

## CIVIL–MILITARY RELATIONS IN THE EARLY WEIMAR REPUBLIC

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**ABSTRACT.** *The historiography on civil–military relations in the early years of the Weimar Republic has concentrated on issues such as the soldiers’ councils, the threat of a radical left-wing uprising and the difficulties of demobilization. This article broadens the perspective on co-operation between the officer corps and the government, arguing that the collapse of the Kaiserreich provided an opportunity to remake the state. For very different reasons, liberal and socialist politicians and officers shared a community of interests in centralizing the Reich. Officers believed that a more centralized state was more effective in military and foreign policy terms. Whereas other incidents of co-operation were due to urgent necessity, the establishment of the Reichswehr Ministry showed that the new state could potentially serve the longer term agenda of the officer corps. However the plans for a centralized Reichswehr Ministry were opposed by those who held power in the federal states, particularly in southern Germany. With support from the National Assembly and the cabinet, opposition from the states was overcome. This episode in Weimar history shows that the view of antagonistic civil–military relations must be modified to take account of the ways in which the officer corps sought to exploit the possibilities opened up by the German revolution of 1918.*

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Between 1870 and 1919 Bavaria, Prussia, Saxony, and Württemberg had their own ministries of war, guaranteed by the *Reservatrechte* which were part of the treaties signed in November 1870 between the North German Confederation and Bavaria and Württemberg. They allowed those two states, as well as Prussia and Saxony to retain their own war ministries. Military unity was provided by the Kaiser, who was the commander in chief of all the German armies in wartime, and the General Staff which was centralized in Berlin.<sup>1</sup> This tenuous form of military unity was undermined after the collapse of *Kaiserreich* in November 1918. While there was little doubt that Germany would remain united despite defeat and the presence of separatist movements in the Rhineland, there was debate over the degree of federalism in the new state. As in the case of tax reform and transport, the question of military unity was settled in favour of the centralizers.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte, 1866–1918: Machtstaat vor der Demokratie* (Munich, 1992), p. 202; Lothar Gall, *Bismarck: the white revolutionary, 1815–1871* (2 vols., London, 1990), 1, pp. 371–2.

<sup>2</sup> On tax reform see Gerald Feldman, *The Great Disorder: politics, economics and society in the German inflation* (Oxford, 1993), p. 161, who argues that next ‘to the actual creation of the Republic it was probably the most revolutionary act in the history of the Weimar Republic’; Reginald Phelps, ‘Aus den Groener-Dokumenten’, *Deutsche Rundschau* 76 (1950), pp. 735–8.

Therefore the abolition of the states' war ministries can be seen as part of the Weimar Republic's 'centralizing' project.<sup>3</sup>

The Reich–state conflict in the early years of the Weimar Republic has often been obscured by the more spectacular political struggle between the right and left. Moreover, civil–military relations are portrayed as frayed, with the recalcitrant officer corps undermining the new regime.<sup>4</sup> This study of the Reich–state negotiations on military unity between February and July 1919, based on documents from federal and regional archives, argues that the centralizing project of the Weimar Republic cut across traditional political divisions, such as those between right and left, and between the military and civilian leadership. It suggests that military reformers could refashion their administrative and planning functions in accordance with the principles of military efficiency and in co-operation with the provisional government of the Council of People's Commissars, and then the centre–left coalition which was in power until June 1920. The reconstruction of the state was of fundamental importance to the officer corps. In spite of the dominant historiographical image of officers hanging their heads in despair at the demise of the *Kaiserreich*, it can be argued that the revolution provided opportunities – to sweep away the materialistic culture that had undermined Wilhelmine Germany and to modernize state structures which had been exposed as inadequate during the war.<sup>5</sup> While most of these hopes and expectations went unfulfilled the centralization of the war ministries was hailed by officers as a positive achievement.

This study directs attention away from the activities of the *Freikorps* and the suppression of the radical left to the bureaucratic politics taking place in Berlin which shaped the foundation of the *Reichswehr*.<sup>6</sup> The early institutional history has received little specific attention.<sup>7</sup> Hürten argued that this may be due to the restrictions the Versailles treaty placed on the *Reichswehr*, which have led historians

<sup>3</sup> The best account of the centralization of the Reich between 1918 and 1920 is Gerhard Schulz, *Zwischen Krieg und Diktatur: Verfassungspolitik und Reichsreform in der Weimarer Republik* (2 vols., Berlin, 1987), 1, pp. 21–320. However, he has little to say on the question of military unity.

<sup>4</sup> F. C. L. Carsten, *The Reichswehr and politics, 1918–1933* (Oxford, 1966), remains the classic statement of antagonistic civil–military relations. Wolfram Wette is critical of both the officer corps and the SPD, *Gustav Noske: eine politische Biographie* (Düsseldorf, 1988). For a more positive interpretation see Heinz Hürten, 'Der Kapp Putsch als Wende: über Rahmenbedingungen der Weimarer Republik seit dem Frühjahr 1920', in *Rheinisch-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Düsseldorf, 1989).

<sup>5</sup> On notions of rebirth and optimism in the early Weimar Republic, see Rainer Hering, "'Des Deutschen Volkes Wiedergeburt": Völkischer Nationalismus und politische Erneuerungspläne', *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft des Deutschen Volkes*, 42 (1994), pp. 1079–84. Many of these expectations were *völkisch* and disappointment soon led to trenchant criticism of the 'unGerman' Republic.

<sup>6</sup> Hagen Schulze, *Freikorps und Republik, 1918–1920* (Boppard am Rhein, 1969); H. W. Koch, *Der deutsche Bürgerkrieg: eine Geschichte der deutschen und österreichischen Freikorps, 1918–1923* (Frankfurt, 1979).

<sup>7</sup> Two exceptions are Heinz Hürten, 'Heeresverfassung und Länderrecht: Württemberg in den Auseinandersetzungen der Weimarer Nationalversammlung um die Bildung einer einheitlichen Reichswehr', *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen (MgM)*, 23 (1978), pp. 147–82; Hans Meier-Welcker, 'Die Stellung des Chefs der Heeresleitung in den Anfängen der Republik. Zur Entstehungsgeschichte des Reichswehrministeriums', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte (VfZ)*, 4 (1956), pp. 145–60.

to assume that the possibilities for internal reform were extremely circumscribed.<sup>8</sup> His own contribution to the historiography of the origins of the *Reichswehr* Ministry was the publication of documents which covered the reaction of Württemberg to the initial suggestions of a centralized ministry. The assumption that structures of the *Reichswehr* were wholly imposed by Versailles does contain a certain element of truth. However, it obscures the opportunities which officers saw for forging a more effective army. In 1919 officers faced the immediate challenges of demobilization and the threat from the radical left. Yet they also had ambitions for the restoration of Germany as a Great Power. In this longer term perspective the bureaucratic politics which shaped the *Reichswehr* Ministry provide an important insight into military politics and the scope for co-operation between the civilian government and the officer corps.

## I

Although four states had their own war ministries in the *Kaiserreich*, historians have argued that this was a mere veil of independence.<sup>9</sup> Pull it back, and the unconditional loyalty of the Bavarian and Württemberg armies to the Reich was clear. Although the Kaiser had the power of command (*Kommandogewalt*) in Bavaria only in wartime, the armies had almost identical training procedures. Moreover, there was a high level of officer exchange between the different states. The early careers of two of the senior officers in the German army in 1919, General Wilhelm Groener and Colonel Walther Reinhardt, are examples of the interaction between the different states' armies in the *Kaiserreich*. Reinhardt, a Württemberger, but since January 1919 the Prussian minister of war, was trained in the Prussian War Academy, and then worked in a variety of posts, before preparing the mobilization plans for the Württemberg 13th Army Corp.<sup>10</sup> Groener, the quartermaster general and moving spirit of the Supreme Command from late 1918 to the summer of 1919, was also a Württemberger, who had worked in the Prussian Ministry of War during the war.<sup>11</sup> But the vital element in the *Kaiserreich*'s military unity was the position of the Kaiser. His abdication undermined the framework of military unity. If Germany was to remain united, then a united army was an important feature of the Reich's sovereignty.

Despite occasional calls for the unification of the war ministries,<sup>12</sup> the system of separate ministries appears to have worked during the *Kaiserreich* era. However,

<sup>8</sup> Hürten, 'Heeresverfassung und Länderrecht', p. 147.

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of the *Kaiserreich*'s military constitution, see Eckart Busch, *Der Oberbefehl: seine rechtliche Struktur in Preußen und Deutschland seit 1848* (Boppard am Rhein, 1967), pp. 19–48.

<sup>10</sup> Fritz Ernst, 'Walther Reinhardt (1872–1930)', *Zeitschrift für württembergische Landesgeschichte*, 16 (1957), pp. 331–64.

<sup>11</sup> Johannes Hürter, *Wilhelm Groener: Reichswehrminister am Ende der Weimarer Republik* (Munich, 1993).

<sup>12</sup> 'Reichskriegsministerium und Kontingentskriegsministerien', Hauptstaatsarchiv, Stuttgart (HstAST), M 1/3, 683, fos. 1–33, and also an article from the *Straßburger Post*, 28 Dec. 1912; General Major von Habermaas, 'Heereswesen', in B. Bruns, ed., *Württemberg unter der Regierung König Wilhelms II* (Stuttgart, 1916), pp. 224–9.

the end of the war and collapse of the state opened up the question of the Reich–states relationship. Despite the existence of several separatist groups the vast majority of Germans assumed that Germany would and should remain united. There was disagreement on the level and manner of unity within the Republic, with most politicians and bureaucrats within the Reich’s political system tending to campaign for more centralized power, while those within the states’ power bases tried to retain as many of their privileges as possible. Both sides of the debate had a mixture of hard-edged self-interest and genuine political beliefs.

The most important figure in the early stages of the debate was Hugo Preuß, a liberal lawyer, appointed to the Interior Ministry’s committee to draw up a constitution. On 3 January 1919 he produced a draft and an accompanying essay. His principal concern was to ensure that the will of the whole German people was democratically expressed in the *Reichstag*. This would guarantee ‘the free right of self-determination of the German nation in its totality’. Preuß argued that throughout German history the states’ dynasties had held back the creation of a united democratic state. Now that the revolution had swept the dynasties away, there was an opportunity to establish a German democracy on a firm footing. Preuß also recognized the obstacles which would have to be overcome. In his view, the revolution had brought a new set of vested interests to power and he feared that Germany could become ‘a league of twenty-five “free states”’. From his historical analysis Preuß concluded that the Prussian state had continually hindered a truly united German state. Its continued existence would be ‘a constitutional, political and economic impossibility’. Due to its size Prussia would be able to prevent the implementation of policy decisions made at Reich level. By breaking Prussia up into smaller units, the Reich would encourage the smaller states to stay in a united Germany, and would also make it easier for German-Austria, one of the Habsburg Empire’s successor states to unite and hence form a ‘Greater Germany’.<sup>13</sup> In Preuß’s system the centralized Reich would have the vast majority of the power, including control over external affairs, economic policy, the railways, and the postal system. The same principle would apply to military affairs, although he recognized that the Allies would have some say in the final composition of Germany’s military forces.<sup>14</sup> Preuß’s conception of the constitution would have reduced the states to administrative tasks, broken up Prussia, which had provided a model of military prowess to Europe for almost two centuries, and concentrated power in Berlin.

This radical conception of a centralized German Reich found little support among the political parties in the National Assembly, and there was no possibility that Prussia was going to be replaced by a number of smaller administrative units.<sup>15</sup> Although the National Assembly was not prepared to accept the more

<sup>13</sup> Hugo Preuß, *Staat, Recht und Freiheit: aus 40 Jahren deutscher Politik und Geschichte* (Hildesheim, 1964), pp. 370–9.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 379–84.

<sup>15</sup> Heinrich August Winkler, *Weimar, 1918–1933: die Geschichte der ersten deutschen Demokratie* (Munich, 1993), pp. 99–100.

radical ideas of Preuß, the majority of its members were in favour of a more centralized state. The Socialist party, the SPD, had traditionally seen the myriad of states in the *Kaiserreich* as irrational and as a barrier to true democracy. Power tempered their idealism, but they supported one of the most important reforms, the centralization of the tax system. A certain degree of centralized economic planning had been legitimated by the experience of war planning. From December 1918 onwards the Reich government, and Matthias Erzberger, the Centre party's Reich finance minister, pressured the states into the centralization of the finance system.<sup>16</sup> Erzberger, who was thoroughly detested in the officer corps for his role in the Peace Resolutions of July 1917, had carried out financial reforms which could only be approved of from the military point of view.

In the late 1920s Reinhardt commented that 'the transfer of direct income tax to the financial administration of the Reich solved the basic question, seen simply from the point of military effectiveness, better than ever before in German history'.<sup>17</sup> The remaking of the state was of particular interest to the officer corps. It was widely believed that the more centralized the state, the better equipped it was to wage war, or at least an activist foreign policy. In a letter to President Friedrich Ebert (SPD), Groener argued that the opportunity presented by the revolution 'must be exploited under all circumstances in order to make the German dream of a powerful state, encompassing the whole German race, and based on a strong central power, reality'. If the National Assembly were able to force through a high degree of centralization, he was prepared to accept the break up of Prussia.<sup>18</sup> Groener repeated these sentiments at a meeting of Supreme Command officers on 19 and 20 May, which were closely linked to his ideas for a long-term recovery by Germany. He argued that only as a unitary state (*Einheitsstaat*) could Germany return to her great power status. An article in the journal, *Das Militärwochenblatt*, warned that the unitary state would be endangered by too many concessions to the states. In a small army the plethora of ministries would have to be avoided.<sup>19</sup> Clearly the officers corps and the SPD had different ultimate goals, but for a moment their intermediate aim of a centralized state overlapped, producing a powerful reforming alliance. The development towards the unitary state in 1919 was an indication that the Weimar Republic was not necessarily antithetical to the officer corps' view of an ideal state.

While Groener was advising Ebert to press for the most unitary state possible, Reinhardt, the Prussian minister of war, had a crucial role in unifying the states' ministries. He conducted the negotiations with the various states, and at the end

<sup>16</sup> Feldman, *The Great Disorder*, pp. 161–6.

<sup>17</sup> Ernst Reinhardt, ed., *Walther Reinhardt: Wehrkraft und Wehrwille: aus seinem Nachlaß mit einer Lebensbeschreibung* (Berlin, 1932), p. 84; Niall Ferguson, 'Public finance and national security: the domestic origins of the First World War revisited', *Past and Present*, 142 (1994), pp. 144, 155–8.

<sup>18</sup> Heinz Hürten, ed., *Zwischen Revolution und Kapp-Putsch: Militär und Innenpolitik, 1918–1920* (Düsseldorf, 1977), p. 53.

<sup>19</sup> *Das Militärwochenblatt*, 3 Jan. 1920, p. 1451, 'Das neue Reichswehrgesetz und der Kampf um den deutschen Einheitsstaat'.

of his career he saw the creation of the *Reichswehr* Ministry as his most significant achievement.<sup>20</sup> A number of factors influenced Reinhardt's policy on this issue. First and foremost, it was a question of efficiency and practicality.<sup>21</sup> Reinhardt saw the establishment of the North German Confederation as a highly significant development in German military organization, when 'the element finally came into the German military structure, which had been missing since the era of the Stauffer dynasty, namely the unifying central point, in the form of the King of Prussia as the supreme commander'.<sup>22</sup> After 1918 the creation of the *Reichswehr* Ministry guaranteed military unity. Further, as Reinhardt would make clear in the course of negotiations with the states, the unwieldy structures of German military administration had hampered the war effort.<sup>23</sup> The centralization of military administration appeared even more necessary after the failings of the First World War.

Despite his Württemberg background he was deeply opposed to Preuß's proposed dissolution of Prussia. Reinhardt argued that the collapse of Prussia would defeat the aim of centralization by making Germany weaker. On 14 January 1919 the acting cabinet, the Council of People's Commissars, of which Reinhardt was a non-voting member, met to discuss the second draft of the constitution. Preuß pointed out the incongruities of Prussia's overwhelming power within Germany, and called for its break up. Reinhardt was the first to speak in favour of Prussia's position within Germany. According to Reinhardt:

Prussia has become great through its state-building powers, which have not yet disappeared. German unity has been achieved through the unity of ever bigger states; not for nothing does Berlin lie on the edge between the industrial west and the agrarian east. The question is whether, without a strong Prussia, the many different parts of Germany would possess the centripetal power, in order to resist the attempts to amalgamate with non-German neighbouring states.<sup>24</sup>

Reinhardt accepted the principles of centralization, but not Preuß's means of achieving this goal. For Reinhardt the process of centralization could be part of the organic development of the Reich rather than a mechanistic and unhistorical imposition. His interpretation of the historical mission of Prussia enabled him to combine the practicalities of power politics with the idealism of an ever-evolving state.

<sup>20</sup> Reinhardt, ed., *Wehrkraft und Wehrwille*, p. 51.

<sup>21</sup> Doctrines of military efficiency were at the core of the *Reichswehr's* policies, see Michael Geyer, 'The past as future: the German officer corps as profession', in Geoffrey Cocks and Konrad Jarausch, eds., *German professions, 1800–1950* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 197–200.

<sup>22</sup> Reinhardt, ed., *Wehrkraft und Wehrwille*, pp. 83–4.

<sup>23</sup> Niederschrift über die Verhandlung der Staatenvertreter in Weimar, 5–8 Feb. 1919, Bundesarchiv-Lichterfelde (BArch), R 43 1/1863, fo. 248.

<sup>24</sup> Susanne Miller and Erich Matthias, eds., *Die Regierung der Volksbeauftragten, 1918–1919* (2 vols., Düsseldorf, 1969), II, pp. 240–4.

## II

Although Reinhardt opposed the break up of Prussia, Preuß's draft plan of the constitution opened the way for the unity of the states' war ministries. Article 3 of the first draft stated: 'Reich affairs, which are exclusively the legislative and administrative prerogative of the Reich, include the defence of the Reich on land, sea and in the air.'<sup>25</sup> Without the centralizing policies of the civilian government, Reinhardt would have been unable to unify the states' war ministries. The earliest indication that the Prussian Ministry of War was drafting plans for a future unified ministry is a diary reference by Colonel Ernst van den Bergh, a member of the SPD *Reichswehr* Minister Gustav Noske's staff, on 10 January 1919, to a plan for a peace-time 'Ministry of War'.<sup>26</sup> There were a number of other incidents which suggest that Reinhardt was thinking of a united ministry. When Noske was casting about for an appropriate title for his position in charge of military affairs in the new cabinet Reinhardt suggested the term 'Reichswehr minister', because it avoided using the word 'war', which was not on Germany's immediate agenda in 1919, and because it signified that the Reich had authority over military policy.<sup>27</sup> The decrees of 19 January 1919, which set the terms of service in the post-war army and applied to all contingents of the German army, were formulated in negotiations between the Prussian Ministry of War and the Central Council, representative of the soldiers' councils. This was a de facto centralization of military policy in Berlin.<sup>28</sup> At a cabinet meeting on 21 February it was formally agreed that the unification of the states' ministries could proceed. All administrative and command functions would become the prerogatives of the Reich.<sup>29</sup> The cabinet had set the general terms and delegated the task of negotiating with the states to Reinhardt. The cabinet had rated his organizational skills very highly, and he believed that the organization of an army was a central part of the soldier's profession.<sup>30</sup>

However, these negotiations were complicated by the opposition of the states to the loss of their war ministries and military rights.<sup>31</sup> This opposition was based on regional identity, fear of 'Borussification', hatred of Prussia, and regional political interest. The revolution might have destroyed regional dynastic interest, but the successor governments to the monarchs and dukes of the *Kaiserreich* were unwilling to give up their newly acquired power. Kurt Eisner, leader of the left-wing USPD

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 249.

<sup>26</sup> Wolfram Wette, ed., *Aus den Geburtsstunden der Weimarer Republik: das Tagebuch des Obersten Ernst van den Bergh* (Düsseldorf, 1991), pp. 79–82.

<sup>27</sup> *Idem*, *Gustav Noske: eine politische Biographie* (Düsseldorf, 1988), pp. 354–5.

<sup>28</sup> Eberhard Kolb and Reinhard Rürup, eds., *Der Zentralrat der deutschen sozialistischen Republik, 19.12.18–8.4.19* (Leiden, 1968), pp. 441–8.

<sup>29</sup> Abschrift, memorandum of cabinet meeting, 21 Feb. 1919, Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv (BA-MA), Freiburg, N 86/16.

<sup>30</sup> *Wehrkraft und Wehrwille*, pp. 50–1.

<sup>31</sup> These ministries went under various names after November 1918; in Baden, where a new ministry was established, it was called 'Ministerium für militärische Angelegenheiten' (Ministry for Military Affairs); Bavaria used the same term; in Prussia, Saxony, and Württemberg the name 'Kriegsministerium' (Ministry of War) was retained.



and head of the Bavarian government in the aftermath of the revolution, commented that he did not want 'a one-sided Prussian dictatorship in place of the Prussian military aristocracy which had been fortunately destroyed'.<sup>32</sup> By 1918, the Bavarian army felt exploited by the Prussian army.<sup>33</sup> As law and order collapsed states tended to look after their own internal security interests. Throughout Germany guard units were established, which were the potential nucleus of new state armies.<sup>34</sup> In a Karlsruhe paper in early January 1919 citizens were urged to join the local *Ordnungswehr* (order guard) which would help protect 'freedom and order in the Baden Republic'.<sup>35</sup> The dissolving military unity of Germany was evident in the declarations of Baden and Braunschweig that their military conventions with Prussia had ended with the abdication of the Kaiser. Noske had to meet with a representative of the tiny Braunschweig government, and put forward the Reich government's view that the military conventions were valid until a new accord was reached.<sup>36</sup> The Reich negotiators would have to overcome the emotional bond which many Germans had with their state, a bond of which the states' government were deeply aware.

The states had already been exposed to the strong winds of centralization. The Prussian cabinet, while not against the decrees of 19 January 1919, were annoyed that Reinhardt, himself a member of the cabinet, had failed to consult them, since the decrees infringed upon the rights of the Prussian state.<sup>37</sup> At a meeting of the states and Reich on 25 January, Preuß put the case for a united military organization, which would allow 'the security of national existence against foreign threats and the maintenance of peace and order at home'. Preuß developed his argument for a more centralized state in terms of the primacy of foreign policy, an unusual position for a liberal to espouse, but one close to the position of the officer corps: 'The securing of the position of the Reich in foreign affairs in the manner that shows foreigners that there is only one Reich and not individual tribes (*Stämme*) is necessary for the existence of Germany.'<sup>38</sup> However, his calls for a unitary state, be they couched in terms of democracy, or of national existence, held little appeal for the states. Georg Gradnauer, the Saxon minister president, suggested that only limited constitutional decisions should be taken in the current situation, while Eisner warned that the states must be included in any constitutional debates. Finally Ebert agreed to establish a committee for the states

<sup>32</sup> Heinz Hürten, 'Heeresverfassung und Länderrecht: Württemberg in den Auseinandersetzungen der Weimarer Nationalversammlung um die Bildung einer einheitlichen Reichswehr', *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen*, 23 (1978), p. 147.

<sup>33</sup> David Clay Large, 'The politics of law and order: a history of the Bavarian *Einwohnerwehr*, 1918–1921', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 70 (1980), p. 7.

<sup>34</sup> Ulrich Kluge, *Soldatenräte und Revolution: Studien zur Militärpolitik in Deutschland, 1918–1919* (Göttingen, 1978), pp. 188–95.

<sup>35</sup> *Karlsruher Tagesblatt*, 12 Jan. 1919.

<sup>36</sup> Reichswehrministerium memorandum, 23 Mar. 1919, BArch, R 43 1/2265, fo. 12.

<sup>37</sup> Protocol of Prussian cabinet meeting, 24 Jan. 1919, Geheimes Staatsarchiv, Dahlem, 90a, Nr 6, B III, 2 b, vol. 168, fo. 13.

<sup>38</sup> Memorandum of meeting on the constitution on 25 Jan. 1919, BArch, R 43 1/1863, fos. 70–1.



which would deal with constitutional issues, a move which opened the way for negotiations.<sup>39</sup>

To co-ordinate their position on Reich military policy the Württemberg government organized a meeting of Baden, Bavarian, Saxon, and Württemberg military ministers and advisers in Stuttgart on 3 February 1919.<sup>40</sup> This meeting indicates some of the strengths and weaknesses of the states' position vis-à-vis that of the Prussian Ministry of War, which was essentially acting as an organ of the Reich government. Immanuel Hermann, the SPD Württemberg minister of war opened the conference with the statement that 'as regards military questions we assume that the unity of the Reich is unconditional. On the other hand we want at the least to preserve the military and political independence which we have enjoyed until now, and that the independence of the federal states should be further developed if possible.'<sup>41</sup> Albert Roßhaupter, Bavaria's SPD minister of military affairs, sought the preservation of Bavaria's rights under the *Kaiserreich's* military constitution. He had little confidence that the Prussians would be accommodating to the needs of the other states, and urged that the four states represented at the conference act in unison. While both Württemberg and Bavaria could afford the bureaucratic structures necessary to maintain their own units, Baden's representative, Professor Hummel of the Democratic party, was doubtful about the rationale of a Baden ministry for perhaps just one brigade. Beyond retaining their rights, the states' representatives made few constructive suggestions. Major Weng, a Bavarian, proposed 'a directory with the participation of the federal states'.<sup>42</sup> Yet, as his Bavarian colleague Dr Erhard, pointed out this would allow Prussia to dominate military affairs as the largest state. The result of the meeting was a vague agreement that the states would maintain a broad front against plans to sweep aside their rights. The defence of their rights was their main argument. Hermann suggested that they adopt the standpoint, 'that the status quo cannot be changed without the approval of the states'.<sup>43</sup> It was difficult for the states to agree on any detailed plan because first, they were uncertain of what Reinhardt intended to do, and secondly, they had divergent interests themselves. Therefore they ended up reacting to the initiatives taken by the Prussian Ministry of War.

The united front of Baden, Bavaria, and Württemberg, who had shown most interest in opposing a centralized military organization, was tested at a meeting of the states with Reinhardt, and two aides, at the Fürstenhaus in Weimar between 5 and 8 February. Franz Sperr, the Bavarian military envoy, was adamant that the states' rights should be preserved. He was supported by the Baden and Württemberg representatives. However, Preuß insisted on a united army, within whose framework some concessions could be made to the states.<sup>44</sup> Reinhardt

<sup>39</sup> Memorandum of meeting on the constitution on 25 Jan. 1919, BAArch, R 43 1/1863, fo. 99.

<sup>40</sup> Hürten, 'Heeresverfassung und Länderrecht', pp. 154–64, contains the minutes of the meeting.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

<sup>44</sup> Niederschrift über die Verhandlung der Staatenvertreter in Weimar, 5–8 Feb. 1919, BAArch, R 43 1/1863, fos. 241–8.

pointed out that practical considerations suggested the unification of the war ministries:

While recognizing the wartime performance of each contingent, one must still say that too many variations existed in the army ... At the moment we can simplify and make [the army] cheaper; the details are the concern of the *Reichswehr* law. The states' wishes should be accommodated as far as possible. Beneath the *Reichswehr* Ministry will be the Austrian, Prussian, etc. high commands. These can be given some administrative functions (housing troops, and similar functions). Training and education must be under the control of the Reich, since they are central to the spirit of the army. That the Reich General Staff must be united is self-explanatory, as well as justice and conscription. In the future we will not be able to maintain a large army. Therefore I suggest: 'The defence of the Reich is exclusively the affair of the Reich. The necessary institutions will be administered according to the *Reichswehr* law.'<sup>45</sup>

Reinhardt's position vis-à-vis the states was strong. His rational arguments, based on experience in war and current realities, contrasted with the states' insistence on their rights. Reinhardt had positive policy suggestions, and controlled the agenda. While willing to compromise he ensured that any compromise would not upset the overall aim of his policy, a more efficiently structured military administration. However, neither Reinhardt nor Preuß were able to get Bavaria and its dogged military envoy, Sperr, to agree to the changes in the draft constitution.<sup>46</sup>

Two days after the end of the meeting at the Fürstenhaus in Weimar, Konrad von Preger, the Bavarian envoy to the Reich, reminded Ebert that he had promised not to sideline the states by using the vast majority in the National Assembly in favour of a centralized Reich.<sup>47</sup> This letter was prompted by the removal of the fourth clause of article 5 of the constitution, which dealt with military affairs. Article 5 was a confusing mix, promising a united administrative organization, whilst also explicitly guaranteeing Bavaria's *Sonderrechte*, the rights guaranteed by the 1870 treaties. The removal of the fourth clause clarified the situation, but to the detriment of Bavaria, by excluding the guarantee.<sup>48</sup> This was the subject of a further Reich-states meeting between 18 and 20 February. Preuß explained that members of the Centre party had been behind the change. Preger felt 'surprised and disconcerted', whilst Sperr stated categorically that a united army was not a possibility at the moment.<sup>49</sup> Reinhardt replied that the other clauses gave guarantees that the states' wishes would be considered in

<sup>45</sup> Niederschrift über die Verhandlung der Staatenvertreter in Weimar, 5–8 Feb. 1919, BArch, R 43 1/1863, fo. 248.

<sup>46</sup> Niederschrift über die Verhandlung der Staatenvertreter in Weimar, 5–8 Feb. 1919, BArch, R 43 1/1863, fos. 248–9.

<sup>47</sup> Preger to Ebert, Weimar, 10 Feb. 1919, BArch, R 43 1/1863, fo. 57.

<sup>48</sup> Zusammenfassung des Entwurfs einer Verfassung des deutschen Reiches, Beschlüsse des 8. Ausschusses, BArch, R 43 1/1863, fo. 433.

<sup>49</sup> Memorandum on meeting of *Staatenausschuss*, Weimar, 18–20 Feb. 1919, BArch, R 43 1/1863, fo. 299.

the framework of a united army. He urged the states to take ‘a step forwards towards unity’.<sup>50</sup>

Reinhardt’s early conception of a united army had a number of features. First, the *Reichswehr* minister would exercise the same rights as the Kaiser had. This reflects Reinhardt’s view that the Kaiser was the unifying central point for Germany, as well as his desire for a strong, decisive policy-making institution. Secondly, Reinhardt was not prepared to allow the continued existence of the states’ war ministries. Thirdly, he was prepared to give the larger states, and here he included Hesse and Baden, *Kommandostellen* (command posts subordinate to the *Reichswehr* minister). By this he meant that the larger states could have their own units, and that the command structure would be based on the Reich’s federal structure. Hence the chain of command would run from the *Reichswehr* minister in Berlin to commanders in Munich, Karlsruhe, and Dresden and so on. Since the *Reichswehr* minister would exercise central control this chain of command would not damage the unified structure of the army, and it would also go some way towards appeasing the states.

The *Reichswehr* Ministry’s control of the chain of command led to opposition to Reinhardt’s plans from within the officer corps and especially from officers in the General Staff, who felt that their influence would be greatly diminished. In general it was unusual to find officers who opposed the process of centralization, since this would lead to a more effective military apparatus, but self-interest dictated tactical opposition from some senior officers. In early February, General Martin von Oldershausen, a Saxon in the Supreme Command, argued that the states should retain their war ministries, whilst the General Staff would remain independent.<sup>51</sup> In early March General Hans von Seeckt, then based with Army Command North, played devil’s advocate, suggesting that ‘the particularist desires of the federal states have come so strongly to the fore due to the revolution that it does not seem worthwhile to introduce the necessary form of the Reich army with force’.<sup>52</sup> However, Groener, the leading General Staff officer and future critic of Reinhardt, supported his fellow Württemberger’s centralization policy. Seeckt would have to wait to fight Reinhardt’s ascendancy at a more appropriate time.<sup>53</sup>

The political momentum was also shifting in favour of a unitary *Reichswehr* Ministry. It was clear that the National Assembly desired a more centralized Reich, and this had enabled the government to remove the fourth clause guaranteeing previous agreements. Having made his general position clear to the

<sup>50</sup> Memorandum on meeting of *Staatenausschuss*, Weimar, 18–20 Feb. 1919, BAArch, R 43 1/1863, fos. 300–2.

<sup>51</sup> Jürgen Schmädke, *Militärische Kommandogewalt und parlamentarische Kontrolle: zum Problem der Verantwortlichkeit des Reichswehrministers in der Weimarer Republik* (Lübeck and Hamburg, 1966), pp. 62–5.

<sup>52</sup> Abschrift of memorandum, Seeckt to Reinhardt, 1 Mar. 1919, BA-MA, N 247/66, fo. 29.

<sup>53</sup> Hans Meier-Welcker, ‘Die Stellung des Chefs der Heeresleitung in den Anfängen der Republik: zur Entstehungsgeschichte des Reichswehrministeriums’, *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 4 (1956), pp. 145–60, details the Seeckt-Reinhardt struggle in the second half of 1919.

states' representatives Reinhardt was now able to concentrate on negotiating an accord with them. Initially this took the form of pressurizing individual states, particularly Baden and Württemberg. The two south-western German states occupied a key position. As the smallest states which could support an independent military bureaucracy, it was imperative to persuade them to accept a unitary solution to the issue of military organization. Since Saxony had shown less enthusiasm for preserving their rights, and preferred to position itself as a mediator between Prussia and southern Germany, this would leave Bavaria isolated.

In November 1918 Baden had formed a War Ministry.<sup>54</sup> This was a unilateral violation of the convention of 1870 by Baden, but it appeared to force the Reich to adopt two different policies on the agreements of 1870. On the one hand Reinhardt was prepared to allow the National Assembly to dissolve the accords with Bavaria and Württemberg, but was not willing to allow Baden to dissolve its 1870 agreement with Prussia. On 19 February Reinhardt and Noske wrote to the Baden envoy to the Reich rejecting the creation of an independent military administration in Baden. Instead they hoped 'that in the new army Baden, in agreement with Prussia, could become the first state to enter a Reich military structure'.<sup>55</sup> Yet despite the contradiction in their policy towards the agreements of 1870, they maintained the upper hand. The National Assembly was regarded as the body charged with drafting the constitution, and no encroachments on its powers would be tolerated. This allowed Reinhardt and Noske to adopt this dual standard, and force the states to take whatever concessions they could, for fear of the unitary tendencies of the National Assembly.

The Baden envoy also recognized the danger that an independent Prussian military structure represented. It would be just as easy for Prussia to dominate German military affairs outside the framework of a *Reichswehr* Ministry, as within one. None the less, there was no easy solution to the conundrum.<sup>56</sup> On 22 February Baden's Exterior Ministry wrote to Minister President Geiss and suggested that in the light of the removal of the fourth clause, Baden should negotiate with the Reich on the relationships of state and Reich within the *Reichswehr*.<sup>57</sup> If Baden's policy was immobilized by uncertainty about how best to limit Prussian influence in German military affairs, it was also restricted by an instruction to the envoy in Berlin 'that what Württemberg had, Baden should get as well'.<sup>58</sup>

The first major steps towards the final resolution of the Reich–states military relationship were taken at a series of meetings between Reinhardt, Erzberger, and Otto Landsberg, the Reich justice minister, and representatives from

<sup>54</sup> Militär Konvention zwischen Baden und Preußen vom 25. Nov. 1916, Generallandesarchiv, Karlsruhe (GLAK), Abt. 233/12441.

<sup>55</sup> Abschrift, Baden envoy to Baden Interior Ministry, 20 Feb. 1919, GLAK, Abt. 233/12441.

<sup>56</sup> Baden envoy to Baden Interior Ministry, 20 Feb. 1919, GLAK, Abt. 233/12441.

<sup>57</sup> Baden Exterior Ministry to Geiss, 22 Feb. 1919, GLAK, Abt. 233/12441.

<sup>58</sup> Baden Interior Ministry to the Baden envoy, Feb. 1919, GLAK, Abt. 233/12441.

Württemberg on 5 and 6 March. On 5 March a preliminary agreement was concluded, and General Renner, the Württemberg military plenipotentiary, sent the draft to Stuttgart. Under the terms of this agreement, Württemberg would constitute a self-contained military district, known as a *Wehrbezirk*. The commander of the *Wehrbezirk* would be appointed by the Reich president, from a list submitted by the Württemberg government. Officers in the *Wehrbezirk* would be named by the Reich president, in conjunction with the commander. The commander would be responsible for the distribution of troops and army manoeuvres within Württemberg. Hence, as the Württemberg military adviser, Horn, commented the only real concession was the position of the *Wehrbezirk's* commander. The possibility of retaining the Württemberg Ministry of War was not even on the agenda.<sup>59</sup> That evening Erzberger rejected the counterproposals drawn up by Renner and Horn. He was in favour of a unified *Reichswehr* Ministry for three reasons. First, it coincided with the aims of his plan for a more unified budgetary and financial system in the Reich, and fewer layers of bureaucracy meant lower administrative costs. Secondly, the Reich needed control of the military to shore up the position of the Reich government. Finally, it was in the interest of the states 'if everything was organized by the Reich, because then the predominance of Prussia would be replaced by the power base of the Reich'.<sup>60</sup> Reinhardt also used this argument to impress the states with the need for a unified ministry. He pointed out that Prussia could only be expected to make the same concessions as other states:

In the Prussian army, as well as in the Prussian government, and I believe the hearts of the Prussian people, the will is present to join the army to the Reich. As a Württemberg colonel, I have the permission of the senior officers of the Prussian army. However, it would not be understood in Prussia if the other states were not willing to make the same concessions as they demand from Prussia.<sup>61</sup>

Both Reinhardt and Erzberger were able to manipulate fear of Prussia to force Württemberg into a unified *Reichswehr* Ministry.

On the morning of 6 March the Württemberg government instructed Horn and Renner to demand that senior officers be appointed by the state government, and that Württemberg troops could only be used outside the state in time of war. Landsberg pointed out that the National Assembly would undoubtedly abolish states' privileges, so therefore Württemberg could either accept the agreement drawn up the previous day, or possibly end up out of the Reich.<sup>62</sup> Landsberg exaggerated the choice open to Württemberg, but a quick survey of National Assembly deputies from Württemberg confirmed the lack of support for states' rights. That afternoon Reinhardt, Erzberger, and Landsberg met Horn and Renner. It was made clear that there would be no parallel ministries in the

<sup>59</sup> Hürten, 'Heeresverfassung und Länderrecht', p. 165.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 165–6.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 151–2.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

states to deal with military affairs and that the military courts would be administered by the Reich. Officers would be named by the *Reichswehr* minister, although Württemberg did have the right to suggest candidates for certain posts. The tenor of the draft agreement was summed up when the Reich representatives concluded 'there are only troops of the Reich, no longer Württemberg or Prussian troops'.<sup>63</sup>

The series of meetings between Reich representatives and Horn and Renner allow an insight into both the tactics and nature of the Reich–state negotiations, and civil–military relations. The Reich had managed to isolate one state, Württemberg, and essentially forced it to accept a draft agreement, by emphasizing the unitary tendencies of the National Assembly. This broke the fragile front which the three south German states were trying to maintain. During the negotiations the Reich was the active partner, and Württemberg's representatives were left to react to the draft agreement of 5 March. By the time of the meeting on 6 March, Württemberg was no longer trying to preserve its rights from 1870, but trying to force concessions on the Reich–state relationship within a unified military framework. The negotiations also demonstrated the close co-operation between the civilian government and their military adviser, Reinhardt. Along with the meetings in February, both in the cabinet and with the states, Reinhardt and civilian ministers had co-operated to implement their ideal of a unified military structure. For Reinhardt, it was more productive to work with a like-minded civilian government than try to pursue independent policies. To a certain extent the relationship was symbiotic, in that it allowed both sides to pursue their common interest and use each others' strengths to achieve these goals. Political relationships were fluid, and alliances were formed and broken easily as one issue followed upon another. The attempt to centralize the Reich's affairs broke traditional political alignments, and pitted social democrat against social democrat, and officer against officer.

On 8 March the Baden envoy to the Reich told the government in Karlsruhe that Reinhardt had come to a agreement with Württemberg, and would make no further concessions. He also noted that negotiations with Saxony and Bavaria were continuing.<sup>64</sup> On the same day Renner asked Reinhardt about a possible contradiction in the recently passed temporary *Reichswehr* law. Article 5 allowed the president to name all senior officers, while Renner interpreted article 16 as protecting Württemberg's and Bavaria's privileges from 1870. Reinhardt's reply that all appointments would be made in conjunction with the personnel section of the Prussian Ministry of War seemed to confirm the position enunciated at the meetings on 5 and 6 March, namely that the states would have to accept what they were given.<sup>65</sup>

However, Bavaria began to adopt a more active negotiating policy. On 8 March Sperr submitted a draft plan to Reinhardt. In many respects it was similar

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 172–4.

<sup>64</sup> Baden envoy to the Reich to Baden government, 8 Mar. 1919, GLAK, Abt. 233/12441.

<sup>65</sup> Renner to the Württemberg government, 8 Mar. 1919, HStASt, M 1/4, Bd. 1612, fo. 67.

to the Württemberg–Reich agreement of 6 March, with an enclosed *Wehrbezirk* and the appointment of officers by the Reich president on the suggestion of the Bavarian government. Yet it also contained more explicit guarantees of states' rights. Bavarian economic interests would have to be taken into account when manoeuvres were taking place, or when troops were being distributed. Undue centralization was to be avoided, and the four largest states, Prussia, Saxony, Bavaria, and Württemberg, would each have an officer on the Reich council which dealt with military affairs. The states would also have representatives at the *Reichswehr* Ministry. Bavarian troops and officers were to be trained in Bavaria, and the uniforms were to express the regional origins of each troop unit.<sup>66</sup> However, the Reich refused to accept these terms, and on 10 March, according to a report by a Baden envoy, Reinhardt, Erzberger, and Landsberg made a similar offer to Bavaria as they had to Württemberg. Preger rejected it, insisting that Bavarian rights could not be infringed upon, and he sought the guarantees which the Bavarian representatives had put forward on 8 March.<sup>67</sup>

The unwillingness of Bavaria to cave into Reich pressure led to a discussion of the military clauses of the constitution in the constitutional committee of the National Assembly on 12 March. At first the question of the president's role in emergency powers was raised, with Preuß pressing for stronger presidential powers. However, no decision was arrived at, and the Bavarian deputy, Konrad Beyerle, raised the issue of a unified military organization. He objected to the removal of the fourth clause and the disregard for the rights of the states which were guarded by treaties dating from 1870. He wished for 'unity with the retention of some rights, which are important to the public'.<sup>68</sup> Beyerle doubted if the Bavarian government could persuade their voters to accept the abolition of the Bavarian military ministry. However, the political weapon of public opinion could cut both ways and Reinhardt warned that 'in Prussia people will not understand it, if each state has its own military colours'.<sup>69</sup> He felt that the existence of several war ministries had led to divergent policies on issues such as border protection in the east and the release of prisoners of war. Reinhardt believed that these divergent policies represented 'a break in the unity of the Reich, which must be avoided at all costs'.<sup>70</sup> However, the meeting ended without any agreement.

The only significant progress that had been made since the two meetings of states' and Reich representatives in February was that Württemberg was now prepared to negotiate away its special rights. So while the Württemberg envoy to the Reich, Karl Hildenbrand, was dismayed by the removal of the fourth clause, he still maintained that his state was prepared to negotiate an agreement on a unitary army.<sup>71</sup> Württemberg was trying to maximize states' rights by accepting

<sup>66</sup> Report from Weimar, 8 Mar. 1919, HStASt, M 10, Bd. 3, fo. 121.

<sup>67</sup> Memorandum of F. K. Müller, 10 Mar. 1919, Karlsruhe, GLAK, Abt. 233/12441.

<sup>68</sup> Verfassungsausschuß, 5. Sitzung, Weimar, 12 Mar. 1919, HStASt, M 77/1, Bü 82.

<sup>69</sup> Verfassungsausschuß, 5. Sitzung, Weimar, 12 Mar. 1919, HStASt, M 77/1, Bü 82, fo. 7.

<sup>70</sup> Verfassungsausschuß, 5. Sitzung, Weimar, 12 Mar. 1919, HStASt, M 77/1, Bü 82, fo. 13.

<sup>71</sup> Verfassungsausschuß, 5. Sitzung, Weimar, 12 Mar. 1919, HStASt, M 77/1, Bü 82, fo. 10.



the principle of a unitary army, while Bavaria was trying to extract maximum concessions by pursuing a stubborn policy. This was a problem for the Reich, because ultimately it had to negotiate the same agreement with all the states, but it was also a weakness for the states because it broke their united front. Both Baden and Württemberg were aware of their weak positions. Hildenbrand had written to the government in Stuttgart in late February, noting that negotiations were the only means by which the states could extract some guarantees. He realized that the National Assembly was even less inclined than the Reich government to appease particularism.<sup>72</sup> There was a limit to which the negotiations could be spun out, since, as Reinhardt had indicated several times, Prussian and Reich patience was finite. Baden's envoy in Munich also had doubts about the realism of the Bavarian position. Bavaria was in the middle of a government crisis, so there were no instructions sent to Preger or Sperr. A policy of stubborn obstructionism did not appear to have a future.<sup>73</sup>

### III

Although the meeting on 12 March had dissolved without agreement, two days later the major breakthrough was achieved when the so-called 'Weimar agreement' was concluded. This agreement was apparently the result of two further days of negotiating. A Baden envoy noted the pressure which the impending defeat of a motion in the National Assembly to preserve the states' special rights added to the situation: 'This produces a situation which in view of the unitary tendencies of the overwhelming majority of the National Assembly makes it imperative that the larger states, no matter if and to what extent they had their own military administration up to this point, reach an agreement with the Reich, which takes into account their interests in the *Reichswehr* law.'<sup>74</sup> The states aimed to secure certain guarantees which would be enshrined in the *Reichswehr* law, which was due to be drafted later in 1919, instead of having guarantees written into the constitution. Whereas the special rights of 1870 took the form of treaties between Bavaria, Württemberg, and the North German Confederation, the rights accorded to the states in 1919 were based on a much less binding agreement.

The preamble to the Weimar agreement stated that it aimed to ensure the unity of the *Reichswehr*, and in so far as was compatible with this aim, the states would have certain rights. Each of the named states, Baden, Bavaria, Prussia, Saxony, and Württemberg, would form 'an enclosed area, each with a senior commander (*Hochstkommandeur*)', who would be named by the Reich president on the suggestion of the state, and could be removed by the latter.<sup>75</sup> Units based in these states would be composed of citizens from that state, or region. The senior

<sup>72</sup> Hildenbrand to the Württemberg cabinet, 27 Feb. 1919, HStASt, E 130 b, Bü 3728.

<sup>73</sup> Baden envoy in Munich to Baden minister of the exterior, 11 Mar. 1919, GLAK, Abt. 233/12441.

<sup>74</sup> Baden envoy to the Baden cabinet, 18 Mar. 1919, GLAK, Abt. 233/12441.

<sup>75</sup> Baden envoy to the Baden cabinet, 18 Mar. 1919, GLAK, Abt. 233/12441, contains a copy of the agreement.

commander would have to take the state's economic interests into account when he was planning exercises, while arms contracts would also have to be equitably distributed between the states. The states would also have military representatives in the *Reichsrat*, which was the upper house in the German parliament and composed of states' representatives, as well as in the *Reichswehr* Ministry, allowing the states to play a role in the formulation of military policy. The states could use troops at times when their police forces were unable to control unrest. Since symbols played as important a role in the German revolution as any other, troops would also wear a badge to denote from which region they came.

Most of the states' rights were consultative, and they had no active way of influencing military policy, except through their representatives on the *Reichsrat* and in the *Reichswehr* Ministry. One adviser to the Baden government believed that the right of a state to remove a senior commander was 'the main basis for the states' government to influence military affairs'.<sup>76</sup> This was the only significant right which the states had to influence military policy. Yet these representatives would only have a limited influence on military policy, and would find it difficult to protect any particular interests of the states. Other concessions were symbolic, and though important for preserving regional military traditions, would have little impact on the formulation of military policy. The Weimar agreement was significant for more than its terms, which in any case were to be the subject of a further three months of debate between Reinhardt and the states. The existence of the agreement prevented an open conflict between the states and the Reich. The Reich government may have used intense political pressure to force an agreement, but ultimately it did not unilaterally abandon the special rights of 1870. By signing up to the agreement all the states recognized that the military constitution of the *Kaiserreich* with its special privileges for certain states was no longer tenable in the post-1918 Germany. Preger and other leading officials were worried by the surrender of so much control to the Reich, and on 22 March he lamented that Bavaria was no longer 'a sovereign federal state, but simply a constituent state under the Reich'.<sup>77</sup> For Reinhardt and other Reich officials this situation was ideal.

The Weimar agreement was sent back to the states' governments for approval. The three south German states were all opposed to some of the terms. Württemberg, while willing to abolish its War Ministry, now wanted the senior commander to be subordinate to the state government in accordance with the old rights, which would have effectively negated the impact of setting up a unified *Reichswehr* Ministry.<sup>78</sup> Tensions between the Reich and the states came to the fore at a meeting on 26 March between Hermann, the state committee of the soldiers' councils in Württemberg, General Otto Haas, a leading Württemberg general

<sup>76</sup> Baden envoy to the Baden cabinet, 18 Mar. 1919, GLAK, Abt. 233/12441.

<sup>77</sup> Diethard Hennig, *Johannes Hoffmann: Sozialdemokrat und Bayerischer Ministerpräsident* (Munich, 1990), p. 248.

<sup>78</sup> Württemberg Ministry of War to Baden cabinet, 15 Mar. 1919, GLAK, Abt. 233/12441.

who was raising a volunteer force, and Reinhardt and Noske. Noske argued that the soldiers' councils were preventing the transport of Haas's volunteers to the eastern border, and demanded that the soldiers' councils be dissolved. The state committee rejected Noske's demands, and argued that 'the Reich has no power to carry out such orders in Württemberg'. This argument reflected the confusion caused by inheriting the *Kaiserreich's* system without the underpinning political culture and will. Even more notable was Reinhardt's outburst later in the meeting when he rejected a Württemberg request for each state to design their own helmets: 'Absolutely differing headwear destroys unity. Badges of rank must be the same. Shoulder badges can be worn on the shoulder clips. Finally according to democratic norms the minority must follow the majority.'<sup>79</sup> He was prepared to concede small badges signifying the state of origin of the troops, but would not allow a patchwork of uniforms to develop. The querulous nature of the meeting was also indicative of strained Reich–states relationship.

On the initiative of Bavaria the south German states tried to restore unity amongst themselves at a meeting on 29 March in Stuttgart. A wide range of topics were on the agenda and the meeting can be seen as a counterpoint to the centralizing project of the Reich government.<sup>80</sup> Despite divergent interests a united front was re-established against 'an overimplementation of unity, and a serious danger for the preservation of the independent life of the states'.<sup>81</sup> Bavaria's representatives advanced two reasons for the retention of their special rights. First they believed that the German army had functioned well up to 1918, and secondly they doubted if the populace would accept a diminution of Bavaria's special rights. However, the Bavarian proposals fell short of restoring their special rights. Instead, they were a modification of the Weimar agreement, whereby the Reich president would only be able to appoint senior commanders from a list of candidates approved by the states' governments, and that Bavaria would retain its right of clemency.<sup>82</sup> The rhetoric targeted against overbearing centralization had proved to be tougher than the actual attempts to roll back the Reich's power.

While the south German states were trying to pull together, the Prussian Ministry of War planned some changes to the Weimar agreement. On 2 April the five largest states met again. Colonel Waitz, the Prussian Ministry of War's representative at this meeting and almost certainly instructed by Reinhardt, argued that the right of states to remove the senior commander infringed the right of the Reich president. This led to a change in the Weimar agreement, and the power of the states was further diminished. The Reich president now had the right to name, promote, and remove the senior commander. Another clause required the state's permission to move troop units out of the state for an extended period of

<sup>79</sup> Memorandum of a meeting in Weimar, 26 Mar. 1919, HStAst, M 10, Bd. 1, fo. 83.

<sup>80</sup> Wolfgang Benz, *Süddeutschland in der Weimarer Republik: ein Beitrag zur deutschen Innenpolitik, 1918–1923* (Berlin, 1970), pp. 133–9.

<sup>81</sup> Günter Cordes, ed., *Krieg, Revolution, Republik: die Jahre 1918–1920 in Baden und Württemberg: eine Dokumentation* (Ulm, 1978), p. 173.

<sup>82</sup> Memorandum of a meeting of south German states on 29 Mar. 1919, HStAst, M 10, Bd. 3, fo. 107.

time.<sup>83</sup> The right of the state government to remove the senior commander had been the most effective means of influencing regional military policy, since the senior commander was in charge of issues such as manoeuvres, recruitment, and the distribution of troops. Now the senior commander was totally dependent on the Reich government, and hence less liable to pressure from the states. The position of the senior commander was almost comparable to that of an envoy from the *Reichswehr* Ministry to the states, an envoy who would receive his orders from the minister, and smooth over any local difficulties.

The negotiations dragged on. Once again the unity of the south German states was broken. According to one of Reinhardt's advisers, Semler, Saxony and Württemberg had accepted the amended agreement of 2 April 1919. Bavaria was holding out and wanted a slower process of integration into a unitary army. This would involve surrendering their special rights over a period of years, rather than by 1 October when the *Reichswehr* Ministry was due officially to replace the states' ministries. To prevent this Reinhardt was prepared to leave Bavaria's special rights at the mercy of the National Assembly, whilst also concluding an agreement with the other states.<sup>84</sup> Reinhardt was prepared to use the vast majority in the National Assembly in favour of centralizing the army to force the states to accept an agreement over which they had some influence. The SPD minister president of Baden, Adam Remmele, was also disappointed with the revised accord, since now that the states' government could not remove a senior commander they had no significant means of influencing military policy. However, Remmele decided that in view of Prussian, Saxon and Württemberg support for the agreement, Baden would be unwise to make a stand with Bavaria.<sup>85</sup>

Bavaria's position had been further weakened by the establishment of a Councils' Republic in Munich in April 1919. At first the Bavarian government, led by Johannes Hoffmann (SPD) and based temporarily at Bamberg, tried to suppress the revolt without outside help, but a defeat at Dachau, just outside Munich, forced them to ask Philipp Scheidemann, the SPD chancellor, for military aid.<sup>86</sup> Reinhardt contacted Hoffman and told him that the Reich would take charge of the operation, a statement which did not soothe injured Bavarian egos. The plan to defeat the revolt was drawn up in the Prussian Ministry of War by Generals Walther von Lüttwitz and Ernst von Oven. On 2 May a mixture of Bavarian and Reich troops marched into Munich. It was a clear demonstration that Bavaria was dependent on the Reich in a moment of crisis, though the Bavarians chose not to draw this lesson from this episode.<sup>87</sup> Instead, Sperr had

<sup>83</sup> Hildenbrand to the Württemberg cabinet, 3 Apr. 1919, HStASt, E 130 b, Bü 3728.

<sup>84</sup> Baden envoy to Baden minister of the exterior, 8 Apr. 1919, GLAK, Abt. 233/12441.

<sup>85</sup> Remmele to Baden minister of the exterior, 10 Apr. 1919, GLAK, Abt. 233/12441.

<sup>86</sup> Hennig, *Hoffmann*, pp. 293–8.

<sup>87</sup> For an account of the Munich Councils' Republic, see Hennig, *Hoffmann*, pp. 293–328; also Allan Mitchell, *Revolution in Bavaria, 1918–1919: the Eisner regime and the Soviet Republic* (Princeton, 1965), pp. 304–30.

written to the other states on 30 April, criticizing the amended Weimar agreement. He argued that the state should have to approve any senior appointments by the Reich, that the distribution of arms contracts should be fixed in the agreement, and that the states should have more influence over local military policy, particularly policies which affected the economy.<sup>88</sup>

A meeting followed on 7 May, which represented the most significant changes to the Weimar agreement of March. Both Prussia, also representing the Reich, and Bavaria wanted to change the term senior commander to state commander (*Landeskommandant*), which better signified the role of the commander in the Reich–state relationship. However, their conceptions of the position of the state commander differed radically. The Prussian Ministry of War opposed giving the state commander any special powers of command, whereas Bavaria wanted him to have the right to inspect troops. Prussia's conception secured the position of the state commander as a representative of the Reich to the various states, whereas the Bavarian plan conceived of the state commander as a representative of the state, a conception linked to the suggestion that the state could have a veto over the appointment of commanders. In the new agreement the Prussian conception of the state commander was adopted, but there were other concessions to the states. The economic interest of the state in military matters was stressed, and arms contracts were to be fixed by an *Ausgleichsstelle* (a board composed of representatives for the various states) which would protect small arms manufacturers, rather than opening up military contracts to free competition. Finally several officers, not just one per state, could be appointed to the *Reichsrat*.<sup>89</sup>

The agreement of 7 May was then sent back to the states' governments, and five weeks later Reinhardt presented the draft to the Reich cabinet. The main terms had been present in the Weimar agreement. The new terms included the creation of the post of state commander, named on the suggestion of the state government and supposed to look after the state's interests, and the establishment of the *Ausgleichsstelle*. The state commander would also be consulted by the *Reichswehr* Ministry on proposed laws, and ministry officials would be recruited from all areas of the Reich.<sup>90</sup> The agreement gave the states' governments no concrete opportunity to intervene in the formulation of military policy, but did allow the states the formal voice of the state commander to complain about any damage done to the state's interests by military policy. Whether the Reich would pay attention to complaints and how the position of the state commander would work out in reality remained to be seen in the 1920s. Agreement had been reached, and the various war ministries of the states would be united. Reinhardt

<sup>88</sup> Sperr circular to Prussia, Baden, Saxony, Württemberg, 30 Apr. 1919, GLAK, Abt. 233/12441.

<sup>89</sup> Baden envoy to the Baden minister of the exterior, 7 May 1919, GLAK, Abt. 233/12441.

<sup>90</sup> Hagen Schulze, ed., *Akten der Reichkanzlei: das Kabinett Scheidemann. 13. Februar bis 20. Juni* (Boppard am Rhein, 1971), pp. 439–43, contains the text of the agreement and the objections registered by the states.

had rationalized the regional military structures of the *Kaiserreich* with the full support of the civilian government. On 16 June the cabinet confirmed the agreement which was now the basis for the Reich–state relationship in *Reichswehr* law, eventually passed in March 1921. Neither did the cabinet accept any of the reservations which the states had entered in the protocol with the agreement.<sup>91</sup> The unification of the various states' war ministries is an example of how the cabinet could delegate authority to negotiate to an officer, and retain the final right of approval. Rather than being seen as a possible military influence in civilian government the procedure adopted by the Reich must be interpreted as rational cabinet-style government.

The cabinet approved the agreement with the states on 16 June, but twelve days later Germany signed the treaty of Versailles. Reinhardt believed that in a 200,000 man army Baden, Saxony, and Württemberg could have their own enclosed divisions, the commander of which would double as the state commander. However, the 100,000 man army meant that Baden and Württemberg would have to share the 5th division, whilst Saxony would share the 4th division with Prussia. On 8 July Reinhardt wrote to the Baden envoy, to inform him of the difficulties with the agreement.<sup>92</sup> It was only on 30 July that the states and Reinhardt met, and agreed on a solution, whereby Baden, Saxony, and Württemberg would each have an enclosed brigade, and the senior commander from this brigade would act as the state commander.<sup>93</sup>

#### IV

The series of negotiations had come to an end, and the agreement would provide the basis for the Reich–state relationship in military policy. The terms were worked into the fabric of the *Reichswehr* law, which was drafted in late 1919, but only became law in March 1921. The aim of the agreement was to create a unified army which respected regional traditions. Whether the agreement succeeded in achieving this aim is open to debate. Franz Sperr objected to the form in which the agreement was put into the draft law for the *Reichswehr*, arguing that it gave the Prussian part of the *Reichswehr* too much power.<sup>94</sup> At times the relationship between the states and the Reich was marked by extreme tension especially in 1923 when the Bavarian commander, General Otto von Lossow, refused to implement the orders of Hans von Seeckt, head of Army Command. Yet the refusal of

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 468.

<sup>92</sup> Reinhardt to Baden envoy to the Reich, 8 July 1919, GLAK, Abt. 233/12441.

<sup>93</sup> Baden envoy to the Reich to the Baden Ministry of the Exterior, 30 July 1919, GLAK, Abt. 233/12441.

<sup>94</sup> Sperr to Ministerium des Auswärtigen, 15 Nov. 1919, Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv (BHStA), Gesandtschaft Berlin, 1351.

Lossow to ban the Nazi paper, *Der Völkischer Beobachter*, in 1923, and the subsequent oath of the Bavarian troops to the state government was as much to do with local political conditions, and the breakdown of the system of command, as with any fundamental flaws in the Reich–state relationship in military affairs.<sup>95</sup>

Criticism from the federalist point of view continued. Friedrich von Boetticher, an officer who published widely in contemporary military journals, believed that the *Heimat* was the real source of German strength and that a centralized state risked homogenizing regional differences and hence weakening Germany.<sup>96</sup> The Bavarian federalist, Beyerle, continued to oppose the centralization of the Reich, and in 1924 published a pamphlet *Föderalistische Reichspolitik* (Federalist Reich Policy).<sup>97</sup> In January 1931, as the debate on reform of the Reich was reaching its zenith, *Das Militärwochenblatt* printed an article which warned that a mechanistic centralization of the military apparatus risked destroying German self-consciousness. Further, in the case of a successful attack at the centre of power in war, the state would be quickly defeated.<sup>98</sup>

However, the striking feature of the debate on reform of the Reich is the rarity with which officers proposed significant changes to the military structures introduced in 1919. Even when plans for a return of financial and administrative powers to the states were aired, there was no question of dissolving the *Reichswehr* Ministry.<sup>99</sup> The *Truppenamt*, the successor to the General Staff, called for ‘the implementation of a stronger executive in the Reich with the *Reichswehr* and the police’.<sup>100</sup> Curt Liebmann, a Prussian officer writing in *Wissen und Wehr*, a journal supported by the *Reichswehr* Ministry, argued that the Weimar military system created ‘better pre-conditions for the centralized conduct of war than the constitutional–monarchical system’.<sup>101</sup> In an internal review of the military command system in 1929, Hermann Geyer praised the reforms of the revolutionary period for ending the confusion and artificial separation of military functions which had plagued the *Kaiserreich*.<sup>102</sup>

The reforms of 1919 were the result of a brief moment of co-operation between pragmatists in the officer corps who adjusted rapidly to the establishment of the Weimar Republic, such as Reinhardt and Groener, and moderate SPD politicians, such as Ebert and Noske. However, this grouping was weakened when Reinhardt urged rejection of the Versailles treaty, while Groener pointed out that

<sup>95</sup> Lothar Gruchmann, ‘Der Weg zum Hitler-Putsch: das Reich und Bayern im Krisenjahr 1923’, in Lothar Gruchmann and Reinhard Weber, eds., *Der Hitler-Prozess 1924: Wortlaut der Hauptverhandlungen vor dem Volksgericht München* (4 vols., Munich, 1997), 1, pp. lvi–lix.

<sup>96</sup> Boetticher’s unpublished memoirs, BA-MA, N 323/147, fos. 121–3.

<sup>97</sup> See the review in *Das Militärwochenblatt*, 11 Mar. 1925, pp. 1017–20.

<sup>98</sup> *Das Militärwochenblatt*, 18 Jan. 1931, pp. 1038–9.

<sup>99</sup> See Schulz’s discussion of Seeckt’s Reich reform plans in 1924, *Zwischen Demokratie und Diktatur*, pp. 462–70.

<sup>100</sup> Vortrag beim TA, 7 Dec. 1923, BA-MA, N 42/19, fo. 29.

<sup>101</sup> Curt Liebmann, ‘Zur Frage der einheitlichen Kriegsleitung’, *Wissen und Wehr*, 4 (1923), p. 220.

<sup>102</sup> Hermann Geyer, ‘Zur militärischen Spitzengliederung im Kriegsfall’, 13 Feb. 1929, BA-MA, N 221/10, fo. 5.



only acceptance could save the Reich from Allied occupation.<sup>103</sup> Groener's career was apparently finished. However, Reinhardt became vulnerable to attacks from within the officer corps, and he, along with Noske, was forced to resign as head of the Army Command in March 1920 after the Kapp Putsch. This ended the period of SPD–officer corps co-operation, which would have become frayed in any case due to the divergent aims of both groups – the officers' aim of militarizing German society was clearly not part of the SPD agenda. When Kurt von Schleicher, the head of the *Wehrmacht* Department in the *Reichswehr* Ministry, sought to renew the policy of co-operation with the Republic in December 1926 he plotted to ensure that the SPD would not be part of the government.<sup>104</sup> None the less the centralization of the states' war ministries in 1919 is an early case of the opportunities which were open to reforming and pragmatic officers, and an alternative to the views of conflictual relations between the officer corps and the Republic, and especially between the officer corps and the SPD.

<sup>103</sup> Horst Mühleisen, 'Annehmen oder Ablehnen? Das Kabinett Scheidemann, die Oberste Heeresleitung und der Vertrag von Versailles im Juni 1919', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 35 (1987), pp. 419–81.

<sup>104</sup> Thilo Vogelsang, *Reichswehr, Staat und NSDAP* (Munich, 1962), pp. 409–13; Josef Becker, 'Zur Politik der Wehrmachtsabteilung in der Regierungskrise 1926/27', *VfZ*, 15 (1967), pp. 69–78.