



Volume 5. Wilhelmine Germany and the First World War, 1890-1918 The Majority Parties Request Parliamentary Rule (October 1917)

In the wake of the defiant “Peace Resolution” in July of 1917, the newly allied parties of Catholics, Progressives, and Majority Socialists gathered strength. This new majority was joined by the National Liberals; together they established a joint committee to facilitate regular consultations among their leaders. In October, a parliamentary majority defied the government with another resolution, this one calling for democratic reform and parliamentary rule. Its passage persuaded the Supreme Command to sack Bethmann Hollweg’s (1856-1921) successor, Georg Michaelis (1856-1936), who seemed to do no better at controlling the parliament.

After consultations between representatives of various parties in the Reichstag and the Chancellor about the full situation – domestic and external – we have come as a group to the following position:

Should His Majesty the Kaiser decide to allow a change of Chancellors, it would serve the highest interests of the state to create full guarantees that domestic political development remains peaceful until the end of the war. Only in this way can the solidarity be created that the nation desperately needs at the front and at home.

The path toward this goal is an understanding based on trust about Germany’s domestic and foreign policy until the end of the war. The domestic political difficulties of the last months are due to the lack of such an understanding.

We therefore ask His Majesty the Kaiser, before he reaches this decision, to instruct the person who is prospectively to preside over the business of the German empire to consult with the Reichstag.

Source: “Erklärung der Mehrheitsparteien des Reichstags über die notwendige Parlamentarisierung der Reichsleitung, dem Chef des Zivilkabinetts v. Valentini übergeben am 22. Oktober 1917” [“Declaration of the Majority Parties in the Reichstag on the Necessity of Parliamentary Rule of the Empire, presented to the Head of the Civil Cabinet, von Valentini, on October 22, 1917”], in Karl Helfferich, *Der Weltkrieg* [*The World War*]. Berlin, 1919, p. 505.

Reprinted in Ernst Rudolf Huber, *Dokumente zur deutschen Verfassungsgeschichte* [*Documents on German Constitutional History*]. 2 volumes. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1961, vol. 2, p. 475.

Translation: Jeffrey Verhey and Roger Chickering