

THE CONTEST IN GERMANY

IN Germany the holiday recess has been devoted to strengthening the position of parties for the contest over the repressive bills. The Socialists especially have been holding many meetings to protest against the measures, and will have the help of the Liberals in opposing them, but it is said that the National Liberals and Conservatives will support the government, the latter receiving in return some concessions to the agricultural interest. To pass the bills, however, the government will also need the assistance of the Clericals, but as its price will be the readmission of the Jesuits into Germany, and as it is doubtful whether the Bundesrath, or Federal Council, will accede to the demand, even should the emperor do so, the deadlock may occur at this point. It is doubtful, too, how far the support of the Agrarians can be depended on, for if the emperor makes any more commercial treaties, like that with Russia, adversely affecting their interests, they will want to criticise him, and will be afraid lest the repressive laws may then be applied to them. Still, it is possible that some bargain may be made with the Cleri-

cals, whose support would be decisive, and the repressive laws be enacted, though their passage will mean so serious a restriction of the freedom of speech and of writing in Germany that it is difficult to believe that it can long be maintained. For under a provision of these laws any condemnation of monarchy, or of the institutions of marriage, the family, or property, either in public speech or in print, makes the offender liable to prosecution and punishment for criminal action. As the government controls the police and the magistracy, and the latter have no sympathy with "liberal" ideas, the result will be to practically close discussion upon all important social subjects, and largely upon political questions as well. The Socialists, especially, can hardly talk at all without liability to imprisonment, and the expression of even abstract opinion on the superiority of other forms of government to monarchy, or on government ownership of land, or on the disadvantages of marriage, will be cause for arrest and conviction. Anything more absurd or more oppressive can scarcely be imagined, the German under the proposed laws being left free to deny his Maker and condemn the Bible, but liable to indictment and conviction if he criticises his king, or finds fault with the existing system of property tenure. It is difficult to see how the government can expect to accomplish any useful purpose by such legislation, which by exciting sympathy for Socialists can only strengthen Socialism, and by suppressing free speech will close the safety valve without stopping the generation of steam. While the German people have long submitted to rigorous repression of their acts, they have always insisted on absolute freedom of thought and speech, and as the effect of the new laws will be to abolish that freedom, their enforcement cannot fail to widen the breach between the masses and the classes. Every conviction under them will be regarded by the former as a blow given because they are the masses, and is certain in the end to arouse an ill feeling the more dangerous to the state because those entertaining it are all trained soldiers. That the government is quite within its right in adopting measures to prevent incitement to crime there is no doubt, but it is equally clear that in the new laws it fails to distinguish rightly between discussion intended to persuade and that intended to incite.