

# The Elections Cartel in Regierungsbezirk Bromberg (Bydgoszcz), 1898–1903: Ethnic Rivalry, Agrarianism, and “Practicing Democracy”

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IN debates on the nature and degree of democratization in the Kaiserreich, the dynamics of rural politics have received perhaps less attention than they merit. Indeed, though the picture is more nuanced now, for a long period the ability of rural elites to dominate nonelites (a core aspect of these dynamics) was simply assumed, as was the relationship of this dominance to Germany's troubled democratization. In his 1943 work *Bread and Democracy in Germany*, for example, Alexander Gerschenkron blamed Germany's entrenched and elitist aristocracy for this trait of bullying voters into antidemocratic politics spanning from the Kaiserreich to the Third Reich.<sup>1</sup> More subtly, the landmark 1966 study of Barrington Moore, Jr. noted the potential for an alliance between entrenched aristocracies and small peasantries, with each as reservoirs for anti-democratic (and potentially fascist) sentiment in several countries, with obvious application to the German case as well.<sup>2</sup>

As historians focused on the transition from *Honoratiorenpolitik* to *Interessenpolitik* during the Kaiserreich, a more subtle picture of rural politics emerged. The still standard work of Hans-Jürgen Puhle on the Agrarian League (Bund der Landwirte — BdL), *Agrarische Interessenpolitik und preussischer Konservatismus*, noted the BdL leadership's ability to pursue a quite modern *Interessenpolitik* using equally modern media techniques, a professional staff, and centralized organization to exert unusual levels of pressure on members of the Reichstag.

1. Alexander Gerschenkron, *Bread and Democracy in Germany* (Berkeley, 1943, rev. ed. Ithaca, 1989).

2. Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston, 1966). Moore uses the examples of Britain, France, the United States, China, Japan, and India, but applies the conclusions drawn from these countries to Germany and Russia.

The BdL's structure, in turn, functioned as a surrogate regional party structure for the conservative parties in rural Germany, particularly in eastern Prussia, where parties locally still remained informally organized along the lines of *Honoratiorenpolitik*.<sup>3</sup>

Nonetheless, local rural political relationships still required closer attention. Puhle's stress on organizational aspects in the BdL and on BdL activities in national political forums caused him to consign rank-and-file membership and local activity to the background, with rural voters implicitly cast as passive recipients of received wisdom. It remained for others to examine rural politics at this level, in short, to hear the farmers themselves for the first time. This has shown that farmers often had good reason for siding with Prussian rural elites. Dan White noted, for example, that farmers' interests undermined the ability of National Liberal leaders in Hesse simply to preside over rural voters as the elite; they ultimately had to defer to BdL pressure to conform to their platform, if they wished to retain the support of their voters.<sup>4</sup> Robert Moeller observed that Rhenish peasants and farmers had sound economic and political interests for joining and supporting the Agrarian League, and thus found little theoretical reason to consider them "manipulated"; nor, indeed, would there be any need for a mechanism to explain how these Prussian aristocrats imposed their dominance on areas where they did not dominate locally, either.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, others have argued for the responsiveness of the BdL to local interests, noting that much of BdL politics in the Reichstag often had less to do with the grain-tariff interests of East Elbian *Junkers* than with protecting other farmers' interests, such as pork.<sup>6</sup> Implicitly, simple mutual interest, unmanipulated, has often accounted for the relationship of these elites to the rank-and-file outside of their regions. Local rural politics for these areas was much more calculating, and local votes more solicited than demanded, and thus the politics were more "modern" than was previously thought.

Though these studies have circumscribed estimations of the scale and scope of *Junker* dominance in rural politics beyond eastern Prussia, there is less agreement about the dynamics of local rural politics *within* eastern Prussia.<sup>7</sup> Clearly,

3. Hans-Jürgen Puhle, *Agrarische Interessenpolitik und preussischer Konservatismus* (Hanover, 1966).

4. Dan S. White, *The Splintered Party: National Liberalism in Hessen and the Reich 1867–1918* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976).

5. Robert G. Moeller, "Peasants and Tariffs in the Kaiserreich: How Backward were the Bauern?" in *Agricultural History* 55 (1981): 370–84.

6. James C. Hunt, "Peasants, Grain Tariffs and Meat Quotas: Imperial German Protectionism Reexamined" in *Central European History* 7(1974): 311–31; Steven S. Webb, "Agricultural Protection in Wilhelminian Germany: Forging an Empire with Pork and Rye" in *Journal of Economic History* 42 (1982): 309–26.

7. Indeed, German agrarian history has focused much more on non-Prussian areas than on Prussia for this period. Examples include Ian Farr, "Populism and the Countryside: The Peasant Leagues in Bavaria in the 1890s" in *Society and Democracy in Wilhelmine Germany*, ed. Richard J. Evans (London, 1978), 136–59; David Blackburn, "Peasants and Politics in Germany, 1871–1914"

the electorate there was overwhelmingly conservative with a traditional, deferential political culture and, as the core of the Agrarian League, these rural areas also participated in the aforementioned more “modern,” interest-oriented and professionalized politics of the Wilhelminian era: a curious dichotomy.<sup>8</sup> At the local level, Hans Rosenberg’s idea of “pseudodemocratization,” of rural elite manipulation of modern electoral politics for the preservation of premodern political and economic dominance, remains standard, if only as a foil for some: rural elites (ab)used their appointive powers for local offices and their social prominence to hold the electorate in line, using electoral mechanisms only in order to preserve undemocratic hierarchies and customs.<sup>9</sup> This argument has since received reinforcement from Shelley Baranowski’s analyses of rural politics in Weimar-era Pomerania, which showed how local rural elites played on the electorate’s enduring antimodern, antidemocratic cultural patterns to assist the Nazis to power.<sup>10</sup>

in *European History Quarterly* 14 (1984): 47–75; Ian Farr, “Peasant Protest in the Empire: The Bavarian Example” in *Peasants and Lords in Modern Germany: Recent Studies in Agricultural History*, ed. Robert G. Moeller (Boston, 1986), 110–39; George S. Vascik, “The German Peasant League and the Limits of Rural Liberalism in Wilhelminian Germany” in *Central European History* 24 (1991): 147–75; Anton Hochberger, *Der bayerische Bauernbund 1893–1914* (Munich, 1991). The exception would appear to be Heinz Reif, ed., *Ostelbische Agrargesellschaft im Kaiserreich und in der Weimarer Republik: Agrarkrise — junkerliche Interessenpolitik — Modernisierungsstrategien* (Berlin, 1994). However, while this collection of essays contains a great deal on economic change and grassroots economic organizations for the region and the period concerned, it has much less to say on grassroots political activities.

On German agrarian historiography in general, see Robert Moeller, “Locating Peasants and Lords in Modern German Historiography” in *Peasants and Lords*, ed. idem, 1–23; Ian Farr, “‘Tradition’ and the Peasantry: On the Modern Historiography of Rural Germany” in *The German Peasantry: Conflict and Community in Rural Society from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Richard J. Evans and W.R. Lee (London, 1986), 1–36; Richard Bessel, “Making Sense of the Countryside: Some Recent Writing on Rural Life and Politics in Germany” in *European History Quarterly* 19 (1989): 115–28.

8. See James N. Retallack, *Notables of the Right: The Conservative Party and Political Mobilization in Germany, 1876–1918* (Boston, 1988), and Abraham Peck, *Radicals and Reactionaries: The Crisis of Conservatism in Wilhelmine Germany* (Washington, DC, 1976). As noted, the standard text on the Agrarian League remains Puble: *Agrarische Interessenpolitik*, but see also Sarah Rebecca Tirrell, *German Agrarian Politics after Bismarck’s Fall: The Formation of the Farmer’s League* (New York, 1951). More generally on elections on the period, see Jonathan Sperber, *The Kaiser’s Voters: Electors and Elections in Imperial Germany* (New York, 1997), and Jürgen Schmädke, *Wählerbewegung im Wilhelminischen Deutschland*, vol. 1, *Die Reichstagswahlen von 1890 bis 1912: Eine historisch-statistische Untersuchung* (Berlin, 1995); Stanley Suval, *Electoral Politics in Wilhelmine Germany* (Chapel Hill, 1985), and Margaret Lavinia Anderson, *Practicing Democracy: Elections and Political Culture in Imperial Germany* (Princeton, 2000). On Landtag elections specifically, see the comprehensive Thomas Kühne, *Dreiklassenwahlrecht und Wahlkultur in Preussen 1867–1914: Landtagswahlen zwischen korporativer Tradition und politischem Massenmarkt* (Düsseldorf, 1994).

9. Hans Rosenberg, “Die Pseudodemokratisierung der Rittergutsbesitzerklasse” in *Moderne Deutsche Sozialgeschichte*, ed. Hans-Ulrich Wehler (Cologne, 1968), 287–308. Originally published in *Festschrift für Hans Herzfeld* (Berlin, 1958), 459–86.

10. Shelley Baranowski, *The Sanctity of Rural Life: Nobility, Protestantism, and Nazism in Weimar Prussia* (New York, 1995).

Two more recent works on electoral history have addressed rural Reichstag elections in greater detail, reaching opposite conclusions. Stanley Suval, in *Electoral Politics in Wilhelmine Germany*, suggested that rural voters ultimately found more in common with rural elites than either found with nonrural voters, which led to a growing sense of an Agrarian-Conservative “group-identity,” similar to those among Socialists and Catholics. Preserving the rural community was the means of combating a “rationalized, modernized Germany” and defending traditional institutions. “The preservation of agrarian predominance in their region became in their minds and their electoral program the absolute sine qua non of this process . . . The most strident agrarian became encompassed in the general good whereby conservatives could maintain they stood for ‘the common good over special interests,’ ‘the fatherland over the party.’”<sup>11</sup> Voting Conservative was thus both a calculating act and an affirmation of community membership and group identity. Presumably, then, there was no reason to replace Notables as local leaders, no need to challenge their authority; the calculated vote of *Interessenpolitik* simply rechose the same leadership that the traditional political culture had chosen.<sup>12</sup> Democratic politics complemented traditional authority in East Elbia, without the need to resort to coercion or to the idea of “pseudodemocratization.”

In contrast, Margaret L. Anderson, in *Practicing Democracy*, notes that in most of Germany during the Kaiserreich, the sheer act of voting itself tacitly promoted the equality of each voter, undermined hierarchical mentalities, and thus gradually legitimized itself. However, she adds, this applied less to rural Prussia, where older practices of Conservative elite coercion of voters through social and economic pressure still endured.<sup>13</sup> Since a vote cannot be simultaneously voluntary and coerced, she thus challenges Suval (and implicitly agrees with Rosenberg) on how one even could tell whether rural voters *could* have voted “affirmatively,” particularly given abundant anecdotal evidence of coercion.<sup>14</sup> In

11. Suval, *Electoral Politics*, 103.

12. Indeed, can one have group identity without political calculation? How, after all, could one affirm one’s membership in a group without also pursuing its interests? How else could one judge a leader or politician, except by somehow measuring how much he had pursued the group’s interests, too?

13. Anderson, *Practicing Democracy*, 152–98. One may argue that the process of “practicing democracy” that Anderson describes is actually the culmination of a much longer process involving the transfer of legitimacy from a sovereign to the people. See Reinhard Bendix, *Kings or People: Power and the Mandate to Rule* (Berkeley, 1978), which argues that the universal (male) franchise has been a turning point in industrializing societies for reasons similar to Anderson’s: that even the merely theoretical sovereignty of the people undermines the authority of more traditional elites.

14. Perhaps the archetypal anecdote is of a farm worker who opens a ballot envelope handed to him to examine its contents, and to see for whom he is predetermined to vote, only to have the envelope snatched from him by the local inspector. “You pig,” the inspector says in dialect, “it’s a secret ballot!” (“Du Schwein, de Wahl ist doch geheim!”) See Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1866–1918*, vol. 2, *Machtstaat vor der Demokratie* (Munich, 1992), 498.

short, a local transition to more “modern,” interest-oriented politics did *not* occur in these areas: *Interessenpolitik* could be practiced in legislatures without manifesting itself as democratization (but perhaps as pseudodemocratization) at the parish pump because local leaders still could and did use informal leverage within a durable, deferential political culture.

Politics in rural Prussia in the Kaiserreich needs closer examination, if we are to get a clearer picture of the relationship of Conservative elites to voters, how the former maintained their dominance, and how and to what degree democratization occurred here, too. To this end, this study will examine the Landtag elections in the Bromberg (Bydgoszcz) Regierungsbezirk in 1898 and 1903. These elections lend themselves well to such an investigation. Though resembling the rest of East Elbia in its reliance on agriculture, the area also featured a German-Polish ethnic rivalry, with Germans and Poles at roughly equal strength.<sup>15</sup> This rivalry made political contests into noisy expressions of national struggle, generating rich documentation on the German community’s internal dynamics.<sup>16</sup>

### Bromberg’s Submerged Conflicts

One might expect that intra-German politics in this area would have been fairly quiet. There is great continuity, after all, in the mostly German and Conservative political composition of the delegates who represented the Regierungsbezirk in the Landtag from the 1890s to the 1900s. But this would belie deeper, less visible conflicts and alignments that worried local observers. On 8 September 1903, for example, the conservative *Gnesener Zeitung* even had to appeal for German unity in the coming Prussian Landtag elections. The Germans would prevail against the Poles in the Bromberg (Bydgoszcz) Regierungsbezirk only by remembering the kaiser’s words, that “it will be necessary for once for the Germans to forsake their congenital flaw of partisan conflict.”<sup>17</sup> Strangely,

15. In 1905 (the census year closest to these elections), roughly 51.5 percent of the population of the Regierungsbezirk was Polish, and 48.5 percent was German or German-Jewish. See *Preussische Statistik*, vol. 188, 157; and vol. 206, 291–92. In this essay, “German” includes German Jews.

16. Indeed, because of the focus of historians on the wider ethnic conflict between the German and Polish communities, the combinations and conflicts among local Germans have received little attention, except in terms of opposition to the Polish party. The exception here is Kühne who, in his comprehensive study of the Prussian electoral system, notes the peculiarity of the region’s Conservative-Progressive alliance, with the government actually encouraging voters to vote Progressive. However, Kühne discusses this more as an example of the Progressives’ overall increased acceptance by officials (its “governmentalization”), rather than as a reflection of the region’s politics and their effect on *Honoratiorenpolitik*, which is the intent here. See Kühne, *Dreiklassenwahlrecht*, 287–93.

17. *Gnesener Zeitung*, 8 September 1903. Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz (hereafter GStAPK) XVI Rep. 30, no. 575, v. 1. Unless otherwise stated, all citations are from this archival folio.

the *Zeitung* was summoning the prestige of the kaiser himself to admonish its Conservative readers for having opposed the local National Liberal candidate. The region's Conservative flagship, the *Bromberger Tageblatt*, was also asking its readers in Kreis Wongrowitz (Wongrowiec) to toe an even more difficult line:

It may not be easy for many a Conservative man to help bring a Progressive candidate through; it is self-evident that this always presupposes a great political self-denial. But one must not forget that the enemies practiced this self-denial first in the Reichstag election.<sup>18</sup>

Some level of diversity and partisanship was apparently normal here in 1903; otherwise, Conservative, Progressive, and National Liberal leaders would not first have had to agree (at governmental prompting) to form an electoral "cartel" against the Polish majority, and then to work to maintain it.

Indeed, the German community of the Regierungsbezirk was under a unique set of political stresses as its rural constituents faced the decline of its agricultural base, while its urban constituents faced the increasing economic vigor of the Polish community. As group interests diverged, new group identities emerged, each with its own perception of the national interest. Local German leaders — mostly Conservative — found it difficult to reconcile their increasingly specific focus on agricultural interests with their claim to speak for the whole German community. Many of their nonagricultural constituents thus challenged their leadership, and in so doing challenged the whole local practice of *Honoratiorenpolitik*. Because of the importance of a united front, these conflicts and challenges prior to the 1903 Landtag elections received special attention from German officials and the local press, leaving a rich mine of documentation. This documentation in turn allows us to test the degree to which ideas of pseudodemocratization and "group affirmation" can be applied. As we shall see, local Conservative elites maintained their preeminence against these challenges, but neither pseudodemocratization, nor identity affirmation, nor elite coercion fully account for how they maintained that preeminence. Nor does the nature of the local Notables account for their choice of which tactic to use. Instead, one must take into account the nature of the local constituents whom the Notables faced.

### The Mechanics of Landtag Elections, *Honoratiorenpolitik*, and the Cartel

Through 1903, German Conservative Notables (estate-owners and high government officials, especially) had acted as the German community's leaders, pre-

18. *Bromberger Tageblatt*, 24 October 1903. Indeed, little could better suggest the depth of the German "congenital flaw" and the need for "self-denial" than the description of allies as "enemies," or the depth of political need if one took such enemies as allies.

siding through electoral associations (*Wahlvereine*). The associations, dormant between elections, would only meet informally prior to an election to nominate candidates for Landtag seats.<sup>19</sup> In the election's open assemblies, males over twenty-five chose electors (*Wahlmänner*), who in turn elected the Landtag delegate. Each precinct's voting population was divided into three classes equal in their tax contribution to the state, each having equal weight in choosing the *Wahlmänner*, which meant that the highest, most affluent class with few voters (roughly 5 percent of the population), and the second class with more (another 12 percent or so), exercised disproportionate influence. This mechanism allowed Germans to hold Landtag seats in Polish-majority areas through dominance in the first and second classes, which rested on their dominance in commerce, artisanry, and civil service.

However, as noted, the idea of a single German community had become less valid, and with it the ease of maintaining such a community was also declining. What it meant politically to "be" German (aside from not being Polish) was not self-evident.<sup>20</sup> Even in this quite rural area, towns exhibited a different political behavior from the surrounding countryside. The Progressive Party spoke for the German-Jewish community in the towns, and possibly for some members of the upper echelons of the German *Bürgertum*.<sup>21</sup> The small National Liberal pres-

19. This procedure was based on the by-laws of the 1849 Prussian Constitution. See Ernst Rudolf Huber, *Deutsche Verfassungsgeschichte seit 1789*, vol. 3, *Bismarck und das Reich*, 3rd ed. (Stuttgart, 1988), 85–95. The text of the election rules can be found in Bernhard Vogel, et al., *Wahlen in Deutschland: Theorie — Geschichte — Dokumente 1848–1970* (Berlin, 1971), 351–54.

20. Surprisingly, local politics in this region have received less attention. Historians of the region have tended to focus on the relationship between the German/Prussian government and the local Polish population, or on Polish efforts at developing a more cohesive community, and resisting governmental efforts. One sees this in earlier works such as Martin Broszat's *Zweihundert Jahre deutsche Polenpolitik* (Munich, 1963), as well as in later works such as Richard Blanke's *Prussian Poland in the German Empire* (Boulder, 1981), and in Polish works. See in this regard the essays in Lech Trzeciakowski, ed., *Niemcy w Poznanskiem wobec polityki germanizacyjnej 1815–1920* (Poznan, 1976), and his *The Kulturkampf in Prussian Poland* (New York, 1990). More recent Polish work has noted the unintentionally positive aspects of Prussian policy for Polish community development. See the respective essays of Krzysztof Makowski and Witold Molik in Hans-Henning Hahn und Peter Kunz, eds., *Nationale Minderheiten und staatliche Minderheitenpolitik in Deutschland im 19. Jahrhundert*. (Berlin, 1999).

William Hagen's *Germans, Poles, and Jews: The National Conflict in the Prussian East, 1772–1914* (Chicago, 1980) goes further in discussing the various communities, shifting the focus more to Polish development, but nonetheless does not address German electoral politics or discuss the Bromberg Regierungsbezirk in as much detail. Indeed, Hagen's work uses sources principally from the southern half of Posen province (Regierungsbezirk Posen (Poznan)), and fewer from Regierungsbezirk Bromberg. Likewise, the work of Lech Trzeciakowski on the *Kulturkampf* and Rudolf Jaworski's *Handel und Gewerbe im Nationalitätenkampf: Studien zur Wirtschaftsgesinnung der Polen in der Provinz Posen* (Göttingen, 1986), which studies Polish economic efforts, have helped to fill gaps, but discuss neither the German community nor local elections.

21. Indeed, one might conclude that each party was ethnically based: German Conservatives, Jewish Progressives, and Poles (with some Germans voting National Liberal). But one would need much more data of the composition of the Progressive Party.

ence, especially strong in the city of Bromberg (the regional administrative center) but also present elsewhere, was composed of lower-level officials, teachers, and less affluent retailers and artisans, and acted as the more populist, nationalist section of the German population. The Conservatives (or Free Conservatives, depending on the district) came closest to speaking for the German community as a whole, since their constituency included everyone who was neither Progressive nor National Liberal: German estate-owners and other farmers, but also some town groups, such as higher-level officials, more established German retailers and artisans, and clergy. Such an eclectic collection of constituencies had worked well for the Conservatives; German ethnicity sufficed to unify them, and divergent economic interests had not yet significantly divided these groups.

As the nineteenth century closed, however, the German community's economic dominance was eroding, and with it its political dominance. The growing Polish bourgeoisie was increasingly present in the higher voting classes, which boded ill for continued German control of many Landtag seats. Disunity or even a few abstentions might seal a German candidate's fate.<sup>22</sup> Well before the Landtag elections of 1898, then, the regional governor (Regierungspräsident) and the prefects (Landräte) had met with German Notables to form a unified coalition slate (a "cartel") of German candidates for the Regierungsbezirk. Germans would vote for a common candidate in each district, and each party would receive a share of the German-held or German-won seats proportional to its strength in the German community as a whole: the Conservatives and Free Conservatives six, the National Liberals and Progressives two each.<sup>23</sup>

The main winners in this agreement were the Progressives who, as a town-based party in a rural environment, were normally confined to winning city council seats. But their numerical strength was essential to the cartel, allowing them to demand two Landtag seats. Conservatives stood to gain a seat. The weakest party, the National Liberals, would lose its seat in Bromberg (won under

22. Examples of this are more common for the neighboring Posen Regierungsbezirk. Kühne notes that, in the 1893 Landtag election, Progressives in Posen city had won a seat through the abstention of Polish voters, while a coalition of Progressives, German Catholics, and Poles could divide the seats of Samter/Birnbaum and Posen-Land/Obornik in the Posen Regierungsbezirk. See Kühne, *Dreiklassenwahlrecht*, 287.

23. "Immediat-Zeitungsberichte," 2 December 1898, GStAPK XVI Rep. 30, No. 656, vol. 5. The Regierungspräsident records this meeting's date only as "early in the year" (*im Frühjahr*), so that the meeting took place at least six months before the election. Christoph von Tiedemann (about whom more later) had tried to organize a Conservative-National Liberal coalition in the Regierungsbezirk during his tenure as Regierungspräsident in the 1880s. See Kühne, *Dreiklassenwahlrecht*, 290. Kühne also describes the cartel as being province-wide, including the city of Posen itself, but accounts from local newspapers do not mention the Posen connection.



exceptional circumstances, and now allocated to the Progressives),<sup>24</sup> with the promise of a seat in Gnesen (Gniezno)-Witkowo.<sup>25</sup>

In the 1898 elections, this cartel had defended the German seats successfully, and even had taken two of the three Polish-held Landtag seats. "It made a singular impression," the Regierungspräsident noted, "as even radical Progressive electors cast their votes for the ultraconservative anti-Semitic candidate, and how the most Conservative likewise voted for the Progressive."<sup>26</sup> Only Gnesen-Witkowo had not elected the second German, so that only the National Liberals lost ground.

TABLE 1  
PARTY CONTROL OF LANDTAG SEATS  
IN REGIERUNGSBEZIRK BROMBERG, 1893–1918

<i>District</i>	<i>1893</i>	<i>1898 and Thereafter*</i>
Czarnikau/Filehne/ Kolmar	Conservative	Conservative
Bromberg/Wirsitz	National Liberal	Conservative
	Free Conservative	Progressive
	Free Conservative	Free Conservative
Inowrazlaw/Schubin/ Strelno	National Liberal	National Liberal
	Free Conservative	Free Conservative
Gnesen-Witkowo	Pole	Pole
Mogilno/Wongrowitz/ Znin	Pole	Conservative
	Pole	Progressive

\* With the exception of Gnesen-Witkowo after 1908, which elected a Conservative in 1908, and a National Liberal in 1913. Source: Bernhard Mann: *Biographisches Handbuch für das preussische Abgeordnetenhaus* (Düsseldorf, 1988).

At first blush, the cartel demonstrates the continued authority of local Notables, and the durability of traditional, Notable-based politics: these Notables, after all, had simply created the cartel, without even nominal voter consultation. However, in making the parties dependent on one another's cooperation, the

24. The National Liberals had won the seat in 1893 mainly because the Poles had abstained from voting. The National Liberals at that point could benefit from their position between the Conservatives and the Progressives. Kühne, *Dreiklassenwahlrecht*, 289.

25. Here the efforts of the Royal Settlement Commission (*Königliche Ansiedlungskommission*) actually had succeeded in increasing the German rural population in recent years, and so a National Liberal victory was a possibility.

26. "Immediat-Zeitungsberichte," 2 December 1898, GStAPK XVI Rep. 30, No. 656, vol. 5.

TABLE 2  
 NUMBER OF LANDTAG SEATS HELD BY PARTY  
 IN REGIERUNGSBEZIRK BROMBERG, 1893–1918

Party	1893	1898	1908	1913
Conservative/Free Cons.	5	6	7	6
Progressive	0	2	2	2
National Liberal	2	1	1	2
Pole	3	1	0	0

cartel had introduced new dynamics to local German politics. Many Germans would have to settle for virtual representation, assisting the election of an “enemy” locally for their party’s sake regionally. Further, any constituency’s objection to a candidate or its demand for a greater share within the cartel could come only at someone else’s expense: a zero-sum game that all could lose if a new balance were not established, and discipline not maintained. This made the cartel averse to changes in local political conditions, as the 1903 Landtag elections would demonstrate.

Moreover, the fragility of the cartel also would promote challenges to customary leaders if these refused to address local groups’ demands. Agrarians, whose Conservative estate-owning leaders already belonged to (and helped define) the local Notability, could press their interests “from within,” through informal channels of influence, but nonetheless still had to worry about voter concerns. The townsmen outside these inner circles, facing a different set of problems with the growing Polish community, would have to fight even for recognition of their interests within the cartel, which required them to challenge its Notable leadership. Thus, the cartel, while promoting one group-identity for the Germans as Germans, also encouraged the organization of more divisive, interest-specific groups and reinforced their subgroup-identities within the German community.

### Honoratiorenpolitik in Conservative/Agrarian Areas: Accounting for Constituents’ Interests

For rurally-based Conservatives in 1903, Landtag seats were critical, because the Landtag controlled the funding for the Mittellandkanal program linking Germany’s major rivers.<sup>27</sup> Agrarian League leaders feared that improving traffic

27. On the Mittellandkanal, see Hannelore Horn, *Der Kampf um den Bau des Mittellandkanals* (Cologne, 1964). See also Puhle, *Agrarische Interessenpolitik*, 240–46, and Ernst Rudolf Huber, *Deutsche Verfassungsgeschichte*, vol. 4, *Struktur und Krisen des Kaiserreichs* (Stuttgart, 1957), 1087–1105.

within Germany would expand the market for imported grain to the detriment of domestic producers. Canals linking the Oder to the Vistula, initially sought as compensation for concessions on canals linking the Rhine and the Elbe, now were seen as vectors for an invasion of Russian grain.<sup>28</sup> The pursuit of more seats to stop the canal would become the cause of Conservative subversion of the cartel. At the same time, it would undermine the Conservative Notables' own claim to speak for town-based groups who felt neglected.

In District 87 (Kreise Czarnikau [Czarnków], Filehne [Wielen], and Kolmar [Chodzież]), the towns were as securely German and Conservative as the countryside, so Conservative Notables should have had few problems. One would expect an enduring *Honoratiorenpolitik*, with little concern regarding challenges to the Notables' leadership. However, nowhere else did the canal project have such a direct effect: it would rechannel the local river, the Netze (Notec). The project's preliminary stages had overdrained many littoral fields, and farmers began to complain about productivity losses.<sup>29</sup> In 1900, they petitioned the government "to restore the Netze to its former condition" by completing irrigation projects and the grading of the river.<sup>30</sup> Agrarian League and Conservative opposition to the completion of the projects had alienated many farmers from their usual leadership.<sup>31</sup>

In 1898, the district had elected two Conservatives balancing town and rural interests: Max Zindler, a Schneidemühl factory- and estate-owner, and Axel von Colmar, who had represented the area since 1877 (and in the Reichstag from 1877 to 1898) despite serving as Regierungspräsident elsewhere in Germany.<sup>32</sup> Both opposed the Canal,<sup>33</sup> but while such opposition would have mattered little to Zindler's supporters in town, it mattered more to farmers, some of whom wanted to replace von Colmar with a native, someone more knowledgeable of local conditions.<sup>34</sup>

28. Horn, *Der Kampf*, 89 and 91.

29. Other farmers in the area blamed the poor second harvest in the fall of 1899 instead on an unusually dry season. GStAPK XVI Rep. 30, no. 656, vol. 5, 30 January 1900.

30. "Zeitungsberichte des Oberbergamts Breslau, der Landräte, des Oberbürgermeisters in Bromberg, der Handelskammer u.d. Referenten der Regierung." 10 March 1900, GStAPK XVI Rep. 30, no. 656, vol. 5. Alfred von Conrad, the Regierungspräsident, reported that his staff had given the movement its attention, "to keep it in peaceful channels." By 1901, productivity had plunged further; farmers had begun to *buy* rather than sell hay and straw. LR Czarnikau to RP, 1 May 1901. GStAPK XVI Rep. 30, no. 663, vol. 15.

31. LR Czarnikau to RP, 30 July 1901. GStAPK XVI Rep. 30, no. 663, vol. 15.

32. On von Colmar, see Bernhard Mann, *Biographisches Handbuch für das preussische Abgeordnetenhaus* (Düsseldorf, 1988), 97, and Max Schwarz, *MdR: Biographisches Handbuch der Reichstage*, (Hamburg, 1965), 289.

33. Von Colmar's stance and those of other "canal rebels" in public service later incurred the wrath of the kaiser, who supported the canal. On the "canal rebels," see Horn, *Der Kampf*, 64–87.

34. Note, for example, the letter to *Der Gesellige (Graudenz)*, 4 November 1903, which accused him of "standing off the road [being out of touch], and can only be helpful to us with difficulty."

Local Conservative Notables had to neutralize discontent about the Canal projects quickly, fearing that alienated Netze voters might support a Canal proponent, just to finish the project and restore their fields. The Kreis Electoral Associations replaced von Colmar with another Notable, Karl Viereck, a local justice (Landgerichtsdirektor) in Schneidemühl, with Free Conservative leanings.<sup>35</sup> Viereck would vote for the canal “only on condition that no region and no branch of trade be disadvantaged by it,” a safely nebulous stance.<sup>36</sup>

The informality of Notable politics now complicated matters, for von Colmar refused to withdraw.<sup>37</sup> The Notables, lacking any formal procedure for removing a candidate, expediently chose to endorse all three German candidates for the two seats.<sup>38</sup> While this diluted the endorsements’ value, it did forestall conflict, and Notables could still make personal endorsements.<sup>39</sup> Their preferred candidate won, averting the threat of *Kanal* discontent.

In Landtag District 90 (Gnesen [Gniezno] and Witkowo), agrarians even discarded Notable politics altogether. Here the Polish community had won through 1898, when the Germans had nearly won: the German farmers brought by the Settlement Commission had almost compensated for the defection of five German-Jewish electors for the Polish candidate.<sup>40</sup> Through the cartel, National Liberals would support a Free Conservative (agrarian) candidate in 1898 for reciprocal support starting in 1903.<sup>41</sup> But in 1903, agrarians now hesitated to support a National Liberal, and unilaterally renominated their 1898 candidate<sup>42</sup> and then demanded unity behind him as *the* German candidate, wanting “to give the voters their say back.”<sup>43</sup> Ironically, the National Liberals now found themselves miscast as elitists who denied voters a choice, ironically by abiding by a cartel agreement that their Notable accusers had coauthored without consulting voters. Here the agrarians could afford to abandon Notable politics entirely, in the knowledge that they would enjoy the support of the bulk of the German electorate in any case.

35. Minutes of Electoral Association meeting, 22 September 1903. On Zindler, see Mann, *Biographisches Handbuch*, 432, and Schwarz, *MdR*, 505. On Viereck, see Mann, *Biographisches Handbuch*, 394. On Viereck’s regional popularity, see the *Anzeiger für den Netzedistrikt* (Czarnikau), 20 October 1903.

36. *Kolmarer Kreiszeitung*, 17 November 1903.

37. *Anzeiger für den Netzedistrikt* (Czarnikau), 20 October 1903.

38. LR Kolmar to RP, 28 October 1903. See also LR Czarnikau to RP, 24 October 1903.

39. *Kolmarer Zeitung*, 14 November 1903. Most supported Viereck. One can gauge local support for each candidate through newspaper advertisements. Von Colmar had to sponsor his own in this issue, while local Notables sponsored Viereck’s.

40. *Posener Zeitung*, 11 September 1903, quoting the *Orendownik*, unknown date.

41. *Gnesener Zeitung*, 8 September 1903.

42. A popular Landrat named Robert Coeler. On Coeler, see Thomas Gey’s *Die preussische Verwaltung des Regierungsbezirks Bromberg 1871–1920* (Cologne, 1976), 52.

43. *Posener Zeitung*, 31 October 1903.

Neither Suval's nor Anderson's interpretations fully account for Conservative behavior in these districts. Pseudodemocratization does not apply here: though Notables still chose the candidate in Kolmar, although they did so by taking his political utility into account. Likewise in Gnesen: one might accuse Notables who appealed directly to voters of desperation, but not of coercion. At the same time, the concept of the vote as community-affirming behavior does not seem to apply, either, because in this election, at least, defense against hostile outsiders was not an issue. Rather, for Conservatives the critical factor was that local Notables, rather than simply imposing their own, needed to address voters whose interests matched theirs.

### Agrarians and the *Mittelstand* Movement: Coercion, But Not Unity

While Conservatives worried about grain imports, German radical nationalists, artisans, and merchants in town worried more about Polish competitors. As Conservative Notables shifted to more agrarian stands less relevant to them, these artisans and merchants felt less represented, and began to challenge the efficacy and even the legitimacy of the Notables' leadership. Without the social networks available to Conservative agrarians and high officials or to Progressive merchants, they first of all needed to organize. Beginning in 1901, many in these groups thus began organizing a "*Mittelstand* League" in the Regierungsbezirk, following an appeal from a similar group in Posen (Poznan), the provincial capital.<sup>44</sup> Like Conservative Notables, the league claimed to represent the entire German community, and wanted to become "a rallying point where every economic striving can find support and encouragement, to the degree that it emanates only from the German side."<sup>45</sup> They decried the erosion of both German culture and the German state, for which they blamed both the Polish resurgence and inadequate support from their government and neighbors, and wondered when the government would help them to remain "a healthy core for the German people."<sup>46</sup>

Conservatives initially welcomed the league's creation, not realizing the anti-Notable potential of its alternative group identity.<sup>47</sup> This potential was realized

44. "Acta betreffend den deutschen *Mittelstands*bund, 1901–1912." Wojewodskie Archiwum Państwowe Poznaniu (WAPP) Polizeipräsidium Posen no. 4702. See the leaflet entitled "Deutsche Mitbürger!" An article in the *Posener Zeitung*, commenting on the 1903 Landtag campaigns, reported *Mittelstand* activities in Czarnikau, Inowrazlaw, and Wongrowitz. See *Posener Zeitung*, 25 September 1903.

45. *Ibid.*

46. *Wegeweiser*, 22 January 1902. WAPP Polizeipräsidium Posen 4702.

47. The conservative *Posener Tageblatt* noted approvingly that the league consisted of groups indifferent to the German cause until now: "Even the artisan and the worker carry within themselves a trove of love for their nationality, and the power of idealistic enthusiasm is large enough to

in Landtag District 90 (Mogilno and Wongrowitz). The district had been Polish until 1898, when the cartel arrangement allowed Germans to take both seats, sending a Conservative and a Progressive to the Landtag.<sup>48</sup> Both were renominated routinely in 1903.<sup>49</sup> However, some local townspeople found them wanting. In Wongrowitz, many economically vulnerable German townspeople, led by a middle-echelon court official named Reichelt,<sup>50</sup> founded a branch of the *Mittelstand* League.<sup>51</sup> Reichelt was even considering an independent candidacy, and the liberal *Posener Zeitung* already was gauging popular sentiment for assigning a Landtag seat to *Mittelständler* within the cartel.<sup>52</sup> He threatened that his league would thwart the election of other German candidates if its demands were ignored. If, however, Notables would guarantee one seat to the National Liberals in the future, then he would not run a spoiler campaign in 1903.<sup>53</sup>

Reichelt posed a problem. Denying him might be seen as snubbing and alienating his constituency, but accommodating him required revising the cartel and jeopardizing the support of others, especially Jewish Progressives, who objected to Reichelt's previous ties to anti-Semitic groups, which he now disavowed.<sup>54</sup> Local Notables thus moved carefully, criticizing Reichelt, but not his supporters. "Every departure from the current delegates endangers the German cause to the utmost," the Electoral Association's steering committee appealed, "and thus must be fought decisively."<sup>55</sup> Behind the scenes, Reichelt's superiors pressured him to quit his political activity.<sup>56</sup>

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create a bridge of loving understanding, cooperative reconciliation between rich and poor, young and old, officials and citizens." See *Posener Tageblatt*, 12 February 1902. WAPP Polizeipräsidium Posen no. 4702.

48. *Bromberger Tageblatt*, 24 October 1903. "Zur Landtagswahl." In exchange for Progressive support for a "national" candidate in the Reichstag elections of 1898, the Progressives had been guaranteed a seat in 1903.

49. LR Wongrowitz to RP, 17 September 1903.

50. LR Wongrowitz to RP, 8 November 1903. GStAPK XVI Rep. 30, no. 663, vol. 17.

51. *Ibid.*

52. Reichelt described his constituency as the "middle and lower officials, the teachers and the tradesmen, and the middle and lower retailers": the classical *Mittelstand*, until now always on the margins of local power.

53. Reichelt noted that a *Mittelstand* group wanted him to run, but that he would not if the Electoral Association would allocate a Landtag seat to the *Mittelstand*. Reichelt mentioned this in discussions with Dr. Ernst Schreiber, the *Landrat* of Wongrowitz. See LR Wongrowitz to RP, 17 September 1903.

54. *Ibid.* One must consider the possibility that this *Mittelstandsbund* had anti-Semitic roots, but if so, its members were not primarily motivated by such roots. Their rhetoric discussed the Polish rather than the Jewish problem, and (as we shall see) the movement and the local National Liberal party were mutually sympathetic.

55. LR Wongrowitz to RP, 20 September 1903. One man advocated his transfer to a less ethnically volatile area: "It would be a shame to lose this district again, which we just conquered in the last election, due to the egotism of a single man." Quoted in the *Posener Zeitung*, 25 September 1903.

56. *Ibid.* The *Zeitung*, a liberal newspaper, continued: "How is it, though, that the Landrat and

The tactics worked. Reichelt now told the local Landrat that, even if the Electoral Association rejected his demand, he would now discourage a spoiler candidacy.<sup>57</sup> He then asked his supporters in the *Mittelstandsbund* to cease their activities.<sup>58</sup> He further would accept no nomination if offered, suddenly (conveniently?) having become too ill to campaign.<sup>59</sup> Finally, he worked to restore at least the appearance of a close relationship between the German community and its “natural” leaders: by redefining the incumbents as *Mittelständler*.<sup>60</sup> The cartel held here, but mainly through the informal channels of coercion used against the incipient *Mittelstand* movement. If *Mittelständler* continued to vote for the cartel and to follow the Conservative Notables’ lead, it was less out of deference than of a sense of their limited options, and because of their duty to the larger German community. Here, the Notables’ informal channels of coercion had remained effective as a means of securing dominance when prestige was losing its effect. But the contrast with areas where Conservatives dominated is instructive. Here with no margin for error available, the Conservatives could not compromise at all, and thus used less formal but more coercive tactics.

In District 89 (Inowrazlaw, Schubin, and Strelno), where mobilized townspeople and an aggressive agrarianism coexisted and their interests increasingly diverged, Notable politics would feel the greatest strain, and coercion was least effective. Even before the 1898 cartel, the local Electoral Associations had maintained an informal balance, electing a National Liberal and a Free Conservative,<sup>61</sup> but in 1903 both positions were open. The National Liberal, Bernhard Seer,<sup>62</sup> was retiring, and the Free Conservative Christoph von Tiedemann (the local *Regierungspräsident*)<sup>63</sup> was facing unprecedented, widespread opposition.

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even the Court President interfere in these electoral matters?” The idea of inviolate elections evidently had taken root here, too.

57. LR Wongrowitz to RP, 17 September 1903.

58. LR Wongrowitz to RP, 20 September 1903 and 10 October 1903.

59. *Bromberger Tageblatt*, 27 September 1903. See also *Posener Zeitung*, 26 September 1903.

60. *Ibid.* The *Mittelstand* now included everyone “between the working class and those who have an income of 10,000 Marks or more”! With such a range, any German candidate qualified as a *Mittelständler*, and any vote as a pro-*Mittelstand* act. Curiously, the *Bromberger Tageblatt* argued that the incumbents, though not *Mittelständler* (in contradiction to Reichelt), provided satisfactory virtual (rather than actual) representation. Indeed, it concluded, the best defense of the *Mittelstand* lay in German unity.

61. Only in 1879 did German disunity allow a Pole to win. In 1882, the Germans restored a local cartel, and elected Christoph von Tiedemann. See LR Inowrazlaw to RP, 29 September 1903. Our knowledge that a compromise preceded von Grabski’s election comes from remarks in meetings in 1903 as recorded in the *Kujawischer Bote* (Inowrazlaw), 25 October 1903.

62. *Bromberger Tageblatt*, 11 September 1903. Bernhard Seer had represented the district since 1882.

63. Christoph Willers von Tiedemann had been *Regierungspräsident* of Bromberg from 1881 to 1899. Afterward he no longer lived in the district, despite representing it in the Landtag. See Mann, *Biographisches Handbuch*, 387, and Schwarz, *MdR*, 481.

Von Tiedemann's town opposition came from dissatisfaction with his advocacy for the district. A tool-and-die factory in Inowrazlaw had gone bankrupt.<sup>64</sup> Six hundred workers "and a relatively large number of higher and mid-level clerks" lost their jobs, in a region where Polish businesses already were displacing German businesses. Related businesses closed in turn; many residents lost their fortunes.<sup>65</sup> Von Tiedemann was blamed as Regierungspräsident for failing to intercede with higher authorities to save the firm, and thus to save much of the local German *Mittelstand*.<sup>66</sup>

Von Tiedemann's agrarian opposition came from his Landtag vote for the Mittellandkanal. He later claimed to have had new markets for local farmers in mind, since their grain could flow westward more easily. "Whether or not this evaluation was correct," he pleaded, "I nonetheless believed that I had to represent the interests of the Regierungsbezirk that I administered."<sup>67</sup>

Von Tiedemann thus had few friends, and the other seat was vacant. For agrarians, this was a great opportunity. The cartel called for a National Liberal and a Conservative, but did *not* explicitly call for one urban and one rural representative; nothing prevented both of the seats being pro-agrarian. Rural Conservative Notables exploited this loophole by forcing through the nomination of two estate-owners (Georg Kiehn, a Free Conservative, and Karl Crüsemann, a National Liberal) in Electoral Association meetings before others could protest.<sup>68</sup> But von Tiedemann did not withdraw his candidacy. More critically, already aggrieved town voters protested their exclusion from the proceedings: why should they accept a procedure in which "a few certain people . . . agree at a *Stammtisch* on a favored personality and then simply declare that 'in the interest of Germandom, this candidate must be elected?'"<sup>69</sup> Many town voters even considered running their own candidate: someone who would be "a true and friendlier representative of the artisan class. For this reason it was recommended to set up a candidate only from the *Mittelstand*."<sup>70</sup> No longer could the Electoral Association or the rural Notables therein claim to be the German community's "natural" leadership.

64. Magistrat Inowrazlaw to RP, 24 January 1902. "Denkschrift betreffend die wirtschaftliche Lage der Stadt Inowrazlaw in der Provinz Posen." GStAPK XVI Rep. 30, no. 680, vol. 2.

65. At least sixty other businesses closed as a result of Paetzold's bankruptcy. *Ibid*.

66. Many also complained that his influence had little helped with Inowrazlaw's failed effort to get a railroad repair yard for the city. See *Posener Zeitung*, 12 September 1903, and *Bromberger Tageblatt*, 11 September 1903.

67. *Kujawischer Bote* (Inowrazlaw), 18 October 1903.

68. LR Inowrazlaw to RP, 29 September 1903. On Georg Kiehn, see Mann, *Biographisches Handbuch*, 213. At its own meeting in Schubin, the Agrarian League confirmed the two as candidates. See *Bromberger Tageblatt*, 11 September 1903.

69. *Posener Zeitung*, 12 September 1903. The question, hardly in awe of local Notables, was posed at a protest meeting of voters from Inowrazlaw, Argenau and Strelno.

70. *Posener Zeitung*, 11 September 1903. This was the request of artisans in Inowrazlaw.



Agrarian Notables now retreated. Notables from all *three Kreise* still hoped for von Tiedemann's withdrawal, but failing that, they asked the Agrarian League to "give its chairmen a completely free hand in the main [association] caucus of all German voters . . . and to surrender their absolute veto against a possible agreement on von Tiedemann," presumably the lesser evil.<sup>71</sup> If a fresh start was impossible, a league capitulation could still preserve German unity, which was still more important. The league had to concede that liberals could nominate whom they chose, but asked that "the proposed candidate will assume the friendliest possible attitude to agriculture, but in any case will not be an opponent thereof."<sup>72</sup> Crüsemann also withdrew his candidacy, so that the field was mostly vacant again.<sup>73</sup>

However, local politics had become more candidly interest-oriented. Townsman among the National Liberals interpreted the agrarian actions as retreat rather than reconciliation. The liberal *Posener Zeitung* urged Inowrazlaw citizens to choose an "appropriate" candidate quickly, so that they could "approach the Conservatives with a *fait accompli*": in sum, to do to them as they had tried to do to liberals and townsmen.<sup>74</sup> *Mittelständler* even paralleled Conservative Notable rhetoric, declaring their own interests to be those of Germans as a whole. Did not Germandom depend as much on them as on agriculture? Were they "not only an essential support for the current state order, the only bulwark against the onslaught of Social Democracy," but also the only hope for "a strengthening of Germandom" against the Poles? Thus, helping Germany meant helping *them*, and it was their duty to mobilize in self-defense "in light of the ever-growing economic danger for small businessmen, tradesmen, retailers, and farmers."<sup>75</sup> Expressing no wish to bolt the cartel, they demanded only that the second candidate represent their "rightful" interests, "either through the election of delegates from its ranks, or through the issuance of binding declarations on the part of delegates up for election."<sup>76</sup> Their grievance with the Electoral Association lay more with its failure to stop agrarian efforts at coercion than with its elite nature.

Eventually, to replace von Tiedemann (a Free Conservative), National Liberal leaders selected Franz Lusensky, a High Privy Councilor (Geheimer

71. Ibid.

72. LR Inowrazlaw to RP, 7 October 1903.

73. LR Inowrazlaw to RP, 29 September 1903.

74. *Posener Zeitung*, 27 September 1903. The *Zeitung* also notes that many of the efforts on behalf of the urban constituency in Inowrazlaw emanated from Wongrowitz, where Reichelt and his *Mittelstand* League were active.

75. *Kujawischer Bote* (Inowrazlaw), 16 October 1903. Meeting in Argenau of *Mittelstand* voters.

76. Ibid. Just in case, though, this meeting in Inowrazlaw also resolved to establish a regional "Mittelstand League."

Oberregierungsrat) in the Trade Ministry in Berlin.<sup>77</sup> But agrarians mistrusted him; as a public official he was allegedly subject to pressure from superiors, and thus was not an “independent man.”<sup>78</sup> Nor was he a native, and “the circumstances in the east are so difficult that we believe that only one who knows them well could lead us.”<sup>79</sup> Agrarians finally argued that they *already* had made concessions, including accepting Kiehn’s candidacy, so liberals also should choose someone more moderate than Lusensky.<sup>80</sup>

In this melee, the pretense of a neutral Notability vanished, and with it the Conservatives’ presumption to speak for the whole German community. *Mittelständler* preferred a division of seats based more candidly on material interest. No matter what, the *Gnesener General-Anzeiger* commented, the liberals now wanted Lusensky: if agrarian interests rejected his candidacy now, “town and rural liberal voters would consider the compromise [the cartel] no longer existent and would act independently.”<sup>81</sup> The Conservatives knew now that they could not have both seats.<sup>82</sup> The cartel remained intact, although the base of its legitimacy and the nature and procedure of local politics had changed fundamentally. Here more than anywhere else, interests were more candidly expressed, “Notable” authority less accepted, and “Notable” coercive power less effective: the coercion of pseudodemocratization simply would not work.

### Radical Nationalism as a Failed Group-Affirmation

Restive German nationalists and National Liberals in Landtag District 88 (Bromberg [Bydgoszcz] and Wirsitz [Wyrzysz]) would prove a greater challenge to Notable dominance because, being already organized, they were less vulnerable to coercive measures such as those in Wongrowitz. Further, their radical nationalism provided an alternative rallying point for German electoral unity.

77. *Ostdeutsche Presse*, 24 October 1903. Lusensky also belonged to the National Liberals’ central committee. It is safe to assume that he was preferable to Crüsemann.

78. *Ostdeutsche Presse* (Bromberg), 25 October 1903. Of interest here, as well, is the fact that the government official, once considered always to be “above party,” was now considered to be a mere pawn.

79. *Ibid.*

80. *Ibid.* In this regard, the proposal by the mayor of Inowrazlaw to substitute a local National Liberal (one “Herr Amtsgerichtsrat Kowalke”) got no support, despite the fact that he was more local, and presumably more moderate.

81. *Gnesener General-Anzeiger*, 25 October 1903.

82. Ironically, the conscientious Lusensky offered to withdraw again, fearing that he would destroy the cartel. Town Notables preemptively proposed an even more liberal replacement, a former merchant named Finsterbusch, who not only favored the canal (“he advocates the best means of transportation by water and by land”), but also giving towns in the east more representation in the estate-dominated *Kreistage*. Lusensky now seemed relatively moderate and acceptable to the agrarians, in further testament to their inability to impose a choice. *Kujawischer Bote* (Inowrazlaw), 18 November 1903.

Nonetheless, radical nationalism failed to convince many voters of its superiority to the cartel as a defense of Germandom against the Polish resurgence.

The 1898 cartel agreement had allotted Conservatives in Kreis Wirsitz one seat, Progressives in the city of Bromberg the second, and Conservatives in Kreis Bromberg the third.<sup>83</sup> However, while Germans still controlled the city's politics with a strong overall majority, they felt the growing Polish presence. The Bromberg branch of the radical-nationalist Eastern Marches Association (*Ostmarkenverein*) was one of the region's largest and most active branches for this reason.<sup>84</sup> Its membership even included two local Landtag delegates.<sup>85</sup>

Politically, the fear of local townsmen found expression in the National Liberal Party that criticized the other two parties for their insufficient nationalism. Conservatives cooperated with the polonophilic Center Party too often, while Progressives could not "see that the Poles are working toward high treason, that they are tirelessly arming," and thus Progressives were "either blind or will not see," a reference to the occasional Progressive cooperation with Poles in city-council elections.<sup>86</sup> Local National Liberals also accused Conservatives and Progressives of showing insufficient solidarity. "Especially here in the East," they complained, "one has seen regrettable appearances of the caste-spirit," which were "incompatible with modern thought, which can develop only upon a liberal foundation."<sup>87</sup> They likewise considered the Progressives insufficiently patriotic, for not placing their nationalism above their liberalism.<sup>88</sup>

The city of Bromberg, then, had a core of aggrieved German nationalist voters who feared the Poles, resented cartel/Notable elitism for both slighting them and ignoring those fears, and had less concern for agriculture. One can understand their reaction to the 1898 cartel agreement, which replaced Bromberg's National Liberal and Free Conservative Landtag delegates (who

83. The Progressives also had agreed to withdraw a spoiler candidate for the Reichstag elections that year. Conservatives had reciprocated by ceding a seat which they had held since 1879. The Progressives' concession on the Reichstag seat in 1898 had enabled the Conservatives to elect Christoph von Tiedemann, who remained in office until 1907. A Pole (Leon von Czarinski) had won the 1893 election, the first time a Pole had won the seat, so that the impetus for compromise in 1898 clearly had been strong. LR Bromberg to RP, 12 October 1903 (Geheim!) and *Bromberger Tageblatt*, 10 October 1903 and 10 November 1903.

84. Polizei-Verwaltung Bromberg to RP, 28 September 1895. GStAPK XVI Rep. 30, No. 679: "Deutscher Ostmarken-Verein." The branch included over 200 "buyers, estate-owners, rentiers, doctors, lawyers, higher and lower officials of various offices, teachers, artisans, etc.," of Conservative or National Liberal inclination. One notes the overlap of this membership to that within the *Mittelstand League*.

85. Ernst Heinrich Dietz, a National Liberal magistrate and alderman in Bromberg, and Konrad Max von Unruh, a Free Conservative farmer, and Landrat since 1889. They also were the liaisons to the association's main offices in Berlin. *Ibid.*

86. *Ostdeutsche Presse* (Bromberg), 27 October 1903.

87. *Ibid.*

88. *Ibid.*, 12 November 1903. "Zu den Wahlmänner-Wahlen."

were members of the Ostmarkenverein) with a Progressive and a Conservative (who were not). Although the German cartel as a whole gained seats, the resulting National Liberal loss of its seat could not have been accepted easily. In 1903, the Conservatives renominated their incumbents: Emil Schmidt, a Free Conservative estate-owner for Bromberg, and Emil Martini, a Conservative estate-owner for Wirsitz.<sup>89</sup> The Progressives nominated Louis Aronsohn, a banker and city councilman in Bromberg.<sup>90</sup> The snubbed National Liberals again considered running their own candidate.<sup>91</sup> “Even in Progressive circles,” they complained, “one candidly admits that the National Liberals have a right to representation in the Landtag”; they deserved a Bromberg seat, cartel or no.<sup>92</sup>

Local Progressive and Conservative leaders ignored National Liberal charges: in adhering to the cartel, they ironically could portray themselves as more “national” and less selfish than their National Liberal opponents. The right-wing *Bromberger Tageblatt*, for example, considered maintaining the cartel a patriotic act:

And you, you who do not belong to any political party or club, don't forget what is at stake! German unity is threatened if you give your votes on Thursday to electors outside of the compromise [the cartel] who will vote for National Liberal candidates . . . Let us take this word to heart on Thursday and anytime, and let us stay together as German men *who place the Fatherland above the party!*<sup>93</sup>

The cartel held: the National Liberals actually *lost* votes relative to 1898, and fell well short of their 1893 victory.<sup>94</sup> Ironically, many radical-nationalist National Liberal sympathizers in the towns faced a predicament: they could affirm their radical nationalism only by voting against the radical-nationalist candidate. The cartel could appear as more “national” and “above party,” even though its candidates were less militant. Conservative (and Progressive) Notables could pursue increasingly specific interests, without fear of losing constituents alienated by

89. The rubber-stamp nature of the selection process can be seen in the fact that the committee had picked the nominee well before the actual meeting, and had informed the Landrat of Bromberg privately in advance that Martini would be renominated. See LR Bromberg to RP, 12 October 1903. Geheim!

90. On Aronsohn, see Mann, *Biographisches Handbuch*, 50. Little could suggest better the informal elite-dominated nature of local politics than the fact that the liberal *Posener Zeitung* announced Aronsohn's candidacy even before the Progressives had formally convened, as the *Bromberger Tageblatt* wryly noted. See *Bromberger Tageblatt*, 10 October 1903.

91. *Bromberger Tageblatt*, 10 October 1903. The Landrat of Bromberg later confirmed the National Liberals' intent. See LR Bromberg to RP, 12 October 1903. Geheim!

92. *Ostdeutsche Presse* (Bromberg), 8 November 1903.

93. *Bromberger Tageblatt*, 11 November 1903. The *Tageblatt* likewise criticized the anti-Semite movement, but further documentation on the anti-Semite movement in this election is unfortunately lacking. See *Bromberger Tageblatt*, 10 November 1903.

94. *Ostdeutsche Presse*, 22 November 1903.

their doing so, because the Polish presence assisted them in creating enough of a group identity, which superseded intra-German differences.

### Conclusion

Prior to the electors' meetings in 1903 to choose the Landtag delegates, the conservative *Bromberger Tageblatt* still pleaded for German solidarity, even "where a Polish victory is out of the question from the beginning, because the impression which such united action makes strengthens Germandom's fundamental and moral position":<sup>95</sup> intra-German conflicts could wait for Landtag sessions in Berlin. The *Tageblatt* proposed formalizing the cartel's structure through the creation of "a German provincial elections committee . . . so that every party receives as many mandates as its relative strength among the individual parties in the province entitle it to," and "that these resolutions are substantially respected."<sup>96</sup> In short: agrarian Notables, National Liberals, and *Mittelständler* should stop disrupting the cartel. While no such supraparty was formed, none of the various German parties challenged the cartel's arrangements, accepting the seat-distribution as a new *modus vivendi*.<sup>97</sup>

However, the *Tageblatt* omitted the cause for the greater divisiveness: the increasingly divergent interests of town and country, leading to different conceptions of the "true" interests of the local German community. By placing all of the parties and their goals in a negotiated and potentially renegotiable structure, the cartel promoted the expression of the very "partisan wishes" that the *Tageblatt* decried. Indeed, the newspaper also conceded that such wishes lay "in the nature of things, and will be unavoidable in the future."<sup>98</sup>

Affirmation of one's community through voting, in the manner described by Suval, did not overcome this division as much as it reflected it. Votes affirmed membership in one's community but the definitions of the community itself

95. *Bromberger Tageblatt*, 10 November 1903.

96. *Ibid.*

97. If one may judge from the bureaucratic and journalistic silence on Landtag elections after 1903 (archival files for later elections concern administrative matters rather than factional renegotiations), there were no attempts to change the cartel arrangements again. Kühne, however, notes that the Landräte nonetheless met in December 1907 with the Oberpräsident in order to preemptively deal with potential conflicts, and that the agreement was renewed at each election through 1913. See Kühne, *Dreiklassenwahlrecht*, 289. However, one may infer that these meetings dealt with the still-Polish seat in Gnesen-Witkowo, which in 1908 finally went to a Conservative (the local Landrat Ludwig Dionysius), and then in 1913 to a National Liberal (Max Kandler).

98. Indeed, Bret Fairbairn argues that politics in the Reichstag elections of 1898 and 1903 became more interest-oriented and less conciliatory because these years saw such a general shift in German politics from its original informal elite-oriented basis to one with permanently organized and active parties and a more mobilized electorate. See Bret Fairbairn, *Democracy in the Undemocratic State: The German Reichstag Elections of 1898 and 1903* (Toronto, 1997), chap. 2.

and of its “true” interest were in flux, and thus so were memberships. “Affirmation” thus became a two-edged sword because it worked at more than one level: while it might have allowed Notables and more “common” voters to establish a group identity within the German community (and allowing Notables to continue to lead in their informal fashion), it also excluded others. Many German town voters, having followed Conservative Notables because they represented the non-Progressive German community, found Conservatives increasingly representing only rural Germans, while still claiming to represent everyone.<sup>99</sup> These town voters, worried more about Poles than about agriculture, felt prompted to mobilize as National Liberals or *Mittelständler*. Where not yet organized (as *Mittelständler* in Wongrowitz), they fared badly, since Conservative Notables still could use informal influence channels to stifle challenges. But where they had already organized (as National Liberals had in Inowrazlaw), they could defend their own interests well. Conservative Notable efforts to keep non-Progressive Germans united under their leadership through either affirmation or through coercion of dissident elements thus had only limited success. Even in Bromberg, an appeal for unity barely sufficed to unite the Germans: radical nationalists faced the prospect that voting for cartel candidates and against their own was in fact the only way to promote Germanism. Nationalism here had its most direct electoral effect: though there was disagreement about the nation’s best interest, all could at least agree that Germans were not Poles. But this sort of “affirmation” hardly amounted to an endorsement of the Conservatives’ agrarian program. The expression of nationalism divided the German community almost (but not quite) as much as it united it.

Likewise, coercion similar to that described by Anderson had unexpected limits: while informal levers such as those mentioned by Baranowski quite plausibly played a role in the countryside, they are not present in the documentation for this Regierungsbezirk, which shows coercion applied not to constituents but only to potential leaders of opposition, such as Reichelt. One also must note the presence of uncoercible populations: though surely having some leverage over lower-level officials, rural Notables and Landräte otherwise had little leverage over other Progressive and National Liberal voters (or they would not have had to resort to the cartel in the first place), and their leverage over town Germans not in their employ may be questioned. Many town Germans had no obvious reason to follow or obey Conservative leaders (or

99. Fairbairn mentions that, in these years (1898–1903), the Conservative Party was consolidating its hold over its Reichstag seats in the north and east through its emphasis on agriculture, but in doing so was losing its more marginal seats in regions where agriculture was a secondary issue. See Fairbairn, *Democracy in the Undemocratic State*, 136–37. It seems that a similar process of retreat and consolidation was underway at the local level, as well.

Progressives) as these leaders' interests departed from their own. The Bromberg Regierungsbezirk was not monolithically Conservative, but more of a political Swiss cheese, with non-Conservative enclaves growing in strength as the Conservatives (who nonetheless remained the preeminent German party) alienated supporters by becoming more agrarian.

However, though the data suggest that Anderson's emphasis on coercion in eastern Prussia would not fully apply in this election in this Regierungsbezirk, they reinforce her more general argument about Kaiserreich politics: the Germans here were learning to "practice democracy," too, though at the Landtag- rather than the Reichstag-level. Where ethnic or other balances of power were more critical, the individual's votes (though unequally weighted) mattered more.<sup>100</sup> The behavior of Conservative Notables in this Regierungsbezirk further suggests that even they were learning to lead (or at least to manage), rather than to control. Though perhaps beginning as "natural" leaders due to their status, they now had to maintain their leadership, not coercively but by having to account for their performance in pursuing their constituents' interests. Notability, certainly a precondition, no longer sufficed; even in the most solidly Conservative Landtag district (Czarnikau-Filehne-Kolmar), they chose not to compel obedience but to eject a fellow Notable because he *potentially* would draw the voters' ire. While local elites only nominally consulted voters on the selection of candidates, their inability to count on the voters' compliance itself departs from our standard conception of rural *Honoratiorenpolitik*, and suggests that a new style of politics was emerging even here, and rural Notables ignored this at their peril.

The decline of agriculture and the rise of ethnic rivalry in this Regierungsbezirk both contributed to making its Landtag politics more voter-oriented and less pseudodemocratic than expected (though, with a three-class males-only suffrage and a nonsecret ballot, only marginally democratic), differing less than expected from politics elsewhere in more researched parts of the Kaiserreich in its incipient "practicing" of democratic habits.<sup>101</sup> Given the presence of towns in every rural area in Prussia, and thus the potential for non-Conservative

100. One would expect the more egalitarian and democratic rules for Reichstag elections (secret and equal votes, especially) to promote popular sovereignty more. But, as noted, these same rules meant that the Polish majorities in many Kreise routinely overrode German minorities, making negotiations for German Reichstag-level cartels pointless. Sensitivity about the electorate's wishes was pointless under the circumstances, so that democracy was less "practiced" there than at the Landtag level.

101. This also would parallel the arguments on German economic history of J.A. Perkins, who has demonstrated that the contrasts of landownership between small-holding "West Elbia" and estate-dominated "East Elbia" are exaggerated, as well. See J.A. Perkins, "A Reinterpretation of 19th-Century German Agrarian History" (Ph.D. diss., University of New South Wales, 1985), and his "Dualism in German Agrarian Historiography" in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 28 (1986), 287–306.

enclaves everywhere, one might infer the potential elsewhere for analogous circumstances of razor-thin margins at the Reichstag or Landtag level, which would make voters' support solicited, rather than assumed, and which would erode the local elites' ability to dominate. Further research into local preelectoral maneuverings elsewhere in rural Prussia will determine whether Bromberg's political development was unique, or simply more manifest.

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