

Habsburg H-Net Discussion Network
Prince Metternich, The Renewal of the Carlsbad Decrees, 1824

From: <http://www.h-net.org/~habsweb/sourcetexts/carlsbad.htm>

Prince Richard Metternich, ed. MEMOIRS OF PRINCE METTERNICH, 1815-1829.
Volume IV. Translated by Mrs. Alexander Napier. Classified and arranged by M.A. de
Klinkowstrom. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1880-82

[p. 122]

RENEWAL OF THE CARLSBAD DECREES.

Metternich to the Emperor Francis, Ischl, July 18, 1824.

721. As I have concluded the affairs which have brought me to Johannisberg, I take the liberty of laying the following report of my proceedings before your Majesty.

In the year 1819 the revolutionary tendency of a faction in Germany (supported in an incomprehensible manner, even encouraged by many German Governments) brought upon itself by one act the universal attention of the world. The Russian councillor Von Kotzebue fell as the first sacrifice. Your Majesty will be pleased, to remember that even before the journey to Italy the political horizon was so clouded that it became a serious question whether the absence of your Majesty from Germany would be prudent. My opinion was that by this journey more was to be gained than lost, and I grounded this opinion chiefly on the feeling that the absence of your Majesty would deprive the German Government of its first and strongest support, and the danger of the position in which error and an inexcusable lukewarmness had placed them would have the effect of arousing their attention. My view was soon justified. Scarcely had we been six weeks on the other side of the Alps when the first communication was made from the Court which had thrown itself in the most decided manner upon the revolutionary path. Convinced that a first step must be followed by

[p. 123]

other and more decided ones, I answered the Bavarian Minister with great calmness, and with the expression of your Majesty's readiness to come to the help of your allies with advice and action on every occasion. The Kotzebue affair occurred in the meantime, and the votes gained in strength and number. Wurtemberg, Baden, Hesse, all turned to us, and I proposed to your Majesty in the month of July my journey to Carlsbad and your Highness's return to Vienna, instead of the projected stay at Milan.

The Carlsbad Congress had the most happy results, far surpassing all expectations. It led to the confirmed conviction that the strength and value of the Government measures

depended far more on the correctness of their choice than on their number. Four decrees were passed at Carlsbad, a number which, taken in the abstract, could scarcely, from any point of view, be looked on as considerable.

The Diet was the supreme authority, but no arrangement was made for carrying out its resolutions. We accordingly planned at Carlsbad a provisional executive administration.

The German Universities, hitherto entirely left to themselves, had Government commissioners set over them as presidents.

All the journals and periodicals were placed under censorship.

A central court of inquiry into the intrigues of the demagogues was established at Mayence.

These measures, concerted at Carlsbad among some of the German Courts, obtained the sanction of the Diet on September 20. I then felt convinced that the moment was come to give to the legislation of the Diet the perfection and firmness which it still so much needed.

[p. 124]

It naturally appeared to me that this moment, on account of the widespread terror in all the German Government, was most favourable for extending the great work. I saw plainly that this work could not be accomplished by the legal jurisdiction of the assembly of the Diet. I felt myself sufficiently courageous for the undertaking, and I therefore arranged the German ministerial conferences at Vienna. The result fulfilled my hopes, and even some scarcely formed wishes. At the end of a few months the Diet received seventy freshly organised laws, which were agreed to unanimously. I then unfolded to the assembled German ministers my opinion that the organised legislation of the Diet could now be considered as perfected. The experience of the four years just passed has confirmed my view. The advantage which has arisen from the confirmation of this truth, and which becomes more apparent every day, is, the general tranquillity of the German princes about their separate relations to the Diet, and the different effect of the Diet on each German State, a tranquillity which the free development of this salutary system could alone make possible.

The resolutions of the Diet of the year 1819 have not failed in their effect on Germany, and have acted more or less beneficially on the whole of Europe. If the alliance of the European Powers has shown how beneficially the principle of strength gained by the union of many for the general welfare acts in relation to politics, the example of Carlsbad shows the world that the union of Governments for salutary legislative ends is not less possible, and is equally productive of results. The party whose aim is to disunite States as well as individuals has evidently received its death-blow. The truth of this assertion must be apparent to every impartial observer, for the great impression which the Carls-

[p. 125]

bad decrees made on this party, as well as the happy results which they practically had, cannot really be ascribed to the mere excellence of the laws of September 20, 1819--an excellence which they cannot possibly have in the eyes of impartial judges. Since the year 1819 the governing powers, especially in South Germany, have had to endure many hard trials from the representative government which they had introduced with such inconceivable thoughtlessness. Each one of the State assemblies has given proof of the melancholy truth that all governments introduced by themselves have been shaken to their centres, and that the evil ensuing has been incalculable. On the other hand, to the people the truth was clear that the promised good was an empty dream, a vain design, or an inconsiderate scheme projected by some few individuals in their midst. In the same proportion as light and self-respect spread amongst the rulers, loyal feeling awoke in the people.

Your Majesty may be pleased to remember that, soon after the fortunate termination of the expedition to Spain (the third revolution which in the course of two years has been crushed to dust and ashes), the Baden Court turned to us, and expressed the wish to go further into the matter, and by the united strength of the Government to find means to carry out some necessary reforms in the interior of the States. I still continued to tread with measured steps the path pointed out to me by my already fulfilled wishes. Constant to the principle that with men and States alike dependence is to be placed on the exertion of their own strength rather than on borrowed help, I believed I ought not to press further than absolutely necessary. In time and what it brings forth lay much good, which I endeavoured to help forward, but by no means to anticipate.

[p. 126]

I followed the advice which your Majesty had been pleased to give me of employing my attendance on his Highness the Grand Duke of Bavaria to obtain fresh information about the disposition of that Court. Your Highness knows that my hopes were not great of the Bavarian officials, but they far exceeded the reality. Without wearying your Majesty with the details of my negotiations in every place, I will hasten on to the results.

Your Majesty will find enclosed a work (No. 722) which I induced Freiherr von Zentner to give me at the Tegernsee as his proposal. This work being pure in design and powerful in expression, I took it as the basis of my future transactions. I wished to compromise Bavaria so deeply in the matter that it would be impossible for her to turn back.

Your Majesty will find in the larger paper Baden's feeling on the Bavarian question....

On the day of my departure from Johannisberg the Grand Duke of Weimar came to visit me. I immediately secured him.

Your Majesty will also find enclosed the Presidential proposition which had been already prepared, and which needs no commentary. I have grounded it on the work of the Bavarian Court, and only developed it more thoroughly. It needs now only the Imperial sanction of your Majesty. The German princes will take it without opposition, and agree to it thankfully.

With reference to its effect on the separate German States, I can only add that in the beginning of the year 1825 the next State assemblies will take place in Bavaria and Baden. At these meetings the Governments will begin the reforms originated by the late decrees of the Diet. In the reformed regulations, publicity of the

[p. 127]

transactions will be forbidden; the daily disregard of this has been the cause of great evil latterly. By this means the possibility of the necessary reforms is increased, and they will be made either voluntarily or by compulsion.

I beg your Majesty to examine the Presidential proposition, and to return it to me either with or without your Highness's remarks. After having your Majesty's sanction, I shall immediately have it copied and sent to Freiherr von Munch. I should wish to accomplish this not later than August 9 or 10.

METTERNICH.

I send back the papers enclosed, and you can now despatch the sketch of the Presidential proposition. Your exertions to maintain peace and order in the world have not been in vain. May God crown them with success!

FRANCIS.

Persenberg, August 5, 1824.

722. [The paper by Freiherr von Zentner on the extension of the Carlsbad Decrees is omitted as being uninteresting and almost unintelligible to English readers.-TR.]

Metternich to Baron Munch, Ischl, August 8, 1824

723. His Majesty the Emperor has been pleased to return the sketch of the Presidential proposition, not only without objection, but with expressions of the greatest satisfaction with the whole work. Your Excellency can now proceed to carry out the business, choosing the day which seems to you most suitable.

With regard to the publication of the Presidential report, I am more and more convinced of its necessity. However much I agree with the principle of reducing

[p. 128]

as much as possible the number of publications at the Diet, it does not appear to me that this applies to a document of such great importance as the present. In this statement truths are set forth which cannot be sufficiently spread abroad, and the clear and direct language in which they are expressed will certainly not fail to make an impression both on the well-disposed and on the ill-disposed. Moreover, it is next to impossible to keep such a document long secret, the communication of which to all the German Governments, great and small, makes many copies of it unavoidable, and which is of such general interest that we run the risk of seeing it sooner or later appear in some mutilated or unintelligible translation in the French or English journals. For all these reasons I consider the publication of the Presidential statement not only useful but unavoidable, and I beg your Excellency immediately to take the necessary steps.

Metternich to Munch, Ischl, August 20, 1824.

724. From your Excellency's Report of the 16th instant I see with no small satisfaction that the Presidential proposition has had the success desired, and that its proposed measures have been accepted without opposition or alteration by the Diet.

Congratulating your Excellency and ourselves on this result, in which your prudent guidance has again been actively experienced, I hasten to place you in a condition to express the gratitude of our monarch before the conclusion of its session in reference to the expression of thanks to his Imperial Majesty which stands in the protocol of the Bundestag.

At the end your Excellency will be pleased to lay

[p. 129]

before the Diet, in the form you think most suitable, that-

From the resolutions passed at the sitting of the his Majesty has derived once more the happy conviction that among the enlightened German Governments the most perfect and happy agreement prevails upon those principles by the maintenance of which not only the security, the inner peace, and true well-being of the several states of the Diet are incontestably conditioned, but also the continued existence of the body which embraces all the power and interest of Germany. This conviction alone, long cherished and now confirmed could alone have inspired his Majesty with the courage and confidence with which he has hitherto invariably advanced in all the negotiations of the Diet. His Majesty

would also, further, ever continue in the same disposition, and esteem himself fortunate to be able on every occasion to respond to the confidence of his august brethren in the Diet.

What I have further to remark in this business, so happily terminated, I put off till I receive your further accounts, and till I return to Vienna.

Metternich to Gentz, Persenberg, August 26, 1824.

725. The reception vouchsafed to me by the Emperor was of a nature to delight me, and that particularly because it showed me the great value which he attaches to the Johannisberg business. To value anything so highly its essence must be perceived, and that the Emperor does most thoroughly. He said a few words to me on the general position of things in Europe which hit like a sledge-hammer; the nail is driven in right up to its head, and that is why it is so firm. Unhappily, I had brought to me a few hours ago the

[p. 130]

printed Report of the sitting of the Diet, and a French translation of the Presidential proposition from Frankfurt. I send you both without loss of time, in order that the German version may appear in the 'Observer' as soon as possible.

Copied with permission from the Habsburg H-Net Discussion Network
<http://www.h-net.org/~habsweb/>

Contact James Niessen for questions about the Habsburg website:
niessen@mail.h-net.msu.edu