CHAPTER 7

Jesuit Collision to Yihetuan Diversion, 1900–1901

Within weeks of the Foreign Office concession to the SVD on protection for its converts, Chinese popular resentment against Western economic, political, and cultural imperialism erupted in a massive xenophobic and anti-Christian uprising by the Yihetuan, better known in English and German by the misnomer ‘the Boxers.’¹ The consequences of this movement reverberated around the world, not least in German domestic politics. By precipitating the Kaiser’s dispatch of nearly nineteen thousand men on the East Asian Expedition, the Yihetuan forced the Reich to borrow a total of 276 million marks in 1900/01, a sum eight times the cost of the entire official colonial enterprise of that year. The resulting unanticipated burden upon the imperial treasury during a contemporaneous general economic downturn seriously aggravated the finances of the German government and hence jeopardized the administration’s relationship with the national parliament. The factor of expense was particularly complicated by the heated controversy over the military campaign’s inauguration without the consent of the Reichstag to its budgetary and constitutional ramifications.

With Chancellor Hohenlohe’s credibility with the Center already at ebbtide, the inauspicious circumstances surrounding the initiation of the East Asian Expedition precipitated his resignation in October 1900. However, thanks to the restored alignment of German national and Catholic missionary interests in the Chinese theater as well as to the readiness of the new chancellor Bernhard von Bülow to seek a parliamentary indemnity, the Yihetuan Uprising generally helped consolidate government-Center relations on the domestic front in the face of strong leftist attacks upon both partners. As yet relatively limited in scope, African resistance to German rule nevertheless prompted a few Center populists around Richard Müller-Fulda to take principled stands in

¹ The British term ‘Boxers’ does not have any immediate connection with the proper Chinese name ‘Yihetuan,’ which means ‘Militia United in Righteousness.’ Moreover, the layperson is easily misled by the common term into imagining an army of pugilists. Today the term ‘boxers’ is not even applied to unarmed practitioners of the Asian martial arts, much less to fighters who use spears, swords, or knives as the Yihetuan actually did (Esherick, Boxer Uprising, xiii, 250, 253, 288, 297, 308). Indeed, for this very reason even such an unsympathetic contemporary as Bishop Johann Baptist von Anzer deemed the British appellation misleading to his German audience (“Der Boxeraufstand in China,” Germania, June 12, 1900, Nr. 132).
early 1901 against the government’s ‘native policy.’ Still, with Chinese violence facilitating a government-Center rapprochement that might bring long-sought domestic concessions, the leading jurist and aristocratic factions of the Center preferred to refrain from criticizing the administration regarding its treatment of Africans.

Centrist Defiance, Yihetuan Ferocity, Imperial Audacity

Although three-fourths of the Center eventually voted in favor of Tirpitz’s second naval bill, resistance to this course had emerged in the spring of 1900 not only among such outspoken populists as Hermann Roeren, Georg Dasbach, and Georg Heim, but also within the party’s jurist leadership. Most notably, the Cologne lawyer Karl Bachem, a key voice in the Rhineland Center, had objected strenuously to the enormous financial consequences of the new naval bill and to the failure of the Hohenlohe administration to satisfy any of the party’s desiderata in recognition of its many past services. Finding himself unable to rally the party into taking a stand on the fleet question in the face of widespread anti-British sentiment, Bachem had nonetheless informed his pro-fleet jurist and aristocratic colleagues in the party leadership that this was his last concession. If the Anti-Jesuit Law did not fall in response to passage of the second naval law, then further legislative requests of the Hohenlohe administration would have to be ruthlessly spurned.2

Moreover, by June Bachem had succeeded in winning over to this hard line the influential leader of the Württemberg Center, Judge Adolf Gröber. Accordingly, in the days immediately following the June 12 passage of the naval law, the two Center jurists approached Hohenlohe, Tirpitz, and Bülow to secure a commitment to the revocation of the expulsion article of the Anti-Jesuit Law at the very least. However, although a horsetrade involving the entire Jesuit law had been possible in February while the fate of the naval bill was still uncertain, the statesmen felt no need to reward the Center after June 12 and treated the petition dismissively. Rebuffed, Gröber and Bachem then explicitly threatened the government with a termination of the party’s cooperation.3 Indeed, even Ernst Lieber, Centrist leader and architect of the pro-government line, admonished Hohenlohe on June 16 that there would be

---

2 Bachem to Franz Bachem, Oct. 27, 1900, Nachlaß Bachem, 170, HASK.
3 Ibid.; Dahlmann to Cardauns, Aug. 16, 1900, Nachlaß Bachem, 170, HASK. Bachem, Nov. 30, 1901, Note, Nachlaß Bachem, 173, HASK. Kopp to Hutten-Czapski, June 20, 1900, Nachlaß Hutten-Czapski, 1447, BAP. Tirpitz to Senden, Aug. 30, 1900, Nachlaß Senden, 5:24–25, BMAF.