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An "Era of Reconciliation" in German-Polish Relations (1890–1894)

With Bismarck's dismissal as head of the German and Prussian governments in 1890, a number of policies bearing his personal stamp were called into question, including his Polish policy. The chancellorship of General von Caprivi (1890–94) saw a perceptible twist in the long history of relations between the Prussian/German governments and their Polish subjects, causing both contemporaries and historians to speak of an "era of reconciliation" (*Versöhnungsära*). During this period, Polish leaders supported government legislation and offered to work to strengthen the German Empire, while the Caprivi administration indicated its desire for better relations with the Poles and made a number of concessions to them. The Era of Reconciliation did not last long, however, not even as long as Caprivi's own tenure; its net results were meager, and after 1894 the idea of German-Polish cooperation faded away.

Although this period has attracted the interest of some scholars of German-Polish relations,¹ it has not received (perhaps because of its aberrant character) its fair share of attention in general works on German-Polish relations. Quite fundamental questions—for example, what prompted the milder Polish policies and why did they turn out so disappointingly—remain without adequate answers.² In considering these questions, it is important to keep in mind that the Era of Reconciliation was a two-way street: a merger of government policy under Caprivi with a parallel trend toward "loyalism" within the Polish leadership. (For reasons little related to changes at the top of the German government, some influential Poles began to reconsider their traditional policy of categorical opposition to the government.³) In this study, however, emphasis will be pri-

1. Most recently, Harry Rosenthal, "The Problem of Caprivi's Polish Policy," *European Studies Review*, 2 (1972): 255–64.

2. For the context of this problem, see the numerous general studies of German-Polish relations. Recent works include Hans-Ulrich Wehler, "Die Polenpolitik im deutschen Kaiserreich, 1871–1918," in *Politische Ideologien und nationalstaatliche Ordnung*, Festschrift für Theodor Schieder, ed. K. Kluxen and W. Mommsen (Munich, 1968), pp. 297–316; Horst Jablonowski, *Die preussische Polenpolitik von 1815 bis 1914* (Würzburg, 1964); Martin Broszat, *200 Jahre deutscher Polenpolitik* (Munich, 1963); and Werner Frauendienst, "Preussischer Staatsbewusstsein und polnischer Nationalismus: Preussisch-deutsche Polenpolitik," in *Das östliche Deutschland*, ed. Göttinger Arbeitskreis (Würzburg, 1959), pp. 305–62. Of the older works, those which retain the most value are Józef Buzek, *Historia polityki narodowościowej rządu pruskiego wobec Polaków* (Lwów, 1909); Manfred Laubert, *Die preussische Polenpolitik 1772–1914*, 3rd ed. (Cracow, 1944); and Józef Feldman, *Bismarck a Polska*, 2nd ed. (Cracow, 1947).

3. For the development of Polish loyalism, see Lech Trzeciakowski, *Polityka polskich klas posiadających w Wielkopolsce w erze Caprivięgo* (Posen, 1960); Alfred Kucner, "Polityka 'Kola Polskiego' w Berlinie w erze Kanclerza Caprivięgo," *Nauka i Sztuka*, 3 (1947): 42–76; Wilhelm Feldman, *Geschichte der politischen Ideen in Polen seit dessen*

marily on the motives which, in light of available evidence, might explain the participation of the Caprivi government in this era of relative good feeling. Three general areas seem worth investigating: (1) the personal attitudes of Caprivi and other personalities of the "New Course," particularly in contrast to Bismarck; (2) Germany's deteriorating diplomatic situation—culminating in the Franco-Russian Dual Alliance of 1894 but apparent in embryo even before Bismarck's dismissal; and (3) the changed party relationships in the German Reichstag caused by the defeat of the *Kartell* in the 1890 elections.

Did Caprivi's personal view of the Polish question differ from Bismarck's to the point that changes in government policy would have occurred even without simultaneous changes in the diplomatic or parliamentary situation? Bismarck's hard-line approach to the Poles, however he sought to rationalize it, was attributable in large measure to the fact that he had always been suspicious of and personally hostile toward them.⁴ Caprivi's views on the Polish question are, unfortunately, more difficult to determine. He rarely expressed himself on this issue, wrote no memoirs, and destroyed most of his personal papers upon leaving office in 1894.⁵ The record of his views stems primarily from parliamentary speeches, where Poles were present, or cabinet meetings, where the presence of German nationalists might have caused him to be less than candid. He, however, does not seem to differ much from Bismarck in his theoretical approach to the problem.⁶ Neither man admitted to being disturbed by the mere presence of Poles or other ethnic minorities in the German Empire, neither expressed any desire to assimilate the Poles as long as they were politically loyal, and both men belonged to the general category of Prussian-state nationalist as opposed to German-ethnic nationalist.

If one concentrates on practice rather than theory, however, the evidence reveals a difference between Bismarck and Caprivi on the Polish question. In practice, Caprivi adhered more closely to the state nationalist ideal than Bismarck, at least as far as Prussia's Poles were concerned. Caprivi's basic position was not one that Bismarck could honestly have shared: "We do not hate the Poles; we regard them as fellow citizens—difficult fellow citizens at times, sometimes also fellow citizens who have gone astray from our point of view, but always our fellow citizens with whom it will always be a pleasure to work together for the

Teilungen, 1795–1914 (Osnabrück, 1964 [a reprint of the 1917 Munich edition]); Roman Komierowski, *Koło Polskie w Berlinie, 1875–1900* (Poznań, 1905); Richard Blanke, "The Development of Loyalism in Prussian Poland," *Slavonic and East European Review*, 52 (1974): 548–65.

4. See Hans Wendt, *Bismarck und die polnische Frage* (Halle, 1922); and Friedrich Koch, *Bismarck über die Polen* (Berlin, 1913).

5. H. O. Meisner, "Reichskanzler Caprivi," *Zeitschrift für die Gesamte Staatswissenschaft*, 111 (1953): 739. The "Caprivi Papers" in the Geheimes Preussisches Staatsarchiv, Berlin-Dahlem (hereafter GPSA Berlin) consist of an envelope containing a few personal letters and citations; some letters to a friendly professor constitute virtually the sum of published post-1894 statements by Caprivi (see Max Schneidewin, "Briefe des toten Reichskanzlers von Caprivi," *Deutsche Revue*, 47 (1922): 136–47, 247–58).

6. See Hans Rothfels, *Bismarck, der Osten, und das Reich* (Stuttgart, 1960), especially pp. 68–96, and Theodor Schieder, *Das Deutsche Reich von 1871 als Nationalstaat* (Cologne, 1961), pp. 22 ff.

good of the state.”⁷ When a Polish representative described Bismarck’s approach as “filled with hate,” Caprivi declined to defend his predecessor, implicitly acknowledging his differences with Bismarck on this issue.⁸ From an examination of the Polish press during this period, it is clear that the Poles themselves recognized the difference. The leading Polish newspaper in Germany, *Dziennik Poznański*, for example, carried a statement about Caprivi in October 1894 (after the Era of Reconciliation had broken down): “For local conditions the administration of Count Caprivi has left behind a good memory.”⁹ Few Prussian Poles could have felt similarly about any of the other chancellors of the Second German Empire.

Signs of Caprivi’s different approach to the Polish question appeared during the first year of his tenure, a transitional period that saw the remaining Bismarckian ministers gradually eased out of office. Culture Minister Gustav von Gossler, one of the holdovers, was most influential in Polish matters. He had been second only to Bismarck as a force behind the anti-Polish measures of 1886–87, and after March 1890 he sought to continue in the same direction by devising ever more ambitious projects for increasing the pressure on Prussian Poles. He had evidence, for example, that the proportion of Polish doctors in the province of Poznan had increased from 23 percent to 38 percent during the previous twenty years and he surmised that the other professions showed a similar trend. Because he perceived the professional classes as the principal supporters of modern Polish nationalism, he felt that the state should try to impede their growth by subsidizing a greater number of German doctors and other professional men in Polish districts.¹⁰ But Caprivi was uninterested in such efforts; he ignored them for a time, then responded, with evident annoyance, that there was no state money available for “the financial support of German doctors,” nor would there be any in the future.¹¹ Even more revealing of Caprivi’s personal position (and of the essential difference between himself and Bismarck) is the remark he made in the margin of Gossler’s memorandum: “Despite all the large and small countermeasures . . . the question remains: should we continue to look for petty, stop-gap measures, or is it not [better] to examine whether we cannot make *Prussian* fellow citizens out of the Poles.”¹² Gossler continued to push his ideas, circulating memoranda and statistics concerning the Polish “danger” to other ministers and proposing that the government pressure the Vatican to stop Upper Silesian priests from using Polish in their services.¹³ But by this time he was the last of the pre-Wilhelm II ministers still in office and increasingly isolated. Although these differences over the Poles were not the immediate cause of Gossler’s resignation in March 1891, they played a contributing role.¹⁴

7. Prussia, Landtag, *Haus der Abgeordneten: Stenographische Berichte*, Legislative Period 17:3, 80th Session (May 2, 1891), p. 2106.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 2105 f., speech by Jażdżewski.

9. *Dziennik Poznański*, October 28, 1894.

10. Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Bonn (hereafter PA Bonn), Preussen 4 (Acta betr. polnische Agitationen), Gossler to Caprivi, October 16, 1890.

11. *Ibid.*, Prussian Cabinet meeting minutes, October 24, 1890.

12. *Ibid.*, Caprivi marginalia on Gossler memorandum of October 16, 1890.

13. *Ibid.*, Gossler to Caprivi, February 18, 1891.

14. See John Röhl, *Germany without Bismarck* (Cambridge, 1967), p. 77.

In examining the role of personal attitudes in bringing about a milder Polish policy after 1890, it is necessary to look at others besides Caprivi, for he clearly was not the all-powerful figure and policymaker that Bismarck had been. Gossler's successor as culture minister, Robert von Zedlitz-Trützschler, deserves particular attention (he is considered by Professor Rosenthal to be the predominant force behind the government's willingness to cooperate with Polish loyalists¹⁵). Zedlitz had been governor of Poznań for five years, and at the same time had served as chairman of Bismarck's Settlement Commission (*Ansiedlungskommission*), the agency created in 1886 to buy up the estates of Polish nobles. But Zedlitz was also a conservative, a supporter of a strong religious influence in public life, and close to agrarian interests, qualities he shared with those Polish leaders who already were turning to a policy of loyalism, offering to support and cooperate with the government in support of common conservative values.¹⁶ When Caprivi took over, Zedlitz urged the government to take up this Polish offer, arguing that "through the collaboration of respected Poles in the state, provincial, and county administrations, the existing national differences will gradually disappear and in this way a thriving cooperation of both nationalities will be attained."¹⁷ In 1891, Zedlitz, in his new role as culture minister, permitted Poles to set up afterschool classes to teach Polish on a private basis but making use of public school teachers and classrooms, reversing a Gossler order of 1888.¹⁸ He was also instrumental in the appointment of Florian Stablewski, a prominent Polish priest and politician, as archbishop of Gniezno-Poznań/Gnesen-Posen. Stablewski's appointment, replacing a German, was in Polish eyes the most popular concession of the Caprivi era.¹⁹

Zedlitz's attitude was particularly important because his ministry controlled the sensitive school and church departments of the government. He was, therefore, in a position second only to the chancellor or emperor to affect the climate of government-Polish relations. In addition, Zedlitz not only favored a conciliatory policy toward the Poles but also was more willing than Caprivi to assert his views in the face of opposition. Bismarckians and Polonophobes were still to be found in high positions in the Prussian state structure (for example, Christoph von Tiedemann, architect of the Settlement Law and other 1886–87 anti-Polish measures, remained head of the Poznańian regency of Bromberg/Bydgoszcz, and Gossler himself fell in 1891 only as far as the governorship of West Prussia),

15. Rosenthal, "Caprivi's Polish Policy," p. 258.

16. Before 1890, Bismarck refused to consider such offers; when Polish loyalist leaders took the accession of Emperor Friedrich in 1888 as the signal to launch their first major loyalist initiative, he directed Interior Minister Puttkamer to draw up a reply "so sharp the Poles will never forget it" (PA Bonn, Preussen 4, Prussian Cabinet meeting minutes, May 16, 1888).

17. Bundesarchiv Koblenz (hereafter BA Koblenz), P135 (Acta Generalia des Justiz-Ministeriums), 5964-5 (Zeitungsberichte der Regierungen aus der Provinz Posen), report over Zedlitz's signature, June 19, 1890. (The Justice Ministry documents cited herein as BA Koblenz, P135 recently have been moved to GPSA Berlin.)

18. GPSA Berlin, Rep. 830:II (Regierung zu Bromberg: Abteilung für Kirchen und Schulwesen), 2526 (Forderung des deutschen Schulwesens), Zedlitz decree of April 11, 1891.

19. See Harry Kenneth Rosenthal, "The Election of Archbishop Stablewski," *Slavic Review*, 28, no. 2 (1969): 265–75.

and these men sought to resist any softening of Bismarck's Polish policies. It is not true, however, that they were able to do so with complete impunity. When Tiedemann sought to "interpret" the private instruction order to imply little change at all, Zedlitz quickly reprimanded him with the words: "I was not happy to see that [you] have considered yourself authorized to execute my decree of April 11 in a manner contrary to its contents."²⁰ On another occasion, Zedlitz intervened with local officials to let even German children attend the Polish classes, if their parents so wished.²¹ But in spite of his forthright attitude, one cannot attribute more than a partial role to Zedlitz in the conciliatory policy of the Caprivi era. Many of the "concessions" antedated his appointment as culture minister (for example, the readmission of Polish aliens as seasonal laborers into Prussia and the *Rentengut* legislation which made homesteads available to Poles and others in competition with the Germanizing efforts of the Settlement Commission); others came about without Zedlitz's participation (for example, the granting of financial/administrative autonomy to the Polish cooperative movement); and still others appeared (as will be seen) only after Zedlitz's resignation in 1892.

It is clear, nevertheless, that Caprivi and Zedlitz had more conciliatory views toward the Poles than those which prevailed under Bismarck. On the other hand, even though their views were important in creating a better atmosphere in government-Polish relations and in permitting establishment of closer personal contacts with Polish leaders, studies of power relationships inside the government during the Caprivi era indicate that Caprivi and Zedlitz lacked Bismarck's ability to translate personal views into an unorthodox new policy. It is difficult, therefore, to interpret the Era of Reconciliation exclusively or even predominantly as an outgrowth of such personal factors. There were, of course, other influential figures among Bismarck's successors (Holstein, Miquel, and Philii Eulenburg) who did not share this conciliatory attitude toward the Poles and who would go along with a relaxation of Polish policies only if it seemed to be required by some overriding state interest.

A second explanation for the Era of Reconciliation—that the relaxation of Polish policies stemmed from strategic considerations necessitated by worsening relations with Russia—is well documented and seems to grow logically out of Germany's situation in the early 1890s. Although the break with Russia came after Caprivi became chancellor, there had been concern for some time that Russia could not be kept in the fold indefinitely, that she would eventually gravitate toward France. While Bismarck remained confident of his ability to avoid this development, some of the men who were to take over in 1890 (Holstein, Waldersee, Eulenburg, and Caprivi himself) began in the 1880s to consider a situation in which Germany would be faced with a two-front war with Russia and France.²² General von Waldersee testified most clearly to the connection between this fear of war with Russia and the Polish question when he wrote in 1887: "A necessary result of our war [with Russia] will be the attempt to restore

20. GPSA Berlin, Rep. 830:II, 2526, Zedlitz to Tiedemann, May 5, 1891.

21. *Ibid.*, Zedlitz order of August 2, 1891.

22. Holstein's papers contain the most complete record of these considerations; see *The Holstein Papers*, ed. N. Rich and M. Fisher, 4 vols. (Cambridge, 1957).

Poland; I truly do not overlook the disadvantages . . . but I am convinced that it is the only way to be rid of the Russians for good and, with a little skill, it is the most effective means of creating problems that Russian war strategy is not equal to."²³ Waldersee felt that such a war was imminent and permitted himself some speculation on the nature of the new Polish state, including its customs relations with Germany and the port facilities it would have.²⁴ By promising the Poles their own state, Germany might get them to fight on her side against Russia. Under existing circumstances, however—Bismarck had just launched his new anti-Polish offensive in 1886—Waldersee doubted that Germany could “raise an armed force of 100 Poles,” even against the traditional Russian enemy.²⁵ Prussian Polish policy thus became a factor in strategic considerations: if victory over Russia in a two-front war depended upon Polish support, and if existing Prussian Polish policies discouraged such support, one would have to make the necessary gestures and concessions to Prussia’s Poles. In effect, the traditional Bismarckian assumption of a connection between German relations with Russia and her treatment of Prussia’s Polish population was valid. But while Bismarck always justified his hard line toward the Poles as necessary proof to Russia of his friendly intentions, his successors were faced with Russian hostility as an established fact, and a more conciliatory approach to the Poles was the logical consequence.

The connection between internal Polish policy and strategic considerations may also explain the reluctance of army representatives to accept Bismarck’s anti-Polish measures in the 1880s. Minutes of Prussian cabinet meetings from this period give the impression that War Minister Bronsart was less than enthusiastic about a stepped-up nationality struggle, at least if it were going to involve the army. He did agree reluctantly to Bismarck’s demand, in 1886, for the removal of all Polish soldiers from Polish-speaking regions, but only to ward off a proposal that civilian officials keep watch over the proportion of non-Germans in individual army units on a regular basis.²⁶ At this same time, General Richard von Seeckt, commander of the army in Poznan and father of the prominent Weimar Republic figure, reportedly characterized Bismarck’s anti-Polish measures as “harmful to Germany.”²⁷ A Polish parliamentarian recalled later that Seeckt had distanced himself even more clearly from Bismarck’s approach with the words: “I do not think that those who fought with such bravery [in the wars of unification] are traitors, nor are they bad subjects.”²⁸ Because

23. Letter to Yorck, military attaché in St. Petersburg, November 17, 1887, “Briefwechsel zwischen Chef des General-Stabes Waldersee und Militär-Attaché Yorck von Wartenburg, 1885–1894,” ed. H. O. Meisner, *Historisch-politisches Archiv zur Deutschen Geschichte des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, 1 (1930): 152.

24. Letter to Yorck, May 18, 1888, *ibid.*, p. 164.

25. Alfred von Waldersee, *Denkwürdigkeiten*, ed. H. O. Meisner, vol. 1 (Stuttgart, 1925), p. 303.

26. BA Koblenz, P135, 4066-7 (Gesetzgebung und Verwaltung in den Provinzen Posen, Westpreussen, und Oberschlesien), Prussian Cabinet meeting minutes, January 24 and February 21, 1886.

27. Bogdan Hutten-Czapski, *Sechzig Jahre Politik und Gesellschaft* (Berlin, 1936), p. 191.

28. *Abgeordnetenhaus*, Legislative Period 17:4, 23rd Session (March 1, 1892), p. 640, as quoted by Czarliński.

these military leaders were not otherwise Polonophiles, one must assume that they saw a difficult strategic situation developing in which numerically superior Russian forces would be able to concentrate 200 miles from Berlin. They were well aware that further alienation of the Poles who lived along both sides of this exposed eastern frontier would only make the situation worse.

As for Caprivi himself, Admiral von Tirpitz tells us that he was among the most pessimistic when it came to avoiding war with Russia, warning each spring that "next year we shall have a war on two fronts."²⁹ Tirpitz was one of those contemporaries who understood Caprivi's milder Polish policy to have its roots in this anticipation of war with Russia.³⁰ Apparently, leading Polish loyalists, who tailored their overtures to appeal to this fear of Russia and the hope that the Poles might be of some help, also were aware of Caprivi's concern. A major speech by Stablewski at the 1891 Catholic Congress at Thorn/Toruń³¹ and Józef Kościelski's personal letter to Caprivi in which he offered Prussian-Polish services as a "*treue Wacht an der Weichsel*"³² make use of this approach.

There is additional evidence from the Caprivi era itself that strategic considerations were deeply involved in determining Polish policy. Caprivi's concessions to the Prussian Poles gained support from Poles outside Germany, which helped justify a continuation of the Era of Reconciliation in the face of German nationalist skepticism. To test the strength of this support, Bogdan Hutten-Czapski, a Polish loyalist working in the government, was dispatched to Russian Poland by the General Staff. His report confirmed the government's highest hopes. As he relates in his memoirs, "the resignation of Bismarck, the school concessions by Caprivi in Poznań, and finally the appointment of Stablewski as archbishop had brought about a real change in mood." Stablewski's appointment in particular had made "a much stronger impression in Russian Poland than in Poznań itself," causing Russian officials to begin censoring news of Stablewski and of Caprivi's Polish policy in general.³³ Hutten's conclusion was that the active support of Russian Poles on Germany's side in a war with Russia could be attained through a continuation of Caprivi's policies.³⁴

Emperor Wilhelm II, though normally not very interested in Polish affairs,³⁵ was aware of the possible strategic pay-off of Caprivi's Polish policy. As he explained to Philii Eulenburg in 1892: "I have my good reasons for being a Polonophile. . . . The *entire* Polish national feeling is concentrated on me, each meeting begins with a glass being emptied to me. The hope of liberation from the Russian yoke fills them completely and in a war with Russia all of Poland would stand in revolt on my side with the express intention of having themselves

29. Alfred von Tirpitz, *My Memoirs*, vol. 1 (New York, 1919), p. 37; see also Rudolf Stadelmann, "Der Neue Kurs in Deutschland," *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, 4 (1953): 541.

30. Tirpitz, *My Memoirs*, 1:40.

31. Komierowski, *Koło Polskie w Berlinie*, pp. 216 ff., has the full text of this speech.

32. Trzeciakowski, *Polityka polskich klas posiadających*, p. 80.

33. Hutten-Czapski, *Sechzig Jahre*, p. 167.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 172 ff.

35. Emperor Wilhelm's *Ereignisse und Gestalten* (Leipzig, 1922) and *Kaiserreden*, ed. O. Klausmann (Leipzig, 1902) contain almost no references to the Polish question during this period.

annexed by me.” The suggestion that the Poles might be pursuing national goals of their own in such a war failed to impress him: “No, they have given that up. The educated element . . . wants to come under Prussia. . . . [In any case], for the time being I view the matter simply from a military standpoint.”³⁶ Although some of this intelligence undoubtedly came from his ministers, Wilhelm had independent knowledge as well—from an American correspondent, Poultney Bigelow, and from an army officer sent under disguise to confirm the feelings of leading Russian Poles.³⁷ Thus, while other representatives of the New Course were not Polonophiles by nature, they, like Wilhelm, had their “good reasons,” mainly strategic in nature, for going along with the Era of Reconciliation.

If one were not personally inclined toward a more tolerant Polish policy and if one were unimpressed by the argument of strategic necessity, there still was a third reason for favoring a change in Bismarck’s Polish policy in the early 1890s: the role which Polish Reichstag representatives could play in forming a progovernment majority or in helping pass key government bills. Following the 1890 elections, the sixteen Polish votes were just what was lacking for the formation of the much discussed coalition between the Center and the Conservatives with their anti-Semitic appendage, and some scholars have cited this domestic political aspect as the primary motive behind Caprivi’s Polish policy.³⁸ But this interpretation requires a good deal of qualification. Caprivi did not seriously attempt to construct a permanent Center-Conservative (or any other) coalition, preferring to rely instead on ad hoc majorities to get his bills passed.³⁹ Furthermore, Wilhelm II was strongly opposed to such a coalition and in the one case where it seemed to emerge (in the battle for the 1892 Prussian school bill), he intervened to break it up.⁴⁰ An immediate result of this intervention was the resignation of Zedlitz and Caprivi’s resignation as Prussian minister-president, remaining only as German chancellor and Prussian foreign minister. Their places were taken by men who were more nationalistic and less inclined toward reconciliation of the Poles: Botho zu Eulenburg (Phili’s cousin) as minister-president and Robert Bosse as culture minister. Since most of the matters of major concern to the Poles (school and religious affairs, local government, and the Settlement Commission) were under Prussian state rather than German imperial government, these changes marked a serious setback for the Era of Reconciliation midway through Caprivi’s tenure.

Another problem with the third explanation is that Polish leaders had begun to support key government bills (for example, the 1890 army bill and the 1891 navy bill) as part of their loyalist policy even before Caprivi’s government began to make its concessions. Far from maneuvering to get such support, Caprivi seemed genuinely surprised by it and wondered aloud whether Bismarck’s poli-

36. John Röhl, “A Document of 1892 on Germany, Prussia, and Poland,” *Historical Journal*, 7 (1964): 143–49.

37. *Ibid.*; see also Poultney Bigelow, *Prussian Memories* (New York, 1915), pp. 102 ff.

38. See, for example, Hans Pfeiffer, *Der polnische Adel und die preussische Polenpolitik von 1863 bis 1894* (Jena, 1939), p. 64.

39. See J. Alden Nichols, *Germany after Bismarck* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), for the parliamentary history of the Caprivi era.

40. See Kurt Richter, *Der Kampf um den Schulgesetzentwurf des Grafen Zedlitz-Trützschler vom Jahre 1892* (Halle, 1934).

cies had softened up the Poles or whether they "considered the present government so weak that they believe they can offer it something that they did not offer to the previous government."⁴¹ Moreover, if the Poles were supporting the government in return for government concessions, it made little sense for them to provide the government with vital support in the Reichstag, when it was the Prussian Landtag which controlled most areas of importance to them. The government had a dependable majority in the Landtag (thanks to the three-class voting system) based on the *Kartell* parties and this majority showed no inclination to soften state policy toward the Poles. Caprivi, even before March 1892, could not get the Landtag to go along with commitments he had made to the Poles to get their support in the Reichstag.

Thus, parliamentary considerations were probably a secondary factor in determining Polish policy during the first years of the Caprivi era. This changed in 1893, however, when Polish support in the Reichstag became particularly essential. Although the Poles previously had supported government bills and the government had offered some concessions, there had not been a direct quid pro quo connection between them; only in 1893 did Caprivi turn to a policy of making gestures and devising concessions in a direct effort to "buy" Polish votes.

The importance of parliamentary considerations as an immediate determinant of Caprivi's Polish policy was especially manifest during the struggle for the 1893 army bill. The 140 votes of the *Kartell* parties fell considerably short of the needed majority of 199 and they had to count on the Poles (who continued to support government bills in the hope of receiving additional concessions) and others if the army bill was to pass. The government sought to reinforce the positive Polish attitude by "leaking" word that Wilhelm, in the course of a visit to Rome, had met with the exiled former Poznanian archbishop Ledóchowski and had invited him to Berlin.⁴² In spite of Polish support, however, the army bill was defeated (May 6, 1893), leading to the dissolution of the Reichstag and new elections. The 1893 elections saw a partial comeback by the *Kartell* parties and the number of votes committed to the army bill by German parties rose to 182. Now the Poles, who had returned with nineteen seats and who were the only uncommitted party of sufficient size to provide the government with its majority, were in a perfect bargaining position. The problem for both Caprivi and the Polish loyalists was that during the recent Reichstag campaign opposition to loyalism among Polish voters had grown to the point where it was uncertain whether the Poles could be persuaded to support the army bill a second time.⁴³

41. *Abgeordnetenhaus*, Caprivi's speech of May 2, 1891.

42. PA Bonn, Polen I.A.B.g 14 (Stellung des Erzbischofs von Posen und Gnesen als Primas von Polen), Marschall to Caprivi, April 28, 1893. Rumor in the Polish press had it that Wilhelm had actually apologized to Ledóchowski for his treatment and forced abdication at Bismarck's hands (*Kurier Poznański*, April 29, 1893); see also Nichols, *Germany after Bismarck*, p. 251.

43. On the struggle between loyalists and antiloyalists in the Polish provinces, see Trzeciakowski, *Polityka polskich klas posiadających*, pp. 120 ff.; and Harry Kenneth Rosenthal, "Rivalry between 'Notables' and 'Townpeople' in Prussian Poland: The First Round," *Slavonic and East European Review*, 49 (1971): 68-79.

Caprivi now had to devise some additional concessions which would keep the Poles in line. Thus, he readily supported War Minister Kaltenborn's request that the army again have the right to determine for itself the ethnic make-up of units in Polish areas. Kaltenborn wanted to be able to station Polish-speaking recruits in their home provinces in order "to promote esprit de corps and remedy the shortage of Polish-speaking noncommissioned officers."⁴⁴ In response to Caprivi's need for a concession to the Poles (and in spite of the opposition of Minister-President Eulenburg), Wilhelm gave his consent⁴⁵ and even paid a visit to Poznań, campaigning for the new army bill among Poles as well as Germans.⁴⁶ Unfortunately, Caprivi's ability to offer more substantive concessions in the crucial area of school policy was now quite limited because he did not control Prussian internal affairs. He asked Culture Minister Bosse to reinstate Polish as a subject in the elementary school curriculum in Poznań, but the new minister refused, describing such a concession as "a retreat along the entire front" and an insult to the Germans of Poznań.⁴⁷ Thus, Caprivi could only hint to Polish leaders that eventually Polish would indeed return to the schools.⁴⁸ (Caprivi was reported later to have written privately to Polish leaders, admitting past injustices.⁴⁹) Once again, however, the combination of the Polish leadership's decision to stick with loyalism a little longer, in the hope of concessions yet to come, and the government's conciliatory gestures sufficed to get sixteen Polish representatives to show up and vote for the army bill (July 15, 1893), providing it with the necessary votes to pass.

Soon after the army bill passed, the last of Caprivi's series of trade treaties—those with Rumania and Russia—began to run into stiff opposition and Polish support in the Reichstag again was critical. The treaties were designed mainly to open up new markets for German industry (struggling through yet another trough of the "Long Depression") in return for lowered agricultural tariffs against the products of other states.⁵⁰ Opposition to the treaties came from the German Conservative Party and the agrarian interests allied with it. Polish loyalists, who had always assumed that support for the government and cooperation with German conservatives (with whom they shared social attitudes and economic interests) were two aspects of the one policy of loyalism, were presented with yet another problem. The Poles were as agriculturally oriented as any German party and were strongly tempted to join the growing agrarian agitation.

44. BA Koblenz, P135, 4067, Kaltenborn memorandum of March 20, 1893.

45. PA Bonn, Preussen 4, Prussian Cabinet meeting minutes, May 16, 1893. Even the army's own later guidelines allowed only 5 percent of a given unit to be Polish, and these men had to be politically reliable and fluent in German (*ibid.*, Cabinet meeting minutes, February 27, 1894).

46. Trzeciakowski, *Polityka polskich klas posiadających*, p. 69.

47. PA Bonn, Preussen 8:2 (Die Unterrichtssprache in den Schulen der Erzdiözese Posen), Caprivi to Bosse, May 24, 1893; Bosse to Caprivi, May 30, 1893.

48. Trzeciakowski, *Polityka polskich klas posiadających*, p. 71.

49. See Wilhelm von Massow, *Polennot im deutschen Osten*, 2nd ed. (Berlin, 1907), p. 73, who cites a letter made public in 1898 but apparently no longer extant.

50. See Walther Lotz, *Die Handelspolitik des deutschen Reiches unter Graf Caprivi und Fürst Hohenlohe, 1890–1900* (Leipzig, 1901).

In fact, Polish leaders participated in the founding of the *Bund der Landwirte*, only to be repelled by the strident nationalism of the organization.⁵¹

To assure the Poles' continued support, which ran counter to their national sensibilities and now counter to their economic interests as well, Caprivi had to deliver on his promise to return Polish to the elementary school curriculum. He received some support in this endeavor from Zedlitz's successor as governor of Poznań, Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, another advocate of reconciliation,⁵² but more effective was Archbishop Stablewski's threat to have the Church take over the job of teaching Polish if the state would not do it. The archbishop's threat caused Bosse to drop his opposition in November 1893,⁵³ and Caprivi now had to secure only Eulenburg's approval. Caprivi pointed out to Eulenburg that the traditional, largely noble Polish leadership was under intense attack from its constituents, not only because of its loyalist policy but for other reasons as well. This circumstance, of course, made the leadership particularly vulnerable to a government policy aimed at getting Polish support at minimal cost. As Caprivi argued, it was "in the interest of the government to intensify this division [among the Poles]; what we can utilize for our foreign policy and what we can exploit domestically for progovernment purposes is the aristocratic segment of the Poles . . . to retain [this support] is worth a few hours of Polish instruction each week . . . and the granting of such a limited Polish language program will not hinder the progress of the German nationality."⁵⁴ Caprivi's arguments finally persuaded Eulenburg to change his position. The Poles provided the margin of victory for the Rumanian trade treaty, and Polish was scheduled to return to the elementary school curriculum in February 1894.⁵⁵

Although this was the one time during the Caprivi era that a government concession actually met a direct demand of the Polish leadership, it had virtually no impact on the growing antiloyalist sentiment in the Polish provinces. The government made its concession, then turned almost immediately to the task of protecting itself from the expected German-nationalist backlash by trying to keep its decision from becoming "too public."⁵⁶ Bosse, for example, sought to trivialize the return of Polish as a subject of instruction and made clear his determination to grant no further concessions to the Poles.⁵⁷ On the vote for the Russian trade treaty, Caprivi gathered a majority sufficient to win without the

51. *Biblioteka Kórnicka*, Rep. 1454-8 (Protokoły posiedzeń Koła Polskiego w sejmie pruskim), Polish Party Caucus minutes, May 24, 1893; and Sarah Tirrell, *German Agrarian Politics after Bismarck's Fall* (New York, 1951), p. 179. See also Hanne-Lore Land, *Die Konservativen und die preussische Polenpolitik, 1886-1912* (West Berlin, 1963); and Hans-Jürgen Puhle, *Agrarische Interessenpolitik und preussischer Konservatismus im wilhelminischen Reich, 1893-1914* (Hanover, 1966).

52. BA Koblenz, P135, 4067, Wilamowitz memorandum of September 27, 1893.

53. PA Bonn, Preussen 8:2, Bosse to Caprivi, November 14, 1893; officially Bosse relented because he thought the private Polish instruction program was getting out of hand. In fact, this was merely a rationalization, for the Poles would hardly have been so insistent about the return of Polish to the regular curriculum had their private efforts not been having serious problems.

54. *Ibid.*, Caprivi memorandum of November 18, 1893.

55. *Ibid.*, Prussian Cabinet meeting minutes, December 18, 1893.

56. BA Koblenz, P135, 4067, Cabinet meeting minutes, February 27, 1894.

57. *Abgeordnetenhaus*, Legislative Period, 18:1, 25th Session (March 1, 1894), pp. 781 f.

Poles, who decided at the last minute to support it anyway, but only after announcing that they were voting with the government for the last time unless they received a major concession. Thus the return of Polish to the public schools in Poznania turned out to be the last event in the Era of Reconciliation.

In reviewing the Polish policy of the Caprivi era, it is clear that there were good reasons for altering Bismarck's approach and that these reasons still existed after 1894. Indeed, with the signing of the Dual Alliance just as the Era of Reconciliation broke down, the strategic justification seemed more compelling than ever. Why then did Caprivi and his associates not make a greater effort to cultivate Polish loyalism and keep the Era of Reconciliation going? One obvious factor was the Prussian school bill fiasco, which came just a few months after the series of government concessions that had culminated in Stablewski's appointment. Caprivi, according to one close associate, had intended to continue in the same direction, but his loss of control over Prussian domestic affairs and Zedlitz's resignation made it almost impossible to do so.⁵⁸ There was, instead, a lull between Stablewski's appointment and the army bill debates of 1893, during which the Poles lost faith in the idea of cooperation and antiloyalist sentiment undercut the ability of Polish leaders to continue their support of the government except on a rigid *quid pro quo* basis.

Government efforts to solidify the new relationship with the Poles, of course, had been half-hearted at best even during 1890–92. Virtually nothing was done, for example, to meet the most insistent Polish demand: the rescission or alteration of the Settlement Law of 1886. True, Caprivi showed no particular enthusiasm for Bismarck's settlement project; in 1891, the direction of the Settlement Commission was given to a middle-echelon official (instead of the provincial governor) and it entered upon a period of doldrums.⁵⁹ True also, some Polish contemporaries were under the impression that Caprivi even had given up the project. Professor Buzek, for example, wrote that the government "gave up the extermination battle in the economic sphere" under Caprivi.⁶⁰ This, however, was not quite the case. The Settlement Commission continued to buy up large amounts of land (about 77,000 acres, 80 percent of it Polish) during the Caprivi era, but Polish settlement organizations were also getting underway and, while buying only one-quarter as much land, managed by 1894 to settle almost as many Poles as the Settlement Commission did Germans.⁶¹ Nevertheless, Ca-

58. Ludwig Raschdau, *Unter Bismarck und Caprivi* (Berlin, 1939), p. 208.

59. BA Koblenz, P135, 4089–90 (Gesetzgebung und Verwaltung in den Provinzen Posen, Westpreussen, und Oberschlesien: Die Ansiedlungskommission), Prussian Cabinet meeting minutes, March 23 and April 12, 1891. One reason for Caprivi's action was that Wilamowitz, Zedlitz's successor as governor of Poznania, originally had been an outspoken opponent of the settlement project.

60. Buzek, *Historia polityki narodowościowej*, p. 144.

61. Ludwig Bernhard, *Die Polenfrage*, 3rd ed. (Munich and Leipzig, 1920), p. 511. See also Witold Jakóbczyk, "The First Decade of the Settlement Commission's Activities, 1886–1897," *Polish Review*, 17 (1972): 3–13; Robert Koehl, "Colonialism inside Germany," *Journal of Modern History*, 25 (1953): 255–72; *Zwanzig Jahre deutscher Kulturarbeit*, ed. Haus der Abgeordneten (Berlin, 1907); and Leo Wegener, *Der wirtschaftliche Kampf der Deutschen mit den Polen um die Provinz Posen* (Posen, 1903).

privi was not willing to placate the Poles on this issue,⁶² even during the period when he controlled Prussian domestic policy.

Why did Caprivi not do more? The real answer to this question is probably to be found in the general nationalist *Zeitgeist* and is thus beyond the bounds of this study. Among the partial answers, however, one might cite first government distrust of the supposedly shifty Polish leadership, a traditional attitude much reinforced by Bismarck. Caprivi was not entirely free of this attitude, as evidenced by his remark in 1891 that "one can be pleased about [the Poles'] approach, but we still need evidence that their words can be trusted, for the past does not offer any guarantee of this."⁶³ It was not only that the Polish spokesman did not intend to live up to whatever agreements they made but that, because of the erosion of popular Polish support for loyalism, they might not be able to. Gossler earlier had watched with particular interest as the inner-Polish dissent developed, seeing in it a rationale for his own unwillingness to deal seriously with the Polish loyalists. As he predicted in 1890: "With the nobility it is all over—that is what the [Polish] papers say—the nobility cannot hold out, the nobility is selling its Polish property. . . . Other population groups are presented as the authorized heirs of the formerly powerful nobility. This is a quite conscious struggle of the third and fourth estates—with the nobility it will not last long, then it will be against the clergy."⁶⁴ While exaggerating the immediate threat to the traditional leadership of nobles and clergy, Gossler was correct in his analysis of the longer-term direction in which Prussian-Polish society was moving. On one hand, the fact that the Polish leaders were under such attack at home allowed the government to bargain with them on favorable terms; on the other hand, it made little sense to enter into agreements with a leadership group in the process of being displaced and one which would be unable to obtain the support of the Polish people as a whole. This perhaps explains Caprivi's coquettish attitude as he awaited further evidence that the Polish loyalists were sincere and that they had popular backing. As he told them in the Landtag: "We have heard the message, this milder tone—but complete belief has been absent here and there. If you continue along the path of reconciliation you will make it possible for the government and the Germans in Poznan as well to follow you."⁶⁵

A second partial answer might be that the government and the Polish loyalists, whatever good reasons each side had for a policy of reconciliation, both simply went as far as public opinion would permit at the time.⁶⁶ Certainly, there was a broad German nationalist reaction against Caprivi's Polish policies. A most prominent member of this opposition was Bismarck, who kept up a constant barrage of criticism. His position was simply that "the struggle against the Polish nationality, which is everywhere political and pan-Polish, cannot be let

62. *Abgeordnetenhaus*, Caprivi's speech of May 2, 1891: "The state government is unwilling to change the present law."

63. BA Koblenz, P135, 4089, Prussian Cabinet meeting minutes, April 12, 1891.

64. *Abgeordnetenhaus*, Legislative Period 17:2, 26th Session (March 12, 1890).

65. *Abgeordnetenhaus*, Caprivi's speech of May 2, 1891.

66. See Wilhelm Münstermann, *Die preussisch-deutsche Polenpolitik der Caprivizeit und die deutsche öffentliche Meinung* (Münster, 1936).

out of sight," whatever the strategic or parliamentary considerations.⁶⁷ He was joined by many others, some only seeking grounds to attack Caprivi personally (for example, Waldersee, who after his own fall from power in 1891 turned on the new Polish policy and began criticizing the government for the same approach he himself had suggested earlier⁶⁸). The Germans of Poznan and West Prussia also reacted negatively and vocally to Caprivi's Polish policy.⁶⁹ They had enjoyed and profited from the increased state attention received during the Bismarck years and their representatives were usually in the forefront of parliamentary opposition to Caprivi's concessions.⁷⁰ Finally, there was the general agrarian and nationalist/imperialist opposition to Caprivi, including the Pan-German League of 1890 (which advocated an aggressive anti-Polish program) and the Eastern Marches Society (*Ostmarkenverein*) of 1894.⁷¹

It has been suggested that another partial answer might be found in the way the entrenched Prussian bureaucracy (as distinct from the top policymakers in Berlin) was able to obstruct or sabotage a relaxation of Polish policies.⁷² One must distinguish, however, between individual bureaucrats who may have acted this way and the bureaucracy in general, which was not and never had been of one mind on the Polish question. In the 1890s, the bureaucracy included not only German nationalists like Tiedemann and Gossler, but also provincial officials like Zedlitz and Wilamowitz, who continued to share the nationally tolerant attitude of Stein and Altenstein. Prussian officials who expressed their disagreement with the Bismarckian approach to the Polish problem included military figures like Seeckt, Caprivi's treasury minister Posadowsky,⁷³ and the diplomat Schweinitz.⁷⁴ When the head of the General Commission in Bromberg (Beutner) was criticized by German nationalists because his office was handing out *Rentengüter* to Poles in direct competition with the efforts of the Settlement Commission to settle Germans, he replied that as he understood the Prussian constitution national discrimination against Poles was not permissible.⁷⁵ Such views were doubt-

67. Bismarck to Hans Kleser, May 31, 1892, *Die gesammelten Werke*, vol. 9 (Berlin, 1926), p. 205, and pp. 177, 217, 265; *Die politischen Reden des Fürsten Bismarck*, ed. H. Kohl, vol. 8 (Stuttgart, 1894-95), pp. 142, 210, 247-48; and Hermann Hofmann, *Fürst Bismarck, 1890-8* (Stuttgart, 1913-14), 1:397, 2:3.

68. Waldersee, *Denkwürdigkeiten*, vol. 2, p. 228.

69. Most Poznanian Germans were apparently unmoved by Zedlitz's blunt advice in 1892: "Concerning the fear of Poles, I have always found . . . that in many respects the government and also our good countrymen themselves are seeing ghosts and that it is urgently necessary to get rid of this fear of ghosts. We have to live together in this province and I find it to be better that we get along together" (*Abgeordnetenhaus*, Legislative Period 18:1, 27th Session [March 3, 1894], p. 847, as quoted by the Polish spokesman Schroeder).

70. See Heinrich von Tiedemann's speech in opposition to Zedlitz's private instruction order, *Abgeordnetenhaus*, Legislative Period 17:3, 80th Session (May 2, 1891), pp. 2111 f.

71. See Mildred Wertheimer, *The Pan-German League, 1890-1914* (New York, 1924); Richard Tims, *Germanizing Prussian Poland*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1966); and Adam Galos, Felix-Heinrich Gentzen, and Witold Jakóbczyk, *Die Hakatisten* (East Berlin, 1966).

72. Rosenthal, "Caprivi's Polish Policy," pp. 259-60.

73. Hutten-Czapski, *Sechzig Jahre*, p. 191.

74. See Hans Lothar von Schweinitz, *Denkwürdigkeiten*, vol. 2 (Berlin, 1927), p. 213, for his condemnation of Bismarck's expulsion of alien Poles in 1885.

75. "Jahresverwaltungsbericht der General-Kommission Bromberg," October 4, 1893, quoted in Reinhard Möhn and Helmut Seydel, "Der Kampf um Wiedergewinnung des

less in the minority but they compel us to go beyond simply blaming the entrenched bureaucracy for the failure of Prussian/German leaders to construct a lasting *modus vivendi* with Prussia's Poles. Unfortunately, even though prominent figures within the Prussian system in the 1890s saw the Poles as possible partners, or at least saw no state interest to be served by alienating them,⁷⁶ the views only found some expression at the top during the Caprivi era.

One further question might be raised: Why did the idea of Prussian-Polish understanding lie dormant from 1894 until World War I? Though difficult for German nationalist opinion to accept, the strategic justification (and occasionally the parliamentary as well) obviously remained valid after 1894. But only when the war with Russia finally came twenty years later did the government belatedly try to win Polish support by resurrecting a Polish state in occupied Poland along lines suggested by Waldersee in the 1880s.⁷⁷ Was Caprivi's notion of "Prussianization, not Germanization"⁷⁸ so futile in concept? Were the Poles, for example, so attached to goals which no German government could tolerate (such as a nation-state which must include Prussian Poland) that lasting cooperation was impossible? The record of loyalism in Austrian Poland would certainly seem to belie this assumption, and "Galician conditions" were all that Prussian-Polish leaders ever really demanded or hoped for. Furthermore, the post-World War I plebiscites in Upper Silesia, West Prussia, and Masuria testify to the ability of existing state-political loyalties to withstand the pull of ethnic nationalism among large numbers of Polish-speaking Prussians. These plebiscite results, though much affected by immediate circumstances, were achieved in spite of the complete absence of a rational or compassionate Prussian policy toward Prussian Poles after 1894. Thus the question, as posed once by Hermann Oncken, a staunch nationalist himself, remains: Why was it that, as Germany's strategic position worsened steadily after 1894, no responsible leader was willing to give the reconciliation idea of the Caprivi era another try?⁷⁹

deutschen Ostens: Erfahrungen der preussischen Ostsiedlung, 1886–1914," *Festschrift für Heinrich Himmler* (Darmstadt, 1941), p. 107.

76. The divergent views expressed at this time by two prominent intellectuals still make interesting reading: Hans Delbrück, *Die Polenfrage* (Berlin, 1894), emphasized the futility of Germanizing policies; while Max Weber, in his 1895 Freiburg University *Antrittsrede* ("Der Nationalstaat und die Volkswirtschaftspolitik," *Gesammelte politische Schriften*, ed. J. Winkelmann, 3rd ed. [Tübingen, 1971]), argued that past failures compelled even more drastic measures to protect the German East.

77. See Werner Conze, *Polnische Nation und deutsche Politik im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Cologne, 1958).

78. Raschdau, in *Unter Bismarck und Caprivi*, p. 208, described Caprivi's Polish policy in these terms.

79. "Preussen und Polen im 19. Jahrhundert," in *Deutschland und Polen*, ed. A. Brackmann (Munich, 1933), p. 237.