



# The Political Alignment of the Centre Party in Wilhelmine Germany: A Study of the Party's Emergence in Nineteenth-Century Württemberg

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THE POLITICAL ALIGNMENT OF THE CENTRE  
PARTY IN WILHELMINE GERMANY:  
A STUDY OF THE PARTY'S EMERGENCE IN  
NINETEENTH-CENTURY WÜRTTEMBERG

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LESS than a month before Bismarck's dismissal as German chancellor, the *Reichstag* elections of February 1890 destroyed the parliamentary majority of the *Kartell* parties – National Liberals and Conservatives – with whose support he had governed. The number of *Reichstag* seats held by these parties fell from 221 to 140, out of the total of 397; they never again achieved more than 169. To the multitude of problems left by Bismarck to his successors was therefore added one of parliamentary arithmetic: how was the chancellor to organize a *Reichstag* majority when the traditional governmental parties by themselves were no longer large enough, and the intransigently anti-governmental SPD was constantly increasing its representation? It was in this situation that the role of the Centre party in Wilhelmine politics became decisive, for between 1890 and 1914 the party possessed a quarter of the seats in the *Reichstag*, and thus held the balance of power between Left and Right.

The impact which the Centre would have made by aligning itself with the left-wing parties – Progressives and SPD – was clearly demonstrated later: during the war, when these three parties moved firmly against the imperial government by supporting Erzberger's Peace Resolution in 1917; and in the 1920s, when the same three parties provided the backbone of Weimar democracy. Centre, Progressives and SPD together had a potential parliamentary majority at all times between 1890 and 1914. An alliance during that period might not have wrung immediate concessions from the Kaiser and his ministers; but it would have subjected the autocratic constitutional practices of the *Reich* to severe and permanent pressure. Such a German parallel to the 'Gladstonian Coalition'<sup>1</sup> of Celtic fringe, progressive middle-class and urban workers might have forced ministers from its own ranks on the Kaiser, twenty years before war eventually brought this about: it would certainly have called the hand of those in governmental circles who threatened a *coup d'état*.

The Centre, however, chose to join forces with the Progressives and SPD

<sup>1</sup> Cf. A. Rosenberg, *Imperial Germany*, translated by I. F. D. Morrow (London, 1931), p. 18. The possibility of such a coalition was regarded as a major danger by Bismarck, and by his successors, like Hohenlohe. C. zu Hohenlohe, *Denkwürdigkeiten der Reichskanzlerzeit*, ed. K. A. von Müller (Stuttgart, 1931), p. 451 ff.

only sporadically before 1914 – in opposition to the ‘big’ military bill of 1893, and over the Zabern affair of 1913–14, for example. For the most part, the Centre abandoned its former anti-governmental stance. Encouraged by the greater warmth which Bismarck’s successors showed towards it, the party changed course from the early 1890s, and under the leadership of Ernst Lieber and Peter Spahn generally threw its support behind the old *Kartell* partners on the Right, particularly the Conservatives, rather than the Left. The Centre became a ‘party of government’ (*Regierungspartei*), on whose 100 *Reichstag* votes successive chancellors depended. It was the mainstay of Caprivi’s administration; it supported Hohenlohe’s government as it moved to the right during the later 1890s; it supported the *Sammlungspolitik* of Miquel and Bülow from the turn of the century; and, after a brief, involuntary exclusion from the pro-governmental alliance of *Kartell* plus Progressives in 1907–9, it returned to its role as supporter of the status quo and the Conservatives. This article will try to suggest some of the issues which divided the Centre from Progressives and SPD, and led it to favour a pro-Conservative course.

## I

The Centre party of the Second *Reich* has usually been regarded simply as a clerical party, led by a series of able tacticians who maintained electoral loyalty by appealing to a confessional siege mentality, and in turn bartered support for the government of the day against concessions to Catholic schools and teaching orders.<sup>2</sup> Certainly this feature of the party was most apparent in the *Kulturkampf* of the 1870s, as the Centre sought to defend the Church against Josephinism; and it was in these years that German Catholics, forced into a Prussian-based *Reich* in which they were outnumbered two to one by Protestants, deserted the parties for which they had previously voted and first gave their allegiance to the Centre. In the Rhineland elections to the Prussian Lower House the Liberals had received 60 per cent of the vote in 1863, as against only 8 per cent for the Catholic party. After 1871 this area voted solidly for the Centre.<sup>3</sup> By the time of the 1874 *Reichstag* election, at the height of the *Kulturkampf*, the party was able to win 28 per cent of all votes cast, and 80 per cent of those cast by German Catholics.<sup>4</sup>

But the Centre was not just a clerical party, and this is well illustrated by its hostility towards attempts by Rome and the German bishops to dictate its policy towards *Reich* military bills. As early as 1880, Rome had suggested that

<sup>2</sup> A classic contemporary statement of this view is that of Hans Delbrück, that the Centre was a party ‘held together solely by the interests of the Catholic Church and the masterly parliamentary tactics of Herr Windthorst’. *Preussische Jahrbücher*, 65 (Feb. 1890), pp. 236–7. Cf. A. J. P. Taylor, *The Course of German History* (London, 1962 ed.), pp. 163–4, 172.

<sup>3</sup> Rosenberg, *Imperial Germany*, p. 28, fn. 2.

<sup>4</sup> R. Morsey, ‘Die deutschen Katholiken und der Nationalstaat zwischen Kulturkampf und dem ersten Weltkrieg’, *Historisches Jahrbuch* (1970), p. 35.

a favourable Centre attitude towards Bismarck's seven-year military bill (*Septennat*) might lead to a reduction of *Kulturkampf* measures; but the Centre chairman, Franckenstein, made it clear that the party was political, and independent of clerical influence.<sup>5</sup> In 1887, when the *Septennat* came up for renewal, Bismarck tried to put pressure on the Centre through Rome to support the bill. A note was passed to Centre leaders Franckenstein and Windthorst through the papal nuncio in Munich, di Pietro, urging Centre acceptance of the measure in the interests of the Church. The reply, once again, was an unambiguous statement of Centre party autonomy in all political matters, and a refusal to modify its opposition to the *Septennat*.<sup>6</sup> In 1893, faced with the need to secure Centre support for his 'big' military bill, Caprivi also failed with the same ploy. Cardinal Kopp, a favoured intermediary in negotiations between Berlin and the Vatican, and Ballestrem, a conservative Silesian member of the Centre, went to Rome while the bill was being discussed. They returned reporting that the pope would like to see the bill passed, and recommended discussions between Centre leaders and the German bishops. If the bishops were divided, the party was to heed the advice of those who were more experienced in such matters; a clear hint from Rome that the pro-bill position of Kopp was more favourable in its eyes than the anti-bill attitude of men like Bishop Krentz of Cologne. Centre leaders, especially Ernst Lieber, were incensed by this further attempt at interference, and once again the overtures were disregarded.<sup>7</sup> From this date the party steered an increasingly political course which owed nothing to clerical prompting. German Catholics who enjoyed the ear of the Curia were far removed from power in the party, whose leaders in turn had little or no contact with Rome: Windthorst never went there, Lieber only once.<sup>8</sup>

This emphasis on the Centre as a political party was not new: from the outset in 1870 the party's principal founders, Peter Reichensperger and Hermann von Mallinckrodt, were anxious to avoid the mistakes of the Catholic party which had sat in the Prussian Lower House from 1852, and in their opinion emasculated itself by pursuing a narrow clericalism. Hence their insistence on the name 'Centre', and the inclusion within the programme of a full range of

<sup>5</sup> *Stadtarchiv (SA) Köln, Karl Bachem Nachlass, 1006/55.*

<sup>6</sup> Cf. the memoranda of Karl Bachem, dealing with the reactions of the Centre leadership to the crisis, and the discussions on the Reichstag parliamentary group, *SA Köln, Karl Bachem Nachlass, 1006/56, 1006/61b.* Also E. Hüsgen, *Ludwig Windthorst* (Cologne, 1911), pp. 231-2; G. von Hertling, *Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben*, 2 vols. (Munich, 1919-20), II, 64-6.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Bachem memoranda, *SA Köln, Karl Bachem Nachlass 1006/56, 1006/66c*; Schaedler to Lieber, 20 June 1893, *Pfälzische Landesbibliothek, Speyer, Ernst Lieber Nachlass, S. 195.* The near unanimity of Centre politicians on this issue can be seen not only in the memoranda and letters of the bill's opponents, such as Lieber, Karl Bachem and Schaedler. It also emerges clearly from the diary accounts of Frank Ballestrem, one of the few who urged a more pliant line. Cf. especially folder IX of the unpublished papers of Franz Ballestrem, in private family possession. I should like to express my gratitude to the Ballestrem family for allowing me access to this material.

<sup>8</sup> Morscy, *Die deutschen Katholiken*, p. 45.

policies supporting the rights of the individual states within the *Reich*, the democratic franchise, the demand for more local self-government and social reforms. A number of Catholic deputies in fact refused to join the new party, while a number of Protestants, of whom the most noteworthy was Ludwig von Gerlach, did so.<sup>9</sup> The tacit sympathy of many Protestant Conservatives was aroused by the severity of Liberal attacks on the Catholic Church during the *Kulturkampf*, and this fund of sympathy was frequently drawn on in subsequent years. In 1907, when Bülow tried to resurrect the *Kartell* alliance against Centre and SPD *Reichsfeinde* by enlisting the support of the Progressives as a governmental party, the Conservative *Kreuzzeitung* came out openly against attacking its 'natural allies' in the Centre,<sup>10</sup> and local electoral agreements were concluded between the two which cut across the divisions of the Bülow block.<sup>11</sup>

This Conservative sympathy was reciprocated. Windthorst's own aim was always the establishment of a 'Christian Conservative party', and after his death in 1891 the need to break out of the confessional ghetto was even more openly acknowledged by influential groups within the party, especially those gathered around Julius Bachem in Cologne, and the Social Catholics of the Mönchen-Gladbach school, which favoured non-confessional Christian trade unions. By 1914 these opinions had the upper hand in the Centre, and clerical conservative diehards like Hermann Roeren had left the party. The alliance of Centre and Conservatives in the *Reichstag* as well as in the Prussian Lower House, formalized in the *Schwarz-Blau-Block* which fought the 1912 *Reichstag* elections, represented something quite close to the Christian Conservative idea of Windthorst.

Most important of all, the Centre could not be simply a confessional party, because of the declining importance by the later nineteenth century of the confessional appeal itself: the party's attractiveness to Catholics *qua* Catholics was bound to diminish as the heroic days of the *Kulturkampf* receded into the past. This fact was recognized by its leaders.<sup>12</sup> With support for the tariffs of 1879 and active lobbying for social reforms in the 1880s, the Centre began to address itself more to the economic interests of its electorate. The founding of

<sup>9</sup> Hüsgen, *Windthorst*, p. 95.

<sup>10</sup> *Kreuzzeitung*, 31 Dec. 1906, cited in G. D. Crothers, *The German Elections of 1907* (New York, 1941), p. 122. Bismarck complained in the 1880s of the 'constant flirtation' of the *Kreuzzeitung* with the Centre. *The Holstein Papers*, ed. N. Rich and M. H. Fisher, 4 vols (Cambridge, 1955-63), II, 191.

<sup>11</sup> In the Württemberg constituency III (Heilbronn), for example, Centre and Conservative Agrarians fought together against Progressives, National Liberals and SPD K. Jacob, 'Landtagswahlen und Reichstagswahlen in Württemberg', *Süddeutsche Monatshefte* 1 (1907), 517 ff.; G. Kittler, *Aus dem dritten württemb. Reichstags-Wahlkreis. Erinnerungen und Erlebnisse* (Heilbronn, 1910), pp. 142-3; Th. Heuss, *Erinnerungen 1905-1933* (Tübingen, 1963), pp. 59-64.

<sup>12</sup> Thus Felix Porsch, an important Prussian Centre leader, warned Kopp during the 1893 crisis over the military bill that the spirit of the *Kulturkampf* years had declined, and that Centre men now weighed matters up very carefully, where once they had followed blindly. H. Gottwald, *Zentrum und Imperialismus*, Diss. (Jena, 1966), p. 129.

a plethora of artisan and peasant associations, and of the *Volkverein für das katholische Deutschland* shortly before Windthorst's death, not only gave the party an organizational backbone, but were signs of its de-clericalization; and this concentration on social policy was reinforced from the early 1890s under a new generation of leaders.<sup>13</sup> Nor did this involve a complete break with the past, for the problems of the Catholic minority had never been exclusively religious, even in areas like the Rhineland and Baden where the attack on the Church was particularly fierce. Resentment against the Protestant ascendancy, or the ascendancy of liberal bureaucrats, had an economic and social, as well as confessional, dimension. German Catholics ringed the Protestant heartland of the *Reich*, their sense of separateness encouraged by their relative economic backwardness as well as by attacks on their clergy.<sup>14</sup> As the specifically religious component of this Celtic fringe identity lost some of its immediacy, more general grievances came to the fore and found expression through the Centre.

What requires explanation is why this growing emphasis on social policy, accompanied as it was from the 1890s by declining aristocratic influence within the Centre, should have led the party to a pro-Conservative orientation rather than to alliance with the Left. The apparent paradox in this alignment of the Centre can be most effectively explained by an examination of the party's nature and origins in one of the states where it enjoyed a strong local power-base, Württemberg.

## II

Württemberg had a special reputation among German states for its advanced constitutional and political arrangements. It was noted before the nineteenth century for the checks which existed there on the exercise of absolute state power, for its decentralized administration and for a strong tradition of local self-government.<sup>15</sup> At the end of the eighteenth century Charles James Fox

<sup>13</sup> By the middle of the 1890s the founders and *Kulturkampf* generation within the Centre had mostly died: Mallinckrodt in 1874, Savigny in 1875, Franckenstein in 1890, Windthorst in 1891, Peter Reichensperger in 1892, Schorlemer and August Reichensperger in 1895. A new group of leaders came to the fore, who were in their forties or early fifties at the time of Windthorst's death: Julius Bachem, Gröber, Fritzen, Hertling, Hitze, Lieber, Porsch, Spahn, Trimborn.

<sup>14</sup> There was a considerable contemporary literature on the problem of 'Catholic backwardness', some hostile but much written from the Catholic side, giving detailed information from official statistical returns on the relative under-representation of Catholics in industry and commerce, in the free professions, in state bureaucracies, in universities and technical colleges. Catholic incomes, measured by tax returns, were also considerably lower on average than Protestant and Jewish incomes. See J. Rost, *Die wirtschaftliche und kulturelle Lage der deutschen Katholiken* (Cologne, 1911); A. Neher, *Die wirtschaftliche und soziale Lage der Katholiken im westlichen Deutschland* (Rottweil, 1927); J. Forberger, *Die wirtschaftliche und kulturelle Rückständigkeit der Katholiken und ihre Ursachen. Flugschriften des Evangelischen Bundes*, Heft 263/4 (Leipzig, 1908). See also F. Naumann, *Demokratie und Kaisertum* (Berlin, 1900), p. 122. A good example of the struggle between Protestant towns, with their industry, commerce and bureaucracies, and the Catholic countryside, is to be found in Baden. Cf. F. Dor, *Jacob Lindau, Badischer Politiker und Volksmann* (Freiburg/Breisgau, 1909).

<sup>15</sup> H. Haering, 'Württemberg und das Reich in der Geschichte', *Zeitschrift für*

considered it the only European state outside England with a constitution worthy of the name.<sup>16</sup> Large territorial gains during the Napoleonic period required a growing administrative centralization, and in many respects Württemberg in the nineteenth century was a formally half-absolute state, where the constitutional centre of gravity lay with the king and his ministers, not parliament, and official influence continued to be used at elections up to the end of the century. But there remained constitutional features – such as parliamentary control of the purse-strings – which were relatively advanced. In practice, moreover, Karl I (1864–91) and Wilhelm II (1891–1918) proved more enlightened than their royal contemporaries: they left the running of politics to their ministers, even when reforms were being planned, allowing the latter to build up close working relations with certain political leaders in parliament.<sup>17</sup>

Württemberg has a number of advantages for a case-study of the Centre party. It was representative of those south and west German areas which were chiefly identified with the change in the nature of the Centre party in the later nineteenth century which we have already noted: a shift away from a residual clerical bias, away from aristocratic leadership and towards a greater concern with social issues. It was precisely the kind of state where closer co-operation between Centre and Left might have been expected. In addition, the Württemberg Centre party possessed in Adolph Gröber<sup>18</sup> a powerful local leader who was also one of the most prominent members of the leadership group in Berlin, and representative of the new departure of the 1890s. His relationship with the Catholic hierarchy in the state mirrored those of Windthorst and Lieber with Rome. Moreover, the Catholics in Württemberg, as in the *Reich* as a whole, constituted a minority of one-third, living in clearly delimited areas in a state where religious boundaries were sharply drawn.<sup>19</sup>

The most important of these areas was Oberschwaben, acquired in stages from the Habsburgs, Bavaria and Baden at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and corresponding to that part of the administrative division of the *Donaukreis* which lay south of the Danube. The two other large pockets of

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*württembergische Landesgeschichte*, vii, 1943; K. Weller, *Württembergische Geschichte*, ed. A. Weller (Stuttgart, 1963); W. Grube, *Der Stuttgarter Landtag 1457–1957* (Stuttgart, 1957).

<sup>16</sup> O. Burkart, *Die Zusammensetzung des Württembergischen Landtags in der historischen Entwicklung*, Diss (Würzburg, 1922), p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> K. Simon, *Die württembergischen Demokraten* (Stuttgart, 1969), pp. 48–9. The Progressive leader Conrad Haussmann referred to Wilhelm II as ‘the most democratic king in Germany’.

<sup>18</sup> Adolph Gröber, born Riedlingen/Württemberg, 11 February 1854, son of a prosperous goldsmith and engraver. Graduated from Stuttgart Gymnasium 1872, studied law at Tübingen, Leipzig and Strassburg, entering state judiciary 1877. He had reached position of state prosecutor in Ravensburg when political activity interrupted his legal career. Entered Reichstag for XV Württemberg constituency 1887, and Lower House of Landtag 1889, representing his home town. In Württemberg he was unchallenged leader of local Centre party until death in 1919. In Berlin he quickly became a confidant of Windthorst, and from the 1890s was regarded as one of the most important southern German leaders of the national Centre.

<sup>19</sup> See map, pp. 828–9.

Catholics were less significant in numbers: the *Schwarzwaldkreis* around Rottweil, Rottenburg and Spaichingen; and the area of the *Jagstkreis* near the towns of Ellwangen, Aalen, Gmünd and Neresheim. What they had in common was a peripheral position in the Protestant state, once again a microcosm of that in which German Catholics as a whole found themselves. This was an important conditioning factor, for the outlying, inaccessible Catholic strongholds were divorced not only from the peculiarly militant, pietistic brand of Protestantism espoused in Alt-Württemberg: local trade links with Bavaria and Switzerland marked the separation of Catholics in Oberschwaben especially from the economic as well as the religious life of the state, which was centred on Stuttgart and the Protestant Neckar valley. Just as St Gallen and Lucerne provided a haven from religious intolerance, so a trade in agricultural produce through the port of Friedrichshafen linked the Catholic peasantry of Tettngang and Waldsee more closely with their Swiss market on the far shore of Lake Constance than with their fellow-citizens north of the Danube.<sup>20</sup>

The social separateness of these Catholic communities was crucial in determining their eventual political development in Württemberg, for the timing of the Centre's appearance in the state suggests that neither traditional *grossdeutsch* sentiment, nor the level of anti-Catholic feeling, is adequate as an explanation of the party's emergence.

The Centre was not formed at state level in Württemberg until 1894, and it is the lateness of its emergence which makes it difficult to explain the party's origins in terms of the anti-Prussian feeling which was evident in areas like the Rhineland. Catholic Württemberg was overwhelmingly *grossdeutsch* in 1848, but so was Protestant feeling. This was perhaps the strongest common bond in the state: all 103 petitions received at Frankfurt from Württemberg called for an Austrian emperor for Germany, and the anti-governmental, anti-Prussian liberals who made up the bulk of the state's representation at the Paulskirche reflected the views of both confessions.<sup>21</sup> Nor did the events of the 1860s and 1870s, although they led to the creation of a strong local National Liberal party, deprive Catholics of a vehicle for expressing *grossdeutsch* feeling. The anti-Prussian strain of liberalism survived more powerfully in Württemberg than elsewhere, producing in the *Volkspartei* a specifically Swabian form of a Progressive party. Catholics therefore had no need to create a party which was anti-Prussian and particularist; and the potential leaders of such a party were content to remain within the liberal fold. The most prominent Catholic politician of the years between 1850 and 1890 was Rudolph Probst,<sup>22</sup> a leader of the

<sup>20</sup> C. Bauer, *Politischer Katholizismus in Württemberg bis zum Jahr 1848* (Freiburg/Breisgau, 1929), p. 19.

<sup>21</sup> On the unanimity of views among both confessions, see the letters written by Moritz Mohl to his brother Julius, 30 May, 1848 to 21 April, 1849, in K. Demeter, *Grossdeutsche Stimmen* (Frankfurt/M. 1939), pp. 54-60; and T. Schnurre, *Die württembergischen Abgeordneten in der konstituierenden deutschen Nationalversammlung zu Frankfurt am Main* (Stuttgart, 1912).

<sup>22</sup> On Probst's political views and activities, see A. Hagen, *Gestalten aus dem Schwäbischen*



Oberämter in which Catholics made up more than 80% of the population.



Oberämter in which Catholics made up 50-80% of the population.



Seats won by the Centre Party in the Württemberg Landtag elections of 1895.

*Volkspartei* who sat in Berlin with the Centre group, but was adamant in refusing to countenance what he considered the unnecessary creation of a Centre party in the state.

At the time of the Centre's foundation locally, the *Volkspartei* had not modified its anti-Prussian feelings: indeed, it fought the 1895 *Landtag* elections on an anti-governmental platform strikingly reminiscent of Karl Mayer's earlier anti-Prussian *Volkspartei* campaigns, with Prime Minister von Mittnacht cast as Bismarckian villain. If any party relinquished its old particularist notions in the 1890s, it was, as we have seen, the Centre, whose leaders in Berlin – among them Gröber – now began to change course and make the Centre a party of government. If Catholics in Württemberg had wished in the 1890s to cast a vote against the power of Prussia and its institutions, the protest would have been registered most effectively by voting for the particularist and still anti-militarist *Volkspartei*. In fact, a generation after Königgrätz, the 'diplomatic phase' of Prussia's relations with the southern states had altered: the *Reich* had become a more integrated state, and anti-Prussian feeling no longer played such a major role in Württemberg politics. If it had, the Centre would have been more embarrassed on this issue than its local Progressive opponents.

Neither can the timing of the Centre's emergence be readily understood within the chronology of anti-Catholic feeling in the state. From the first half of the century the Church had been kept in a position of humiliating dependence through the state's Catholic Church Council, which decided even the length of sermons and the hours when confessions might be heard.<sup>23</sup> In Rottenburg, chosen as head of the Württemberg see because of its proximity to the state administrative centre of Stuttgart, the bishop was obliged to share his residence with a seminary in the buildings of an old Carmelite convent.<sup>24</sup> Slightings of this kind, along with the outlawing of teaching orders and discrimination against Catholics in official appointments, remained as standing reproaches to Catholic *amour-propre* throughout the century. But the high-point of anti-Catholic feeling was in fact reached in the 1850s. No struggle in the later period was as fierce as that waged by the Lower House of the *Landtag* against the Concordat of 1857, as anti-clerical and anti-Catholic elements combined successfully to prevent its ratification.<sup>25</sup> No Catholic or Centre party emerged from this defeat, nor in the following decades. The absence of a full-blooded *Kulturkampf* in Württemberg had the effect that no Centre party came into existence, as in

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*Katholizismus*, 4 vols. (Stuttgart, 1948–54), I, 296 ff.; Burkart, *Die Zusammensetzung des Württembergischen Landtags*, p. 104 ff.; A. Scheuerle, *Der politische Katholizismus in Württemberg während der Jahre 1857–1871*, Diss. (Tübingen, 1923).

<sup>23</sup> Between 1802 and 1842 alone the Church Council published 377 ordinances, almost twice as many as the episcopal authorities. Bauer, *Politischer Katholizismus*, p. 14.

<sup>24</sup> Bauer, *Politischer Katholizismus in Württemberg*, p. 19; K. Bachem, *Vorgeschichte, Geschichte und Politik der deutschen Zentrumspartei*, 9 vols. (Cologne, 1927–32), I, 233–4.

<sup>25</sup> Bachem, *Vorgeschichte, Geschichte und Politik*, IV, 351; A. Hagen, *Staat und Katholische Kirche in Württemberg in den Jahren 1848–1862* (Stuttgart, 1928).

other parts of the *Reich*, with the initial and primary function of defending the Church against persecution. Catholic members of the Lower House continued to sit with the various Protestant-dominated parliamentary groups, most joining Probst in the umbrella grouping of the *Linken*, based on the core of the *Volkspartei*, the remainder sitting with the pro-governmental *Landespartei*. While Catholics in the later 1880s and early 1890s were concerned about the intemperate attacks of the Evangelical League, the level of official discrimination remained constant, or even diminished. Prominent Catholics remained accordingly lukewarm on the subject of forming a Centre party at the local level.<sup>26</sup>

Nor did the Catholic electorate seem anxious to withdraw its support from Progressive politicians where it had the opportunity. The *Volkspartei* was the traditional party of lower middle-class radicalism in Oberschwaben, and at an election in 1862 in Waldsee, only a short time after the 1857 controversy, it was still able to win with a Protestant candidate against a Catholic conservative.<sup>27</sup> Even the outburst of Catholic fury which was unleashed by the events of 1866–7 left no permanent demand for confessional representation.<sup>28</sup> Two elections held in Gmünd showed that a Progressive standing on a radical, anti-governmental platform could still beat a specifically Catholic candidate. In 1868 the conservative Catholic Karle temporarily won the seat by obtaining the rural Catholic vote; but the Progressive Streich was able to win it back in a by-election the following year.<sup>29</sup> Throughout the 1870s and beyond, Catholic Württemberg continued to vote for *Volkspartei* men of a radical democratic hue, without regard to confession.

### III

It was not until the very beginning of the 1890s that Adolph Gröber, who had been agitating since the 1880s for the foundation of a Centre party, began to receive a livelier response; and within five years the party was constituted and prepared to fight a successful election campaign in 1895. The sudden emergence of the Centre at local level has been largely passed over by historians dealing with Württemberg politics. Their attention has focused instead on the series of reforming parliaments which, from the 1890s, swept away the remaining unelected members of the Württemberg Lower House, revised the systems of local government and education and introduced a progressive income tax. And in dealing with the watershed which the 1890s undoubtedly represented in Württemberg politics, the role of the *Volkspartei*, and to a lesser extent the SPD, have been most carefully examined.<sup>30</sup> When the Centre party has been

<sup>26</sup> Bachem, *Vorgeschichte, Geschichte und Politik*, VIII, 60 ff.; H. Cardauns, *Adolph Gröber* (M.-Gladbach, 1921), pp. 63–7.

<sup>27</sup> Scheuerle, *Der politische Katholizismus in Württemberg*, p. 135.

<sup>28</sup> In Laupheim, Oberschwaben, Catholics sacked a Protestant Church, G. C. Windell, *The Catholics and German Unity, 1866–71* (Minneapolis, 1954), p. 6.

<sup>29</sup> Scheuerle, *Der politische Katholizismus in Württemberg*, p. 213.

<sup>30</sup> G. Egelhaaf, 'Württemberg in den fünfundzwanzig Jahren 1891–1916', *Württembergische*

considered at all, both its appearance on the local political stage and its subsequent anti-Left alignment have been ascribed simply to confessional factors.<sup>31</sup> This, however, does not answer the question of why the Centre emerged in Württemberg when it did; nor does it explain why Catholic voters who had previously been happy to entrust their representation to the Progressive *Volkspartei* should now switch to a party which on political issues was less in the van of progress. It will be argued here that the predominance in Württemberg of medium-sized landholdings and small business concerns, usually emphasized as a stimulus to progressive politics, also created a strong current of social conservatism. Under the impact of rapid industrialization it was not the radical politics of the *Volkspartei* and their SPD allies on the Left, but the conservative social policies of the Centre and their Agrarian Conservative allies on the Right which ultimately gained the support of those 'middling' social groups which were beginning to face the future with apprehension. It was against this background that the 'natural constituency' of the Centre party was turned, in Württemberg, into an actual political power-base.

The isolation and sense of separateness of the Catholic communities was less obvious in the first half of the century, when communications were uniformly bad, and the Protestant parts of the state as undeveloped economically as the Catholic regions. But when industrialization did come it was uneven: if until 1850 Württemberg stood still while the rest of Germany advanced, after that date the Catholic regions of Württemberg stood still while other parts of the state advanced. The 1850s brought the first wave of industrialization. The census of occupations in 1861 showed that while from 1835 to 1852 the population had increased by 160,000, and those employed in industry by only 30,000, in the decade after 1852 the population fell by 13,000, but those engaged in industry rose by 40,000.<sup>32</sup> By 1863 the government official Mährlen was already claiming that Württemberg had made the transition from *Agrarstaat* to one in which large-scale manufacturing was prominent.<sup>33</sup> The proportion of those dependent on agriculture for a living fell steadily, until by 1882 it was less than half (48.5 per cent) of the population, and by 1907 stood at only 38.5 per cent.

There was not only a tilting of the scales between agriculture and industry,

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*Vierteljahrshefte für Landesgeschichte*, xxv (1916); E. Marquand, *Geschichte Württembergs* (Stuttgart, 1961), p. 348; Grube, *Der Stuttgarter Landtag*, p. 549; R. Menzinger, *Verfassungsrevision und Demokratisierungsprozess im Königreich Württemberg* (Stuttgart, 1969); K. Simon, *Die württembergischen Demokraten*, especially p. 58 ff.; H. Schlemmer, *Die Rolle der Sozialdemokratie in den Landtagen Badens und Württembergs und ihr Einfluss auf die Entwicklung der Gesamtpartei zwischen 1890 und 1914*, Diss. (Freiburg/Breisgau, 1953), pp. 45-57.

<sup>31</sup> The accounts of the Centre party given in the sources noted above (fn. 30) are representative in making this judgement.

<sup>32</sup> Report on census returns by Gustav Schmoller, in *Württembergische Jahrbücher (WJbb)* (1862), p. 283 ff.

<sup>33</sup> *WJbb* (1863), p. 40 ff.; *Das Königreich Württemberg. Eine Beschreibung von Land Volk und Staat. Herausgegeben von dem Königlichen Statistisch-topographischen Bureau* (Stuttgart, 1863), p. 551. (Henceforth: *Das Königreich*, edition cited.)

but a basic change in the nature and scale of industry itself. Before 1850 even the large-scale industry which had existed was forced to compromise with the tradition of decentralized village crafts, by giving out work to occupy the winter evenings of the peasantry: at the beginning of the 1830s the Heidenheim textile firm of Mebold had 25 workers in its factory and 115 outside; the Zoeppritz brothers in Mergelstetten had 112 workers in their factory and a further 105 outside.<sup>34</sup> After the middle of the century this pattern of part-time outwork declined, and the number of machines in the factories increased enormously. The absence of an indigenous machine-producing industry had been a serious handicap in the first half of the century, resulting in factories having equipment often 20–30 years out of date. The development of this sector after 1850 was the basis of the state's growing world-wide reputation for quality finished goods: by 1882 there were 174 concerns in this branch, which grew by a further 43 per cent before 1895. Over the same period the number of firms employing over 50 men increased more than threefold.<sup>35</sup>

Against this background of industrialization and the prosperity which accompanied it, the Catholic areas remained solid in the pursuit of their traditional occupations. The separate development of Catholic Württemberg in the later part of the nineteenth century was rooted in economic backwardness; and this was in turn based on different traditions of property inheritance and their effect on the size of peasant holdings.

Württemberg was not dominated by 'dwarf holdings' like its neighbours Baden and Hesse. Just over 40 per cent of all holdings were small or medium in size, between 10 and 50 *Morgen* (6–35 acres); of the remainder, those over 35 acres outnumbered the dwarf holdings of under 6 acres by three to two. With the exception of Protestant Hohenlohe and the Protestant parts of the Alb, the size of holdings corresponded to the confessional division, larger on the Catholic side and smaller on the Protestant. In Catholic areas, above all in Oberschwaben, tradition was for the patrimony to be handed on undivided to a single heir. The typical agricultural unit in Catholic Württemberg was the family farm of medium or large size, similar to those which formed the backbone of Bavarian husbandry; many had been supplemented by gains made during the break-up of communal land at the end of the eighteenth century. This provided a clear contrast with the Protestant Neckar valley, where a combination of climate, fertile land and the absence of primogeniture led to increasingly parcelled small plots. Whereas in the Neckarland only 13.8 per cent of holdings were greater than 35 acres, in the Oberland the figure was 56.3 per cent, or 20 per cent above the state average. Conversely, half of all holdings in the Neckar valley were smaller than 6 acres, less than an eighth in Oberschwaben.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> P. Gehring, 'Von List bis Steinbeis', *Zeitschrift für württembergische Landesgeschichte*, VII (1943), 435.

<sup>35</sup> L. Dessauer, *Die Industrialisierung von Gross-Stuttgart*, Diss. (Tübingen, 1916), p. 198.

<sup>36</sup> *Das Königreich* (1863), p. 429. In the Allgäu, the consolidation of common land into farms

These differences were decisive in the years of agricultural crisis during the 1840s, for the heaviest burden of debt and the highest incidence of bankruptcy fell on those areas where dwarf holdings predominated. The *Donaukreis* contributed only 15 per cent of the total of forced sales affecting landholders,<sup>37</sup> and one particularly hard-hit group, the vintners, were hardly represented in the south-east Catholic region of the state, where wine was produced only in a small area around Tettngang.<sup>38</sup> Here the worst affected group was that of the traditional landless village lower class, the *Söldner* and *Köbler*: in the 1840s and 1850s the Catholic farm owners had the fear of sharing their fate, but not yet the experience of it. By contrast, the choice facing the densely settled Protestant peasantry was stark: to subdivide further (frequently a physical impossibility), or to leave the land for the town or overseas. The rural artisans faced a similar dilemma, ruined both by peasant poverty and competition from the factory. The flight from the land and the traditional crafts was thus largely a Protestant phenomenon, and the effect of the agricultural crisis of mid-century was to create two distinct economic units within Württemberg: one industrializing fast and mainly Protestant, the other agricultural and largely Catholic.

The three main foci of industrialization were all Protestant. First was the Greater Stuttgart conurbation, formed as the city gradually drew the surrounding communities of Cannstatt, Feuerbach, Untertürkheim, Wangen, Gaisburg and Degerloch within its industrial and commercial orbit. Stuttgart's population increased from 48,000 in 1834 to 63,000 in 1852, doubled in the next twenty years and reached 172,000 by the turn of the century.<sup>39</sup> Cannstatt grew from 7,000 in mid-century to 20,000 in 1890; from the exclusive spa town which Balzac had known it became a solidly working-class suburb of Stuttgart and a major railway junction and repair centre.<sup>40</sup> The second area was made up by a group of towns in the Neckar valley, Reutlingen, Esslingen and Heilbronn, which were closely linked to Stuttgart, and like the capital city had grown enormously by soaking up labour from the land. The third group consisted of four towns, three in the extreme north of the *Donaukreis* (Geislingen, Göppingen, Ulm), and one in the *Jagstkreis* (Heidenheim); but both geographically and economically, these towns looked west towards Stuttgart and the Neckar, rather than south or east to the isolated Catholic valleys.

Catholics took almost no part in this movement into the towns and factories. In the 1860s, after the first great wave of internal migration, still none of the six towns over 10,000 was Catholic; only one of the ten between 5,000 and 10,000; and only three of the twenty-four between 3,000 and 5,000. Catholics

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had been taking place from as early as the end of the sixteenth century. Cf. H. Hoffmann, *Landwirtschaft und Industrie in Württemberg* (Berlin, 1935), pp. 139-40.

<sup>37</sup> *WJbb* (1847), p. 179 ff.

<sup>38</sup> K. C. Hainlen, *Gemeinssliche natürliche Beschreibung Württembergs. Mit besonderer Beziehung auf die Landwirtschaft* (Stuttgart, 1867), p. 94.

<sup>39</sup> Dessauer, *Die Industrialisierung von Gross-Stuttgart*, p. 191.

<sup>40</sup> W. Bloss, *Denkwürdigkeiten eines Sozialdemokraten*, 2 vols. (Munich, 1914-19), II, 74.

made up scarcely one-tenth of the total urban population, but four-fifths of those living in scattered farms and hamlets.<sup>41</sup> This remained true for the next thirty years. The official description of Ellwangen published in 1886 remarked on the 'predominantly agricultural' character of the district; 60 per cent of the inhabitants gained a livelihood directly from the land.<sup>42</sup> In Biberach in 1895, 55 per cent of the population continued to be dependent on agriculture as a source of income, only 33 per cent on industry and commerce.<sup>43</sup> By the end of the century the average number of those living from agriculture in the state's seventeen *Reichstag* constituencies was 44.5 per cent; in the four constituencies with a Catholic majority it was 56 per cent.<sup>44</sup>

It was therefore a Catholic peasantry still intact in its old communities and occupations which faced the economic problems of the later nineteenth century; and with it a flourishing *Mittelstand* in derivative occupations like small-scale brewing and milling, and other crafts like metal-working and leather goods manufacture which lived off peasant custom. And the two decades after the mid-century climacteric proved to be good ones for agriculture and the small businesses and shops which it supported; a golden interim between the old crises of dearth and the beginning of a long-term crisis of a different kind, brought on by collision with the world market and its falling prices. In all agricultural regions land was brought under the plough, the prices of produce and property rose and Rümelin writing in the early 1860s could claim that agriculture was largely free of debt.<sup>45</sup> Württemberg continued to export grain until 1874,<sup>46</sup> and the wars of 1866 and 1870-71 disguised the advent of a downward turn in prices. Nowhere was this temporary prosperity and optimism more apparent than in Oberschwaben, where it was reported that among the peasantry even the possession of state bonds had become normal.<sup>47</sup>

This situation was rudely shattered by declining agricultural returns, as price levels in Württemberg became increasingly affected by world prices which were themselves falling, as new lands in North America, eastern Europe and India were brought into cultivation. Lower freight rates brought cheap agricultural produce to German ports, and after 1871 a railway network of national dimensions opened up the state to these supplies. At the same time, an increased volume of river traffic carried grain down the Rhine to Mannheim, and then on to Heilbronn and Stuttgart, where it was distributed by dealers on the

<sup>41</sup> *Das Königreich* (1863), p. 349.

<sup>42</sup> *Beschreibung des Oberamts Ellwangen, Herausgegeben von dem Königlichen Statistisch-topographischen Bureau* (Stuttgart, 1886), pp. 202, 267.

<sup>43</sup> *Das Königreich* (1907), IV, 14.

<sup>44</sup> *WJbb*, I (1898), 206-7. Max Miller, in his *Eugen Bolz, Staatsmann und Bekenner* (Stuttgart, 1951), has a good description of Rottenburg in the last decades of the nineteenth century; a 'stilles Landstädtchen' while industrialization was beginning in the surrounding areas.

<sup>45</sup> Cited by G. Dehlinger, 'Ein Überblick über die Entwicklung der Landwirtschaft in Württemberg seit der Mitte des 18 Jahrhunderts', *WJbb*, I (1897), 71.

<sup>46</sup> M. Bühler, *Die Stellung Württembergs zum Umschwung in der Bismarck'schen Handelspolitik 1878/9*, Diss. (Tübingen, 1935), p. 48.

<sup>47</sup> *Das Königreich* (1863), pp. 437-8.

*Produktenbörse* at a standard price. Harvest failures in 1873, 1876, 1888 and 1889 brought no repetition of the price rises in 1854, while the dominant trend of world prices was a downward movement to which all three main grains of Oberschwaben – spelt, oats and barley – were subject. Spelt, the main winter crop, reached 20.68M per dz. (100 kg.) in 1854, a price attained again for the last time in 1872; after 1882 the price only twice exceeded 15M. Barley, too, reached a peak in 1854 at 20.91M, but after the 1870s never rose above the 14–15M figure. The same was true of oats, where the 1880s signalled the decisive downward turn.<sup>48</sup>

The loss of income sustained by primary producers was compounded by the sharp rise in costs which began to affect them at the same time: in particular the rising cost of farm labour resulting from the competition of railway construction and factories, with their obvious attractions of higher wages, more regular and normally shorter hours and greater independence. Between 1882 and 1895 the number of male and female servants resident on farms fell by 1,716, the number of day labourers by over 5,500. While the total number of wage earners in the state increased by more than 50 per cent, the number on the land actually fell by nearly 5 per cent,<sup>49</sup> and shortage and competition combined to raise the wages of male agricultural servants by over 300 per cent between 1860 and 1889, and those of female servants by over 200 per cent.<sup>50</sup> This problem was critical in Catholic communities, where considerable numbers of servants and day labourers had always been essential to supplement the labour of family members on medium and large farms. It seems possible that the rising birth rate which now became evident in these areas was at least in part a response to the chronic shortage of non-family labour.<sup>51</sup>

Increased taxes to finance illness, accident, old-age and invalid insurance created an additional burden: in the three decades up to the 1890s the total of taxes and contributions rose fourfold, and to this must be added contributions to hail and fire insurance.<sup>52</sup> Falling land prices were an index of growing pessimism and agricultural distress; and they represented too a drop in the real value of property. This drop in prices was most extreme in Oberschwaben, just

<sup>48</sup> *WJbb*, II (1896), 122.

<sup>49</sup> *WJbb*, I (1897), 176–7; *Die Landwirtschaft und die Landwirtschaftspflege in Württemberg. Denkschrift Hrsg. von der K. Zentralstelle für die Landwirtschaft* (Stuttgart, 1908), p. 191.

<sup>50</sup> *WJbb*, I (1897), 179.

<sup>51</sup> A declining rate of infant mortality also, of course, played a part, for it had earlier been highest in the Catholic areas. A *Heimatsroman* set in Oberschwaben, *Meine Steinauer* (Stuttgart/Leipzig, 1908), and written by Wilhelm Schussen, a school friend of Matthias Erzberger, confirms the widespread use of family labour on the farm, and discouragement of those children who preferred to leave the land to seek employment.

<sup>52</sup> *WJbb*, I (1897), 74 Insurance premiums were especially severe in agricultural insurance, because the returns to the companies were smaller and much less reliable. In life insurance, for example, only 50 per cent of income was returned in claims, in agricultural insurance 80 per cent. At a time when land was losing its profitability, the companies were naturally concerned also about fraudulent claims.

as that part of the state had been best placed to profit from the confidence of the better years.<sup>53</sup>

Catholic peasants who had escaped the indebtedness of earlier crises now found themselves thrown on the capital market at a time when credit terms were unprecedentedly bad. In the first half of the century capital had flowed mainly into the land, but successive crises had destroyed the confidence of creditors in the peasantry. Interest rates rose<sup>54</sup> and capital turned to safer investments in state railways, or to industry and commerce where returns were higher. It was complained that money was no longer loaned against a simple promissory note (*Schuldschein*) but only on mortgage (*Pfandschein*); by 1897 three-quarters of the debt owed by agriculture was in the form of mortgages. In the *Donaukreis* the total value of mortgage debts taken on increased by 42 per cent between 1874 and 1894: harsh credit terms were being tied to the security of property which was losing both its profitability and its market value.<sup>55</sup>

The first of two government inquiries into the state of agriculture found that the average number of bankruptcies in the four *Kreise* per 10,000 owners was 37.25. Strikingly, the western, Protestant areas which had been worst affected earlier in the century now escaped more lightly: the figure for the *Neckarkreis* was 31 per 10,000, and for the *Schwarzwaldkreis* 23. The less densely populated part of Württemberg, with its larger holdings, was now the centre of the crisis: the figures for the *Jagstkreis* and *Donaukreis* were 52 and 42 per 10,000. The Catholic areas were the worst-suffering, and now paid the price for earlier success in resisting debt, foreclosure and flight from the land. This was especially so in the Catholic heartland of Oberschwaben, where Wangen, with 71 bankruptcies per 10,000, was one of the most badly affected communities, and Saulgau (58), Ehingen and Leutkirch (47) and Riedlingen and Tettngang (46) were all well above the state average.<sup>56</sup>

Distress was strongly felt among the Catholic peasantry, for agriculture was at the very centre of life. Rottenburg's newspaper, for example, called itself the *Hopfenzeitung*, after the crop on which the livelihood of most of its readers depended. This same paper was once obliged to remind its readers that 'a newspaper is, so to speak, more than just the *Börsenblatt* of the peasant'.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Over the three periods 1880-84, 1885-9 and 1890-94, the fall in land values was actually levelling off in the state as a whole; in the *Donaukreis* the loss of saleable value was still increasing, from 9.7 per cent in 1880-84 to 12.3 per cent in 1890-94. *WJbb*, II (1895), 21.

<sup>54</sup> In the 1820s interest rates were usually 4 per cent, after mid-century 5½ per cent. *WJbb*, I (1897), 70. In the second half of the century agricultural co-operative banks, after Raiffeisen's model, were established, but they too had to reckon with the vicissitudes to which agriculture was peculiarly prone, and the consequent unreliability of the peasant as a debtor. Stockmayer, an Agrarian deputy in the Württemberg Lower House, spoke of one such association with an interest rate of 6 per cent 'to encourage prompt repayment'. *Verhandlungen der Württembergischen Kammer der Abgeordneten auf dem 33 Landtag. Protokoll Band 1, 120, 10 Sitzung, 8.3.1895 (henceforth: 33 LT, PB 1, 120, 10 Sitz., 8.3.1895)*.

<sup>55</sup> *WJbb*, II (1895), 9, 14.

<sup>56</sup> *WJbb*, I (1893), 133 ff.

<sup>57</sup> *Rottenburger Zeitung und Neckarbote*, 16 Sept. 1911.

Adolph Gröber, beginning his legal career in Catholic Neresheim, noted with some impatience that the local peasantry was 'interested in nothing but agriculture'.<sup>58</sup> In the late 1880s this interest quickened, as a series of factors outside their control – changing world trade, the development of railways and canals, the power of *Produktenbörse* to fix prices at the expense of the local *Schrammen*, the labour shortage, the vagaries of the capital market – made primary producers aware of their impotence. At the same time, there was a slackening of that solicitude which governments had always shown towards agriculture. Before the 1860s, most ministers and officials had echoed the warnings of the writer in the *Württembergische Jahrbücher* of 1839 on the social dangers to be expected from industrialization<sup>59</sup>; and backed their beliefs with a steady flow of aid and credit to the countryside. But by the last two decades of the century, industry and commerce provided the state with most of its revenue, and government and officials were more concerned with ameliorating the problems caused by industrialization than with preaching the social worth of the *Agrarstaat*. The changing official mind was indicated by the development of insurance schemes with their chief benefit to the factory worker, and by a new concern with industrial training programmes. An equally telling sign was the emergence of a new kind of official, like the pioneering Württemberg statistician Losch,<sup>60</sup> whose interests lay in urban housing conditions and suburban railway services.

When the government did investigate agricultural distress, rural disenchantment was plain. It was reported from Ravensburg and Waldsee that the state fiscal burdens were felt as 'oppressive', while the district of Thaldorf commented that its results 'are not of the kind which would win the rural population for social legislation'.<sup>61</sup> Resentment against the olympian detachment of a distant government played an important role in the elections of the period. But it was not the traditionally anti-governmental *Volkspartei* which henceforth reaped the reward; and it failed because, unlike its political cousins in France, the Radicals, it lost the support of the peasantry and lower middle class in the small towns and villages. French liberalism consolidated its hold among these groups by pressing parish-pump demands in Paris: never losing a basic belief in the peasant state as a guarantee of social stability, it abhorred rapid industrial growth, and encouraged the safe investment of capital in government bonds rather than in speculative industrial ventures. The agrarian order was under-

<sup>58</sup> H. Cardauns, *Adolph Gröber* (M-Gladbach, 1921), p. 26.

<sup>59</sup> 'Hopelessness and dependence on the factory owner, the destruction of family life and the spreading of immorality' would attend industrialization. *WJbb* (1839), p. 71 ff. Cf. the remarks of Minister von Weckherlin, retorting to Friedrich List's demand for government-sponsored industry, that 'factories are the greatest danger, for they bring men up to become either beggars or agitators'. Marquand, *Geschichte Württembergs*, p. 335; Gehring, *Von List bis Steinbeis*, p. 414.

<sup>60</sup> Losch's overriding interest in the social problems of industrial society put him on close personal and political terms with Friedrich Naumann's 'Social Liberal' group, for whom he contested a Württemberg *Reichstag* election against a *Bauernbund* Agrarian. See M. Miller and R. Uhlend (eds.), *Lebensbilder aus Schwaben und Franken*, 1x (Stuttgart, 1963), 403, 406–7.

<sup>61</sup> *WJbb*, II (1895), 20 ff.

written in a practical sense by protective tariffs. Germany's Progressives, by contrast, were Manchester men, and nowhere more clearly than in Württemberg: free movement of labour and free trade were central articles of faith, and 'cheap bread' a fundamental part of their policy.

The Progressives sought to counter the unpopularity of this stance by persuading the peasantry that tariffs were a Junker device; but without success, although many of their arguments were undoubtedly correct. They were right to point out, for example, that large estates were the main beneficiaries of high grain tariffs. It was also misleading to claim, as agrarian spokesmen did, that the influx of foreign agricultural produce into Germany would shortly cease, and that tariffs were simply a temporary necessity: Russia was committed to exporting grain at whatever cost, while the amount of virgin land still available in Argentina, Canada and Australia made it likely that all would continue to increase their exports to Germany.<sup>62</sup> In Württemberg it was chimerical to expect a long-term solution to the crisis of foreign competition, for there was no escaping the main problem: after the 1880s the state could no longer provide its growing urban population with food, and the bakers anyway preferred foreign grain, once it became available, because of its superior quality.<sup>63</sup> The duties on rye and wheat were also of little use in areas like Oberschwaben, where they were rarely grown.<sup>64</sup> In fact the duties harmed large and medium-sized farms in three distinct ways. First, Prussian grain growers, having priced themselves out of world markets, dumped in southern Germany and so further deflated prices. Secondly, the repercussions of the protectionist barrier harmed the flourishing export of oats to Switzerland. Finally, the one-sided protection of grain worked against the cattle-raiser's interests: it limited his domestic market by keeping the proportion of family budgets spent on bread very high; and it made feedstuffs more expensive.<sup>65</sup>

This was the case put by *Volkspartei* politicians, and by liberal economists like Albert Bartens. More recent writers on Württemberg have also argued that

<sup>62</sup> R. Drill, *Soll Deutschland seinen ganzen Getreidebedarf selbst produzieren?* (Stuttgart, 1895), pp. 23, 36 ff.; H. Rosenberg, 'Zur sozialen Funktion der Agrarpolitik im Zweiten Reich', *Probleme der deutschen Sozialgeschichte* (Frankfurt/M., 1969), p. 60.

<sup>63</sup> A. Bartens, *Die wirtschaftliche Entwicklung des Königreichs Württemberg mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Handelsverträge* (Frankfurt/M., 1901), p. 35 ff. Milling technology in Germany was initially incapable of dealing with the hard wheat from the great plains of Central Europe and North America, but by the 1880s new techniques developed in the U.S.A. by millers using prairie wheat had been introduced into Germany, and from that time the remaining advantage of domestic grain was destroyed. Cf. K. W. Hardach, *Die Bedeutung wirtschaftlicher Faktoren bei der Wiedereinführung der Eisen- und Getreidezölle in Deutschland 1879* (Berlin, 1969), p. 76.

<sup>64</sup> Hainlen, *Gemeinssassliche natürliche Beschreibung Württembergs*, pp. 86-7.

<sup>65</sup> On this subject, see especially A. Gerschenkron, *Bread and Democracy in Germany* (Berkeley, 1943), who argues at length the Junker deception practised on animal-breeding and dairying producers; and H.-B. Krohn, *Die Futtergetreidewirtschaft der Welt 1900-1954* (Hamburg/Berlin, 1957), especially p. 37. On the adverse effect of the maize tariff on the medium-sized producer, see U. Teichmann, *Die Politik der Agrarpreisstützung* (Cologne, 1955), p. 203.

small producers were subsistence-based, with a minimal interest in the market.<sup>66</sup> In fact, this was not the case, and the extent of small-scale production for the market is clear from official sources. In Gmünd the marketable surplus in 1870 from the 130 households of Iggingen was 1,500 bushels of spelt, 130 of barley and 40 of rye. In Degerfeld, also in Gmünd and consisting of 55 households, it was reported that '200–300 bushels of spelt and 250–350 bushels of oats in excess of domestic consumption can annually be sold outside'.<sup>67</sup> In Göggingen the pattern was similar, and prevailed, according to the *Gmünder Tagblatt*, beyond the turn of the century.<sup>68</sup> In reply to an inquiry of 1895, the district of Bergatreute in Waldsee (where all three main grains were cultivated) calculated the annual loss to its producers from the price drop at 32,000 M: only 17 out of 231 households needed to purchase all their flour and bread; 65 produced at least part of their requirements; 48 were self-sufficient; and 101 had a surplus to market.<sup>69</sup> There can be no question that the peasant producer had an interest in the market price of grain.

It was, of course, true that German agricultural production was unbalanced, and that a greater emphasis on cattle and dairy farming was called for to redress the over-production of grain. This, however, did not dispel the problem that the small producer's budget was often finely balanced to include a small profit from spelt, oats or barley. Nor did Progressive and liberal arguments take sufficient account of the fact that rising costs contributed at least as much as falling prices to rural anger. Thus the suggestion that he switch from grain was met with outright suspicion by the small producer, particularly since it came from the champions of that rapid industrialization which he held responsible for his plight. This reaction found support among cattle-raisers who feared a glut from over-production or a sudden flood of livestock and meat imports,<sup>70</sup> and among dairy farmers whose apprehensions were reinforced by concern over surrogate foodstuffs. Margarine was the main enemy here: the Ravensburg Chamber of Commerce, always sensitive to the moods of local customers, reported in 1894 that dairy men were fighting fiercely to check the spread of margarine as a butter substitute. Feelings were sufficiently strong for the Chamber to take up the movement, and propose – as the Centre party in the *Reichstag* had done – that, as a disincentive to the consumer, the offending substance be statutorily dyed a distinctive and disagreeable colour (their suggestion was violet).<sup>71</sup> Hop growers, concentrated in the Catholic areas of Tettngang

<sup>66</sup> Bühler, *Die Stellung Württembergs*, pp. 12, 47–8; Hardach, *Die Bedeutung wirtschaftlicher Faktoren*, pp. 120–1.

<sup>67</sup> *Beschreibung des Oberamts Gmünd, Herausgegeben von dem Königlichen Statistisch-topographischen Bureau* (Stuttgart, 1870), p. 354.

<sup>68</sup> *Gmünder Tagblatt*, 15 Apr. 1902.

<sup>69</sup> *WJbb*, II (1895), 25.

<sup>70</sup> *WJbb*, II (1895), 14, 25; *WJbb*, I (1897), 74. Horse-raisers also feared a flood of foreign imports: the number of horses imported in 1860 was 35,000, in 1874 67,000, in 1898 122,000. For reactions to this, cf. *Ipf-Zeitung*, 14 Sept. 1899.

<sup>71</sup> E. Schwab, P. Weiss, K. Haltermann, et al., *100 Jahre Oberschwäbische Industrie- und Handelskammer* (Ravensburg, 1957), pp. 58–9. The Centre party supported the 1887 'margarine

and Rottenburg, were also threatened with a curtailed outlet for their crops when improvements in refrigeration reduced the role of hops as a preservative and freed breweries from the compulsion to buy immediately after the harvest.<sup>72</sup>

All these considerations made it difficult for the Progressives to impress with their argument that peasant prosperity lay in diversification. Yet, as working-class complaints about dear food became more insistent, the *Volkspartei* was strengthened in its belief that the great Junker estates must be made to suffer and the peasant to see sense. As the gap between town and country widened, the peasantry looked to other parties for a sympathetic hearing, and in the early 1890s matters came to a head. Grain prices dipped disastrously,<sup>73</sup> and cattle-raisers were struck by a series of natural disasters, culminating in a feedstuffs shortage which reduced stocks by a fifth and cost the peasantry an estimated 30–40 million M.<sup>74</sup> Liberals bore the brunt of the resentment as many cattle owners who had previously resisted were forced to take on debts: complaints were rife about the extortion of Jewish cattle dealers when animals had to be bought on credit, and liberal legislation was blamed for sanctioning the itinerant trade in cattle.<sup>75</sup> Above all, the Caprivi trade treaties, supported by the *Volkspartei*, produced violent opposition, as import duties were reduced on oats, barley, malt, oxen, calves, meat and hops. One beneficiary of the crisis was the Württemberg *Bauernbund*, formed in 1893 as a local branch of the agrarian *Bund der Landwirte*, and beginning to make headway in the Protestant regions of Hohenlohe and the Alb, which by geographical position, type of agriculture and social structure were very close to the Catholic regions of the *Jagstkreis* and Oberschwaben.<sup>76</sup> The other beneficiary was the Centre party itself, many of

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law'; demanded heavier taxation on margarine and supported legislation to ban its sale in places where butter was sold; was a moving spirit behind the *Reichstag* committee motion to make margarine unpopular by dyeing it 'the (colour) of the oaken wainscoting of the *Reichstag* building'; and was a cosignatory along with the Conservatives and Anti-Semites of the 1896 draft bill (June 1897 law) to subject margarine to even more stringent public health investigations (controls over milk and butter were negligible).

<sup>72</sup> Teichmann, *Die Politik der Agrarpreisstützung*, p. 638. Stuttgart was a major centre both for the chemical industry and the manufacture of sophisticated brewery equipment which could make the use of surrogates like rice possible.

<sup>73</sup> Spelt prices in 1894 were at only 11 M./dz. *WJbb*, II (1896), 122.

<sup>74</sup> K. Lindeboom, 'Das Privatversicherungswesen', V. Bruns (ed.), *Württemberg unter der Regierung König Wilhelms II* (Stuttgart, 1916), p. 911; *WJbb*, I (1897), 73.

<sup>75</sup> *WJbb*, II (1895), 14, 25. The case of one fraudulent Jewish cattle-dealer in Ravensburg was much discussed in the press, and even carried into the Lower House in 1895 by the energetically anti-semitic Centre deputy for the area, Theophil Egger. Cf. also Friedrich Payer's description of his Agrarian opponent at a by-election in Besigheim at the same period: 'His campaign was not delicate, and portrayals of the lawyer (i.e. Payer – DGB) having the mortgaged cow taken away from the despairing peasant family at the bidding of the Jew played a major part'. F. Payer, *Mein Lebenslauf*, typed MS (Stuttgart, 1932), pp. 35–6.

<sup>76</sup> On the similarity of Hohenlohe and the Alb to Oberschwaben, see E. Schremmer, *Die Bauernbefreiung in Hohenlohe* (Stuttgart, 1963), and M. König, *Die bäuerliche Kulturlandschaft der Hohen Schwabenalb* (Tübingen, 1958). On the origins of the *Bauernbund* in these years, *Oekonomieerat Rudolph Schmid. Ein Lebensbild eines württembergischen Bauernführers* (no author, Stuttgart, 1927).

whose candidates in 1895 were already political leaders in agricultural communities, or active in local peasant associations.<sup>77</sup>

#### IV

Support also came to the Centre from the *Mittelstand* of artisans and shopkeepers. Declining peasant purchasing power brought a spate of bankruptcies to small businesses in the Catholic valleys, while simultaneously larger competitors began to encroach on local markets. Four traditional industries of Oberschwaben were badly affected. Artisan tanneries were hit by the competition of cheap imported American leather, and the swallowing up of small businesses was well advanced by the middle of the 1890s.<sup>78</sup> Shoemakers were also being eliminated by the competition of firms like Salamander in Stuttgart,<sup>79</sup> while millers faced similar problems, as large concerns in Mannheim and Heidelberg threatened to turn the native industry into a mere distributor of imported flour.<sup>80</sup> Family based breweries found themselves in the same dilemma. Many of those forced out of the producing sector fled to shopkeeping and innkeeping, but it was only in the cities that sufficient custom was growing, and in smaller towns these occupations were chronically overcrowded. By the 1880s there were over 20,000 tradesmen's businesses in the state, and the situation was deteriorating.<sup>81</sup> In the Catholic areas south of the Danube, artisans were encouraged by the presence of a growing number of holiday-makers from the towns to sink their reserves in a shop or inn; but the rate of bankruptcy was high in these trades, in the 1880s six times as great among innkeepers and publicans as in the building industry, for example.<sup>82</sup>

If artisans and shopkeepers often proved to be their own worst enemies, they naturally found others to blame for their problems: large firms, with their control over raw materials and economies of scale; the department stores, which enticed labour and customers out of the small towns and encroached on local markets; and the men who framed the liberal commercial code, which encouraged numerous practices harmful to the *Mittelstand*, from price-cutting wars and the spread of automatic vending machines, to the rising sales of bottled beer so anathematized by publicans. A changing *Volkspartei* was as unsympathetic to these complaints as to those of the peasantry. Thirty years before,

<sup>77</sup> For example, Xaver Rathgeb, landholder and mayor in Ellwangen; Johannes Schick, mayor of Laupheim; Theophil Egger, secretary of the Ravensburg Agricultural League; Franz-Xaver Krug, mayor of Biberach and chairman of the local agricultural loan bank.

<sup>78</sup> Bartens, *Die wirtschaftliche Entwicklung des Königreichs Württemberg*, p. 110.

<sup>79</sup> In 1882, there were two large shoe factories in Württemberg; in 1895 twenty. By the time of the war, Jacob Sigle's Salamander factory in the Kornwestheim suburb of Stuttgart employed 3,400 workers.

<sup>80</sup> See the petition of small millers, 34 *LT*, *Beilage Band III*, *Beilage 167*, 483.

<sup>81</sup> *WJbb*, 1 (1893), 143; and cf. the speeches of the deputies Schmidt (Maulbronn) in 34 *LT*, *PB IV*, pp. 3529–30, 113 *Sitz*, 10 May 1900, and Schumacher (Spaichingen) in 35 *LT*, *PB IV*, p. 2683, 123 *Sitz*, 8 Aug. 1902, on the chronic overcrowding in this sector.

<sup>82</sup> *WJbb*, 1 (1893), 142–2.

Württemberg's liberals had been men of the *Mittelstand*, small-town booksellers and pharmacists<sup>83</sup>; but the *Volkspartei* candidates for the 1895 election included a bevy of 'Manchester men' representing manufacturing and commercial interests: the banker Schaidt, the merchants Lang, Betz, Schumacher and Schweickhardt, the factory owners Bürk, Käss, Hähle, Beuerlen, Henning and Kraut, the large-scale miller Schmid, and the brewery owner Tag. The party's leaders had also changed. Most were now lawyers with strong business ties. Friedrich Payer sat with Hans Hähle on several boards, and the two men between them held eight different directorships.<sup>84</sup> The Haussmann brothers, Conrad and Friedrich, with their respective brothers-in-law, made up a closely-knit group with multiple commercial interests in Stuttgart, Esslingen, Geislingen and Reutlingen.<sup>85</sup> The advent of Payer and the Haussmanns to the leadership of the *Volkspartei* in the late 1880s pointed up the party's growing inability to speak for *Mittelstand* discontent, and from 1895 there was a steady drift of these groups towards the Centre and *Bauernbund*, and a whittling away of Progressive seats in small-town constituencies.

The changing nature of liberalism also stirred the Catholic political elite out of its complacency. For the forceful young *Volkspartei* leaders were not attached to laissez-faire out of narrow self-interest: the local success of men like Robert Bosch and Gottfried Daimler encouraged them in a buoyant optimism about the public benefits of entrepreneurial initiative, and its power to lift men socially.<sup>86</sup> Just as laissez-faire had proved its superiority over ancient guild restrictions, so it would act as a leaven on the inherited rigidities of *ständisch* society. The political corollary of this faith was a demand that government recognize the social importance of the commercial and professional middle classes. In Berlin each liberal leader hoped that Chancellor Caprivi could be persuaded to play Peel to his Cobden. Württemberg's Progressives had sounder

<sup>83</sup> See the lives of *Volkspartei* politicians, in Schmidt-Buhl, *Schwäbische Volksmänner*.

<sup>84</sup> In *Mein Lebenslauf*, Payer calculated his annual income from such sources by 1917 as more than 40,000 M.

<sup>85</sup> Conrad Haussmann, a true free-trade liberal, was characteristically interested in canal and railway projects, where many of his own advisory positions were. His role as intermediary between government and contractors in the Neckar Canal project can be followed in detail in his papers at the Stuttgart *Hauptstaatsarchiv, Nachlass Haussmann, J47/104*. These *Volkspartei* connections with big business and commerce were a powerful political weapon in the hands of Centre and Conservatives. Cf. the *Bauernbund* pamphlet *An die Landtagswähler der Oberamtsbezirk Münsingen* (n.d., 1906?); and *Deutsches Volksblatt*, 3 Dec. 1906.

<sup>86</sup> Bosch was a close friend and political supporter of Conrad Haussmann. The entrepreneurial myth was especially strong in Württemberg, where so many dramatic personal case-histories seemed to prove the truth of it: Daimler, risen from Cannstatt baker's son; Sigle from shoemaker to head of Salamander; Ernst Junghans from master watchmaker to entrepreneur with world markets; Voith, expanding the family locksmith's shop in Heidenheim to an enterprise capable of supplying the turbine engines installed at Niagara Falls. See W. Zorn, 'Typen und Entwicklungskräfte deutschen Unternehmertums', in K. E. Born (ed.), *Moderne deutsche Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (Cologne/Berlin, 1966), pp. 36, 429; W. Ehmer, *Südwestdeutschland als Einheit und Wirtschaftsraum* (Stuttgart, 1930), pp. 48-9, 53, 55.

cause to be sanguine: before the 1895 election ministers already had plans drawn up for the modernization of the constitution, tax structure and educational system, and the liberal state bureaucracy seemed amenable to reform.<sup>87</sup>

The threat from the *Volkspartei* brought together the aspirations of the struggling Catholic communities and the apprehensions of their potential leaders. Prominent Catholics viewed with distaste the prospect of future political leadership by such self-consciously Cobdenite liberals: it could only accelerate the division of society into the wealthy, capitalist few, and the rootless, property-less many. Like many Centre leaders in other parts of the *Reich* their object was to retain a society frozen in its comfortable *ständisch* mould, and they hoped to achieve this by building up the *Mittelstand* of moderate property-owners into a conservative bulwark against the excesses of liberal individualism on the one hand, and the growing threat of socialist collectivization on the other.<sup>88</sup> This concern made the future leaders of the Württemberg Centre party as sensitive as their supporters to the details of government policy. Decisions on the distribution of the fiscal burden, or on canal and railway construction, were scrutinized for their effect on the fate of the *Mittelstand*; believing that they were engaged in a struggle to define the character of the state for a generation to come, they were able to turn apparently neutral questions – like a change in postal charges – into fierce ideological battles.

The shared apprehensions of supporters and leaders were most evident in 1895 on the issue of education. The burden of taxation was already a sensitive issue in rural areas, and educational reform would entail either new expenditure for indebted *Gemeinde*, or the removal of control along with the financial burden from the local community. The general education encouraged by government and liberals alike was also widely condemned: subjects like foreign languages were thought to raise children's expectations, and incite them to desert practical pursuits on the farm or in the workshop in favour of a white-collar job in the town. An unwelcome sign of social mobility had already antagonized artisans, whose apprentices were being attracted to skilled and well-paid factory jobs after enrolling in government-sponsored courses in technical education.<sup>89</sup> The proposal to raise the school-leaving age by a year focused a number of objections: it would stretch local financial resources, and strike hard at the *Mittelstand* and peasantry by diminishing the supply of family labour on which they increasingly depended.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Relations between liberals and government were by no means smooth in these years, but a combination of Payer's conciliatory gifts, and the flexibility of Prime Minister von Mittnacht and ministers like von Pischek, enabled a degree of co-operation between politicians and government unique in Wilhelmine Germany. Cf. Simon, *Die württembergischen Demokraten*, p. 49 ff.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Centre programme, J. Eckard (ed.), *Politische Zeitfragen in Württemberg*, iv (Stuttgart, 1900), 1–6.

<sup>89</sup> Complaints of this kind filled the local Centre press. One of the objects of the 1897 guild legislation in the *Reich* was to return more control over apprentices to the master.

<sup>90</sup> An inquiry of 1904 showed that out of 300,000 children of school age, 70,000 worked in

For the Catholic elite, education had always been regarded as a major battlefield against the Enlightenment; industrial development and the rise of modern class society sharpened its significance. The political education of the working class by the SPD was an alarming state of affairs. Even more serious was the willingness of the state to assume control over education in urban areas, where pressure of numbers had exposed the inadequacy of clerical resources. More than just clerical control was at stake here. The spread of public educational provision weakened the rights of the *Familienvater* over his children, and gave tacit official approval to full-blooded industrialization, under which husband and wife entrusted their offspring to the state and went off to the factory. The proliferation of state schools and training colleges for teachers, together with rising teachers' salaries, brought a further problem: it promoted conflict between Catholic teachers, who now tended to see themselves more as members of a professional corps, and a clerical control over education which seemed to block their avenues to promotion.<sup>91</sup> To Catholic leaders this was a graphic illustration of that 'war of all against all' which liberalism provoked, and which a major instalment of reform would exacerbate.

Liberals, then, were encouraging a social and intellectual ferment from which only the SPD could ultimately benefit. This was the argument which convinced future Centre party leaders. The lapse of Bismarck's anti-socialist law at the end of 1890, and the continued absence of the teaching orders in Württemberg could only harden this feeling, and the example of Probst's conduct in these years is an illuminating one. In January 1889 Gröber was still recording doubts in his diary as to whether Probst, as Württemberg's leading Catholic politician, would ever be willing to lead a Centre party in the state.<sup>92</sup> His *volte-face* dated from the following year, when the SPD was freed from Bismarck's laws, and the party at its Halle conference singled out the Centre as its particular enemy. Less than a month later Probst was in the chair at a meeting in Ulm, helping to set up a committee to put pressure on the government over the return of the banned orders and safeguards for confessional schools.<sup>93</sup> The meetings with ministers and the mass petition organized by Probst and the Ulm committee put forward one central proposition: in their schools policy, the liberals were 'going hand in hand with the Social Democrats and Anarchists'.<sup>94</sup> It was this which drove

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some form of paid agricultural employment, nearly half as domestic servants. When this is added to the number working unpaid, the universal pattern in Oberschwaben, it can be seen how powerful an interest the larger peasant proprietor had in restricting educational expansion.

<sup>91</sup> A meeting of the Catholic Teachers Association at Ravensburg, in 1901, was to pass a set of 'Theses' deploring the frustrations which attended the efforts of its members to rise in the profession. *Politische Zeitfragen*, 9, p. 144. Eight years later a *Jagstkreis* local meeting of the same body was so incensed by the 'clerical block' that it voted full support to the *Volkspartei* educational spokesman, Löchner – who was a freemason. *Deutsches Volksblatt*, 9 Jan. 1909.

<sup>92</sup> Cardauns, *Adolph Gröber*, p. 65.

<sup>93</sup> Bachem, *Vorgeschichte, Geschichte und Politik*, VIII, 67.

<sup>94</sup> Probst speech at Ochsenhausen, reported in *Deutsches Volksblatt*, 12 Jan. 1895.

Probst to leave the left group in the *Landtag* in 1893, after a life-long political association.<sup>95</sup>

## V

How far was the Centre party which Gröber, Probst and others now began to build, acting on this issue simply as the political arm of the Church? Certainly in Württemberg, as in the rest of the *Reich*, the Church as an institution was not so compromised as, for example, it was in France by past association with the tithe, or present identification with aristocracy and privilege. It could plausibly claim that the liberals were the main threat to peasant lands and livelihoods. But more important than this, the Church in France gained a political foothold among the peasantry and artisans through the organizations of parish priests at the local level; whereas *Ralliement*, backed by the hierarchy as a national political movement, was a failure. In Germany, the politicians of the Centre party never allowed the hierarchy either to obstruct or to lead their movement. Forging a political weapon which relied heavily from the outset on the local clergy, they proved infinitely more successful than de Mun or Lamy.

In Probst's case, the roots of his independence from the hierarchy were as venerable as his liberalism: he was, and remained, a disciple of Montalembert. Gröber represented the new school of Centre politicians which emerged in the 1890s. He, like his mentor Windthorst, saw both the dangers and weaknesses of a political party run by Rome or the German bishops. From the 1880s, when his political activity in Rottweil brought a clash with the local seminary head, he refused to be deflected by the clerical displeasure he provoked.<sup>96</sup> His relations with successive incumbents at Rottenburg were especially cool. They preferred the discreet lobbying of ministers on specific concessions to the Church, not the instigation of a mass party which cut across the lines of their own authority.<sup>97</sup> But Gröber, unwilling to see political Catholicism in Germany become the preserve of a rump of notables and bishops, followed the course laid down by Windthorst, and followed by his own contemporaries Lieber, Spahn and Trimborn. Through the ballot box and by means of an active social policy he intended to consolidate a party aimed ideologically at liberals and socialists, conservative in its aims but entirely modern in its methods.

This was the significance of the *Volksverein für das katholische Deutschland*, founded in Württemberg four years before the party itself, and by 1895 already

<sup>95</sup> Cardauns, *Adolph Gröber*, p. 67; Bachem, *Vorgesichte, Geschichte und Politik*, VIII, 75. The deputies Schick (Laupheim), Bueble (Waldsee), Kiene (Ehingen) and Haug (Ulm) helped to complete the core of the future Centre party – although Haug subsequently sat instead with the *Bauernbund*.

<sup>96</sup> Cardauns, *Adolph Gröber*, p. 28.

<sup>97</sup> Bishop Hefele, for example, wrote to Probst on 30 Oct. 1877, expressing his unwillingness to see a Centre group in the Lower House. Scheuerle, *Der politische Katholizismus in Württemberg*, Appendix III, p. 261; and cf. Miller, *Eugen Bolz*, p. 36. In the 1880s Hefele and his assistant (later Bishop) Reiser felt the founding of a Centre party would be 'inopportune'. Bachem, *Vorgesichte, Geschichte und Politik*, VIII, 60–1. On Gröber's poor relations with Reiser's successor, Keppler, see Bachem, VIII, 74.

numbering 20,000 members.<sup>98</sup> Windthorst's creation, the *Volksverein*, was intended to counter the outmoded policy and informal organization which the Centre had inherited from the *Kulturkampf* era, and to impose the *Sozialpolitik* objectives of the national party leadership on the regional idiosyncrasies and clerical bias of some south German Catholic movements.<sup>99</sup> The organization was an invaluable auxiliary of the Centre: in states where the peasantry and rural *Mittelstand* were suspicious of privilege and 'outside' authority, it served the same function as the peasant and artisan associations in successfully utilizing the energies of the radical lower clergy, who themselves sprang largely from similar social backgrounds. It was therefore appropriate that the founding meeting of the Centre in Württemberg should have taken place at a *Volksverein* meeting in Ellwangen on Whitsunday 1894, when the 4,000 present passed Gröber's resolution to form a political party to fight the coming *Landtag* elections.<sup>100</sup>

The 1895 elections marked a turning-point in Württemberg politics. The parliament which was dissolved in the previous year was little different in composition from its predecessors in past decades, divided still into an 'anti-governmental' Left and a 'pro-governmental' *Landespartei*. But these groupings reflected the political alignments of 1866–71, or even 1848, not those of 1895. As the election showed, the economic and social forces at work in later nineteenth-century Württemberg were too powerful to be contained within such an archaic party structure. The divisions between classes, between town and country, Agrarians and Industrializers, demanded, and found, direct political expression. The Centre was only one of the parties which first enjoyed an independent political existence in the 1895 *Landtag*: both SPD and *Bauernbund* entered the Lower House for the first time, and in a sense this was true of the *Volkspartei* itself, now freed from uneasy coalition with the other groups inside the Left.

The weakness of the *Volkspartei* was that it still claimed to represent the *kleinbürgerlich* radicalism of 1848, although both this and its own policies had entirely changed by the 1890s. Increasingly its economic policies could only be agreeable to those – like Daimler, Bosch, Junghans, Sigle – who had succeeded in raising themselves out of the *Mittelstand*: those who had dropped into the dependent working class looked towards the SPD, while those who struggled to maintain their independent existence on the farm or in the workshop were more likely to turn to the Centre and *Bauernbund*. The 1895 election was therefore the beginning of a succession struggle over the liberal *Volkspartei*; and in the campaign economic and social issues were placed in the forefront by the supporters and leaders of the other three parties.

<sup>98</sup> Cardauns, *Adolph Gröber*, pp. 104–5.

<sup>99</sup> M. Spahn, *Das deutsche Zentrum* (Mainz/Munich, 1907), pp. 81–2; T. Nipperdey, *Die Organisation der deutschen Parteien vor 1918* (Düsseldorf, 1961), pp. 281–2.

<sup>100</sup> Bachem, *Vorgeschichte, Geschichte und Politik*, VIII, 78–9.

The Centre campaign retained the emphasis given to it by the first resolution passed at the Ellwangen meeting, attacking the laissez-faire views of the liberals and demanding legislation in defence of the peasantry and *Mittelstand*. This was partly a useful lightning-rod against *Volkspartei* attacks on the 'clerical' Centre; but it also reflected a real demand from below, and one which the liberals clearly found embarrassing.<sup>101</sup> Certainly in small-town meetings, pressing material problems often relegated the lofty concerns of the Centre leadership to an entirely subsidiary role. At a meeting in the Rottweil constituency, the schoolteacher Dietz 'spoke principally about agriculture and economic questions in the light of the Centre programme, and at the close touched briefly on the schools and orders question'.<sup>102</sup> This ordering of priorities could be read in countless reports of local papers like the *Ipf-Zeitung* or *Waldse'er Wochenblatt*. 'Defence of the Church' slogans played a surprisingly muted part in the campaign, given the genuine grievances of the Catholics as Catholics, the strongly anti-Catholic tenor of the opposition campaign and the importance of the local clergy in the electoral machine.

## VI

In 1895 the Centre returned with 18 seats,<sup>103</sup> the *Bauernbund* with 5 and SPD with 2; the *Volkspartei* still returned 31 deputies, the last real success it was able to enjoy appealing to the electorate as the historic party of Swabian lower middle-class radicalism. But by 1912 these strengths had been entirely altered: in an enlarged Lower House, Centre and Conservatives, as a Right block, held 46 seats, the *Volkspartei* only 23 and the SPD 17. This final destruction of the liberal position, from the 1890s, was the decisive end of 'old politics' in the state, under which the *Volkspartei* was the natural outlet for *kleinbürgerlich* dissatisfaction with the established order. It was the culmination of more than forty years of social differentiation among the electorate. The liberals were now the party of the entrepreneurs and bankers, of the growing professional groups like teachers and of the 'new *Mittelstand*' of white-collar workers.<sup>104</sup> Its

<sup>101</sup> At an electoral meeting in the Oehringen constituency, for example, Friedrich Haussmann told his audience that he was in favour of retaining duties on agricultural products at the Caprivi level. This was in flat contradiction to official party policy; Oehringen was nevertheless lost to the *Bauernbund*. On this, and the result at Crailsheim, where the Agrarians polled over 40 per cent of the vote at the first attempt, see Simon, *Die württembergischen Demokraten*, p. 42. The two seats were identical in social structure and type of agriculture practised to Centre seats in the same area, like Neresheim and Ellwangen.

<sup>102</sup> *Deutsches Volksblatt*, 17 Jan. 1895.

<sup>103</sup> A note on the margin of Centre party victories may be useful here. The electoral system allowed for two ballots, with a run-off between the top two candidates if no one candidate obtained an overall majority on the first ballot. Forty-four of the 70 elected seats to the Lower House were decided on the first ballot; 16 out of 18 Centre seats were won without a run-off. In the Oberschwaben seats the margin of first ballot wins was usually overwhelming: in Ehingen, the Centre deputy leader, Hans Kiene, polled 3,441 votes out of 3,511 cast. These results were achieved on an average turn-out throughout the state of 75 per cent, compared with only 44 per cent in 1889, when genuine party competition was much less.

<sup>104</sup> Simon, *Die württembergischen Demokraten*, pp. 28-9.

residual strength in rural areas rested partly on the comparative prosperity of groups like market gardeners, but also on judicious use of the anti-clerical card and a considerable amount of trimming on the tariff issue.<sup>105</sup> In working-class seats, the SPD had swept aside the liberals, while in the outlying rural constituencies, Centre and *Bauernbund* were the legatees of former *Volkspartei* strength among the peasantry and *Mittelstand*.

Württemberg illustrates the role of the Centre as a political representative of these classes, appealing to a ghetto mentality which was as much social as religious in origin. While a liberal like Conrad Haussmann entertained a certain disdain for what he called the 'dark urges' of the people, Centre politicians were adept at seizing on the most parochial complaint about bureaucratic *hauteur*, or the failure of a railway branch line project, and amplifying it as a political issue. This gave them a powerful stick with which to beat the liberals; and for all the demagoguery which this mode of politics entailed, Centre leaders were right to see such concerns as symptomatic of a widespread sense of neglect among demoralized social groups. The importance of the Centre at local level lay in its ability, through party committees, reading rooms, the *Volksverein*, peasant associations, artisan and shopkeeper co-operatives, to return to these classes a sense of self-esteem, providing them with a closed world very similar in its comprehensiveness and tone to the sealed-off proletarian world of the SPD.

But the political organizations of Centre and SPD, at local and national level, ran on parallel rather than convergent lines. The divisions between the two parties corresponded to those between the mutually exclusive social classes from which they drew their support, and whose interests they upheld. For although the Centre was by reputation a party embracing all classes, it was disproportionately strong in the countryside and small towns, and the Catholic working class received from it only a fraction of the attention lavished on the peasantry and *Mittelstand*.<sup>106</sup> Only two of the forty-five deputies who sat for the Centre in the Württemberg Lower House between 1895 and the war represented this interest, and even in the industrial Rhineland and Westphalia the 'left wing' of the party showed more enthusiasm for organizing artisans against proletarianization than for organizing the workers themselves.<sup>107</sup> At Berlin, and in state

<sup>105</sup> In a 1900 Lower House division forced by the Centre on a motion to raise tariffs, six *Volkspartei* deputies voted against their own party, Conrad Haussmann made an ambiguous defence of free trade, and only Carl Betz maintained the old liberal hostility to tariffs of any kind. In Geislingen and Göppingen, *Volkspartei* local councillors – one a businessman dealing in agricultural implements – voted approval of even higher tariffs.

<sup>106</sup> In Bavaria, where three-quarters of the *total* population was Catholic, Hertling could still describe the Bavarian Centre as the party of 'grain tariffs and compulsory guilds': Hertling, *Erinnerungen*, II, 54.

<sup>107</sup> The social ideas of Franz Hitze, of the 'realist' left wing of the party, were straightforwardly corporatist: he foresaw a society organized into seven 'estates' (*Stände*), with production rigidly controlled. There would be no rootless proletariat, and every member of society would be 'conservative and happy again' within his own self-governing *Stand*. This, no less than the extreme right-wing Oberdörfner Programme of the 1890s, had its centre of gravity among the

parliaments where it enjoyed a pivotal position, the Centre consistently backed legislation designed to buttress the small producer against consumer pressure; and in its support for 'dear bread' and its hostility to the consumer co-operative movement the Centre ran directly counter to SPD policy.

It was this which primarily prevented serious co-operation between the two great mass parties of Wilhelmine Germany, and drew the Centre towards alliance with the Conservatives. It was these two parties which joined forces to support the agricultural tariff, outlaw cheap food surrogates, hamper the co-operative movement and help the artisan with a re-vamped guild system. Centre and Conservative leaders shared a belief that the *Mittelstand* and peasantry could be forged into a political weapon against liberals and socialists. By nurturing them as a 'general class' against the overmighty power of international capital on the one hand, and the threatening growth of international labour on the other, they could achieve in concrete form what Catholic ideologue Heinrich Pesch called a Solidarism of the middle,<sup>108</sup> and the nationalist parties on the right termed *Schutz der nationalen Arbeit*.

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peasantry and *Mittelstand*, not in the working class. Cf. P. Jostock, 'Der soziale Gedanke im deutschen Katholizismus', K. Hebing and M. Horst (eds.), *Volk im Glauben* (Berlin, 1933), pp. 143-4.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. p. 147.