were to be accepted without qualification and, above all, if France herself did not desire peace and a settlement. But the fact is that France does desire a settlement and that the mass of the French people never saw the Ruhr as more than a sheriff's operation to collect a debt. If, then, the collection of the debt is insured, the French sentiment will beyond much doubt be satisfied.

The bridge over the difficulty actually lies in the hands of the British engineer, MacDonald. It rests with him to give France the assurance that if France withdraws and Germany later takes advantages of French withdrawal and is guilty of another voluntary default, France will not only be free to go back to the Ruhr but will be assured of British approval and support. Such an assurance should satisfy French interests as it would almost inevitably offer a real obstacle to German default.

The second complaint against the Dawes report made in Germany, but more often made on behalf of Germany by outside commentators, is that the experts failed to name a total sum for reparations. They were not asked to do that, they were limited to fixing the amount Germany could pay once her own situation were restored. To say how many years the Germans should pay what the Dawes committee fixed as a possible annual contribution is the function of the Reparations Commission.

But the truth is that the Germans have not shown any consuming eagerness recently to have this period delimited. They grasp the fact that once the period is fixed—and if it is fixed now it will be for a generation at least and perhaps for two—it will be almost impossible later to get the time reduced. German criticism of the Dawes report on this basis has

been frequent but there has been no specific demand for amendment.

Despite nationalist propaganda and declamation I do not believe that Germany at the moment desires a new war or wants to go through another period of chaos. But the world must recognize that the Germany which lost the war is a thing of the past and that a new and powerful Germany is gradually coming into being, a Germany which is still a great power despite the losses in territory, population and wealth incident to the World War.

The Dawes committee quite skillfully based its terms upon the principle that all nations which participated in the war should pay for it by equal tax contributions, thus avoiding any stigmatizing of the Germans as war criminals or as responsible for the conflict. Once and for all the German people have repudiated this responsibility and it will never again be possible in any international conference to put upon them, with their submission, any such sentence as is included in the Treaty of Versailles.

The single chance of settlement now rests upon the fact that the Germans perceive that they cannot recover without foreign loans and cannot get foreign loans without giving certain engagements. To be able to return to normal prosperity and economic and financial balance Germany has now to agree to make certain payments to her conquerors. For her the one question is how much she can afford to pay for what she desperately needs. There are obviously fixed limits. Ask her to pay too much, make the conditions too onerous and too humiliating and she will reject them.

Moreover Germany can still be ruined but she cannot now or ever be coerced into payment. The French and Belgians are making the Ruhr pay at the moment, but it may fairly be doubted whether this situation would continue if the German nation should finally reject the Dawes plan. And the French and the Belgians need money almost as badly as the Germans, they need peace almost as much and, like the Germans, they are totally unwilling to assume responsibility for defeating the proposed adjustment.

For myself I regard the German elections as a very clear warning against extreme policies on the part of the Allies and particularly on the part of the French. They must serve equally to enlighten Paris and London as to what is to come. They must establish the fact that military as well as economic evacuation of the Ruhr is the underlying condition of any German acceptance of the Dawes plan and they must advertise to Ramsay MacDonald the greatness of the task before him, when he meets the new French Premier shortly.

If France and Germany were now left to themselves to settle the whole matter it would, on the face of the recent German election returns, seem a hopeless situation. If the ultimate fact of these German elections is the triumph of the Nationalists through the formation of a cabinet committed to reject the Dawes plan, then the situation will be desperate. But notwithstanding the French and German states of mind, it seems to me that it is still possible to indulge in measurable optimism, because there is a Europe which demands settlement, there is a Britain with an able premier qualified to deal with both French and German states of mind and to recognize what is final in the situation of both.

We shall have some form of adjustment before snow flies or eae we shall have new chaos and the moral certainty of new wars before a much longer span of time elapses. If Germany rejects the Dawes plan or if France in the end insists upon military occupation of the Ruhr, my judgment is that the Dawes report is

doomed. But Germany will reject the plan if France stays in the Ruhr and France will stay in the Ruhr unless she is in some other fashion insured against possible future German wilful default.

Germany believes France is working for her complete destruction and she is resolved not only to survive but to be and to be treated as a great power again. The election returns mean this unmistakably. France believes Germany is planning immediate evasion of all reparations payments and ultimately a new war of revenge. And France means to live and to live free from any continuing menace to her existence. The break between the two nations is complete, the differences for the time being irreconcilable and all hope of compromise is indiscoverable, save outside of both countries.

I remain an optimist in the present patently difficult and dangerous situation solely because I believe that in the main the spirit of all European nations is fundamentally dominated by a present fear and horror not only of new wars but even more of any return of the post-war nightmare which all of them have lived through in the past five years and are just beginning to escape from. But if the Dawes report is finally rejected it seems almost impossible to hit upon any way in which tranquility or normalcy can be attained or fresh conflicts in the near future avoided.

Germany and France are now quite unmistakably ready to fight rather than to make certain compromises, to risk ruin rather than to accept certain conditions which seem to them permanently intolerable. Mutual distrust and suspicion have reached a point where direct adjustment is totally impossible. Yet, through the Dawes report a way of settlement has been proposed which has been in principle accepted by both and might, after preliminary amendments and following special agreements between France and Britain, serve as a contract of liquidation and give Europe a chance to let its passions cool and its fears vanish.

But it would be a dangerous mistake for Americans to conclude that up to date the Dawes report has found any real acceptance in Europe, and particularly in Germany. We are at the beginning, not approaching the end, and at best the road will be difficult in the extreme—and the more difficult because of the results of the German election.

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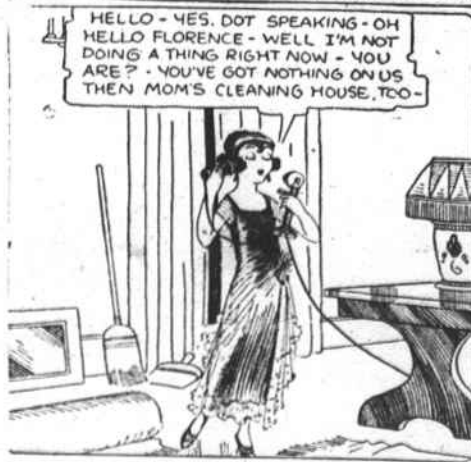
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