

WAS LUDENDORFF TO BLAME?

IN 1916 Hindenburg declared to an Austrian journalist that no one on earth could separate him from Ludendorff. This statement he made *à propos* the attempts made by the former Government to do so, and also by members of certain circles, who are now busily engaged in trying to prove that Ludendorff is responsible for Germany's misfortunes, whereas the blame is to be found in quite another direction. These people are those who from the very beginning of the war regarded it simply as an opportunity for political power, and to whom a German victory meant an insuperable obstacle to the attainment of their aims. Ludendorff and Hindenburg have now been separated, we do not know precisely how or why; but one thing is certain, however, that Kaiser Wilhelm was induced to withdraw his confidence from General Ludendorff. When the latter realized this he tendered his resignation. It is merely a legend that Ludendorff fell because he refused to recognize the changed condition of affairs. On the contrary, he approved, and even urged, a change. It is also a legend — to use no stronger expression — that General Ludendorff at the last moment suddenly put before the former Government the demand that they should conclude an armistice within 24 hours. As a matter of fact, as far back as the middle of last August, Ludendorff told the Foreign Secretary that steps ought to be taken, primarily through Holland, to make arrangements to negotiate an armistice. This he did after the German defeat of August 8. That defeat caused a gap which could not be made good either by numbers or by splendid

moral. What course the German diplomats at that time really pursued is a matter of conjecture. We have no real data on which to form any unprejudiced opinion on the events of the middle of August, or the relations between Hindenburg and Ludendorff. The following, however, appears probable: When, during August, Hindenburg, in agreement with Ludendorff, approached the Government, and later on demanded of the latter an account of how matters stood diplomatically, neither of the generals had the slightest intention or idea of an armistice, which, of course, would mean the annihilation of the German Empire. The version that Ludendorff had demanded an armistice within 24 hours is certainly not correct. It is more probable that Ludendorff pressed for an armistice at the end of a time previously arranged by the Government itself. The General, moreover, at the time considered the situation extremely critical. A few days later his opinion was that the situation had changed for the better, and, as a matter of fact, he was correct in that view. He accordingly did all in his power to avert the impending political upheaval, but his efforts were in vain. His enemies had him in their power, the moment had arrived when they could overthrow the man they hated, and whose energy and courage they feared from a political standpoint. Doubtless, he would prove an insuperable obstacle to the carrying out of their revolutionary plans to the conclusion of a peace at any price. We may call to mind the state of public opinion at the time. If we could only have an armistice and could persuade our enemies of the

'reality of the German desire for peace,' we should have left the worst behind us. *Vorwärts* wrote that the time had come when it was absolutely necessary for us to go through with the acceptance of the armistice conditions — (which, by the way, were not known at the time) — and that then we should have peace and bread and all sorts of good things; but in any case an armistice at once! Ludendorff and Hindenburg were at that very time convinced that it was possible for Germany to continue the war for several months longer, under far more favorable conditions than hitherto. Over half a million reinforcements were at their disposal. Reports concerning the position of the Entente all agreed that the Allies would be forced to cease fighting before the end of the year. These reports were confirmed by the statements made by various English officers. Hindenburg's and Ludendorff's opinion that by going on fighting the conditions (both so far as the armistice and peace were concerned) would improve as month succeeded month, has been completely vindicated up to now. When the frightful terms of the armistice were made public the whole blame was thrown on Ludendorff and the accursed military system, etc.

In this connection we may ask whether (Ludendorff having already resigned) the armistice conditions were ever laid before the High Command, that is to say, before Hindenburg, and what his opinion was. This question appears to us highly important; in any case history must return to it. To force this armistice on the German Empire and people, except under conditions of the direst necessity, was foolish, cowardly, and criminal. The guilty persons must be found out and branded. The extraordinary haste of the democratic and social democratic

parties to lay all the blame on Ludendorff is sufficiently characteristic. We know that every Soldiers' Council and every newsboy can prove conclusively that Ludendorff brought about the catastrophe by his great strategic blunders. We do not attempt to express an opinion on the military events, their causes, etc., or on the conduct of the various military leaders, but we must repeat our firm conviction that the real cause of our failures and the consequent *débâcle* was the disruptive work on the 'home front,' together with the Northcliffe propaganda. In this way has Germany been overthrown, and annihilated as a Power. We can only repeat that we have made mistakes just as our enemies have done. On the German side, so far as military mistakes are concerned, only one was made in any decisive sense, the original plan of the campaign, and this had its political side. We must lay the blame on the former command for the fact that their reports, and even their confidential *communiqués*, since August 8, were conceived in far too optimistic a vein; the true state of affairs was hardly indicated. But we cannot believe that men like Hindenburg and Ludendorff would have made such huge mistakes if they had only taken the advice of the Editors of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, the *Berliner Tageblatt*, and *Vorwärts*! Ludendorff is now regarded as a traitor to his country and a criminal, and this mean hounding down of a brave man is participated in by many of those who formerly considered no praise too high for the General. They forget that Hindenburg, who to-day is rightly acclaimed by all, was Chief of the General Staff of the army in the field, and Ludendorff his Quartermaster General. The aims of both generals during 1918 were identical. We cannot condemn one and belaud the other. If this is done,

it only shows bad faith, and is merely serving political ends. Even if General Ludendorff has made mistakes, he cannot be regarded by any sane German as an incapable leader or a criminal in any sense. It is a quite comprehensible fact that he lost his nerve for a short time after his superhuman exertions — but why was he compelled to retire before he was himself again?

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One of the most despicable faults and weaknesses is that of damning and slandering great leaders, because their name is in some way connected with failure and misfortune. If the German Crown Prince had not arrived in the nick of time at König Grätz, in 1868, Moltke, Bismarck, and König Wilhelm would have remained to us as standing examples of an accursed and rotten system.

PRESIDENT WILSON

AN AUSTRIAN VIEW

BY PROFESSOR M. J. BONN

Two years have elapsed since President Wilson presented his first peace proposal to the belligerent powers in the note of December 18, 1916. Since the beginning of the war he had waited for the day that it would be permitted him to point out the way to peace for the European world in the name of the great American nation, in which are united descendants of all the fighting peoples. He had repeatedly encountered insurmountable obstacles, until finally in December, 1916, when the German peace tender of December 12 had made known the readiness of the Central Powers for peace, and the collapse of the Rumanian offensive had lowered the hopes of the Allies, the right hour seemed to have come. He deceived himself. It was natural that his intervention should be suspected by the Allies as undertaken in connivance with the Central Powers.

It was comprehensible that people in Germany, irritated by America's delivery of munitions to her enemies, should not see the connection of things in the right light. The newspapers proclaimed that we wanted no Wilson peace. Wilson's character and personality were systematically distorted. The conception the German people held of him bore no correspondence with actual facts, but constituted a living example of the naïve childishness and simplicity with which a nation of poets and thinkers can form its political hatreds and its political affections.

The Germans have been taught to view political questions from an ethnographic national standpoint. They are inclined to see the bonds of political unity only in the ties of blood and speech, and they seldom comprehend that common institutions and com-