

THE ARMISTICE AND THE FOURTEEN POINTS

BY JEAN DE PANGE

UPON receiving the text of the Versailles Treaty on May 8, 1918, Count Brockdorff-Rantzau, speaking in the name of the German delegation, used the following words:

In this Conference, where we stand alone, without allies, face to face with a host of powerful adversaries, we are not without defenders. You yourselves have summoned us as an ally: the rights which were guaranteed us by the agreement signed by you at the beginning of the armistice. . . . On October 5, 1918, the German Government proposed as a basis of peace negotiations, the principles promulgated by the President of the United States of America. On November 5, Mr. Lansing, the Secretary of State of that country, replied that the Allied and Associated Powers agreed to accept these bases subject to two specified reservations.

These words were addressed to the presiding officer of the Conference, Mr. Clemenceau, who had not followed the example of Lloyd George, but had accepted the Fourteen Points of President Wilson without making the reservations necessary to protect French interests. Our adversaries thereupon denied that we had the right to go beyond the limits within which we had imprudently confined ourselves. These were their tactics throughout the debate upon the treaty. Now they declare officially:

The solemn engagements of Secretary Lansing's note of November 5 have been violated, but they are still in effect, and upon them we base the right which we shall inevitably use to insist upon a revision of the Peace Treaty.

This declaration is published at the beginning of a collection of official documents entitled, *The Preliminaries*

of the Armistice, and published by Mr. Ebert's government. The minutes of the Councils of War held at the Grand Headquarters and of the Cabinet meetings held at Berlin, memoranda of telephone conversations between the military and civilian leaders of Germany, and copies of telegrams exchanged with the Imperial Suite, are printed here. They show vividly how, when the great German Empire drove headlong to its final shipwreck, its pilots seized the plank of safety offered them by Wilson's programme.

The collection begins with the minutes of a Crown Council held at Spa on August 14, where the Emperor presided. At that time, the Empire still retained all its conquests in Russia, the Balkans, Belgium, and France. But for six days its leaders had known that it had received a fatal wound. A month previously, when the new Minister of Foreign Affairs, Von Hintze, asked if the Champagne offensive would result in 'a decisive and final victory,' Ludendorff after repeating the question declared, 'My answer is a formal, yes.' But something happened on the eighth of August, which Ludendorff calls, 'A black day in Germany's history,' which revealed the moral exhaustion of his troops. Whole divisions fled in panic when attacked by tanks between the Somme and the Luce. What was worse still, the reinforcements hurrying up for their support were hooted by the fleeing soldiers with cries of 'war prolongers — strike breakers.' Later, Ludendorff, who was

always inclined to find a physical explanation for things, attributed the rout of August 8 to the grippe and to a shortage of potatoes. But from that day on no one was really deceived. The greater part of the German army was dispirited and weary of fighting. What hope was left, in view of the enormous superiority which the Entente possessed in men, munitions, and raw materials? After August 14, the Emperor, the Chancellor, Hindenburg, Ludendorff, and Von Hintze, all recognized the necessity of beginning negotiations. The last named gentleman was directed to invite the Queen of Holland to mediate, in order to avoid the appearance of Germany's taking the initiative.

On the second day after the defeat upon the Somme, August 10, the Emperor of Austria declared positively that a general peace must be concluded during 1918, 'no matter what the conditions,' or he would be obliged to make peace separately. Then, accompanied by Count Burien, he hastened to Spa, where he spent the fourteenth and fifteenth of August trying to persuade Emperor William to dispense with intermediaries, and to send at the first possible moment an invitation for a peace conference to all the belligerents. On August 19, Count Burien, expressing the desire of his sovereign, addressed himself directly to Turkey and Bulgaria, asking them to join in his representations that peace must be made within eight or ten days. He took this action without consulting beforehand Kaiser Wilhelm. The latter keenly resented this as violating the agreement between the two Empires. But time was pressing. On August 24, at a conference held at the Ministry of the Interior, to which the chiefs of all the party delegations in the Reichstag were invited (including Ebert), Von Hintze asserted

that the war must be ended at the earliest possible moment. Nevertheless, he agreed with Ludendorff that negotiations should be begun through neutrals. When Switzerland and Sweden were approached upon this subject, they replied that such an effort on their part would be considered as hostile by the Entente. Was it possible to expect more of Holland, as Ludendorff fancied? Austria could not wait to ascertain this, and in spite of the insistence of Kaiser Wilhelm, and of Von Hintze, who went to Vienna, Count Burien, on September 14, dispatched a note requesting the belligerents to open peace negotiations.

The breaches in the imposing edifice of the quadruple alliance rapidly grew wider. An irreparable break was made in its line of defense when Bulgaria was overrun. On the evening of September 26, Ludendorff summoned Mr. Von Lersner, who represented the Foreign Office at headquarters, and told him that the Bulgarian army seemed to have been 'completely dispersed.' In his memoirs he says that it 'dissolved and went home.' That means that the strike spirit had triumphed. An effort was to be made to keep Tsar Ferdinand on the throne by concentrating at Sofia all the German troops available, 'officially in order to protect the retreat of the Bulgarian army, but really to protect the King from his government.' Above all, it was necessary to keep a watch upon Roumania, where recent events might provoke a catastrophe. How much longer could they count on Austria and Turkey? Ludendorff realizes that this is the beginning of the end, and has the Minister of Foreign Affairs invited to come to Spa for a conference. He sees but one way of obtaining acceptable conditions from the Entente—a direct appeal to President Wilson. He writes:

America's decisive military intervention in France, without which the Entente would have been defeated long before, offered the prospect that Wilson would be able to make England and France accept the terms which he had enunciated, by giving them the force of an actual engagement. It was necessary to clear up this point. If our opinion of Wilson was confirmed, we might accept the Fourteen Points as the basis of negotiations. They were very harsh, but at least they were precisely defined.

After September 29, Ludendorff, completely in accord with Hindenburg, forced Von Hintze and then the Emperor to approve his programme. The same day the latter caused an order to be published accepting the resignation of Chancellor Hertling and proclaiming that a government would be organized on a parliamentary basis, with the collaboration of the chiefs of the parties represented in the Reichstag. The German leaders counted upon the favorable effect of this political change upon Wilson, to whom the new government would be forced to address its request for an armistice and a conference to negotiate peace in accordance with the Fourteen Points promulgated by the President on January 8, 1918. This plan was communicated to Turkey and Austria, who had reported that they were at the limit of their powers of resistance. In order to persuade the chiefs of the parliamentary parties to endorse his views, Ludendorff had Major Von dem Busche explain to them the true military situation. 'The collapse of the Bulgarian front has ruined our plans.' On the West, the superiority of the Entente has been greatly increased by the unexpected success of tanks employed *en masse*. These caused panics and produced confusion in the plan of battle. They were responsible for the large number of German prisoners taken and the consequent rapid exhaustion of reserves. As a result it had been necessary to

abolish twenty-two divisions of infantry. No hope remained of forcing the enemy to make peace by military means; it was necessary to stop fighting at once before Germany's weakness became evident to its enemies.

Indeed, on September 26, the Entente armies began their concentric attack from the Meuse to the North Sea. Under this terrible pressure, the German line broke at several points. Ludendorff betrayed signs of a nervous collapse. On the first of October, at one in the afternoon, he instructed Lersner to transmit to the Minister of Foreign Affairs his urgent request to dispatch an offer of peace at once. 'To-day, our lines are intact, but we cannot foretell what may happen tomorrow.' An hour later he repeated this request through the Chancellor of the Legation, Grunau, asserting: 'At any moment our front may be broken and we may be compelled to solicit peace under less favorable conditions.' Grunau adds: 'I was under the impression that he had completely lost his self-control.' At midnight, Ludendorff again ordered Lersner to report, 'The army cannot hold out forty-eight hours longer.' He insisted that a peace offer should be sent 'in the most expeditious way possible,' if necessary, using the wireless station at Nauern. The following day Lersner sent the Foreign Office the text of a note composed by Ludendorff personally, offering to negotiate peace on the basis of Wilson's programme. The new Chancellor, Prince Max of Baden, who opposed this measure, the next day, vainly protested to Hindenburg that it meant losing the German colonies, Alsace-Lorraine, and the Polish provinces. The opinion at Grand Headquarters was that Germany would be fortunate to get off so easily. Hindenburg answered that the situation was getting constantly worse, and that not

a moment should be lost. So, the same day, October 3, the note was sent to President Wilson, practically in the form in which it was composed by Ludendorff.

The first object of that general, and of Hindenburg, was to have Wilson's programme recognized as the basis of negotiations. Consequently, when a reply was received from the President of the United States, inquiring if the Imperial Government 'accepted the conditions outlined by the President in his message of January 8 to Congress, and in his subsequent messages, and if it was ready to withdraw its troops back of the German frontiers,' the Chancellor replied in the affirmative. Hindenburg impressed upon the latter the necessity of obtaining the adherence of all the Entente Governments to this programme. He considered this a necessary guaranty against more exorbitant demands by the Entente. Consequently, he himself wrote the following paragraph of the second German note sent to President Wilson on October 12: 'The German Government assumes that the governments of the Allied Powers are in full accord with the United States in respect to the assurance given by President Wilson.'

On October 14, America's reply was received. It demanded satisfactory guaranties 'for the maintenance of the present military superiority of the United States and her allies.' In other words, Germany was to be disarmed under the armistice conditions before negotiations started. 'Furthermore, in his reply to our second note, Wilson did not state that the Entente had accepted the Fourteen Points.' This is the way that Ludendorff expresses himself in his memoirs, showing clearly that this was his principal object of solicitude. What would be the outcome if the Allies should for-

mulate their claims independently of Wilson's programme? In view of this uncertainty he thought it best to fight further. At a Cabinet meeting, held at Berlin on October 17, and presided over by Prince Max of Baden, he said: 'Soldiers' luck is the very substance of war. Perhaps this soldiers' luck will again return to our banners.' But would the German people risk the chance? When interrogated on this point the new Socialist minister, Scheidemann, expressed himself as follows:

The people have been disheartened by the unsuccessful submarine campaign, by the superiority of the enemy in equipment, by the defection or complete disorganization of their allies, and by the growing distress at home. The working people are coming more and more to say: 'Better a terrible disaster than a terror without end.'

General Ludendorff: Cannot Your Excellency manage to revive the morale of the masses?

Secretary of State Scheidemann: It is a question of potatoes. We have no more meat. We cannot supply potatoes because there is a shortage of four thousand cars daily. We're entirely without fats. The situation is so critical that I am helpless for an answer if you ask me how Northern Berlin and Eastern Berlin continue to exist. Until we have solved that problem it is impossible to restore courage. In fact, it would be dishonest to leave the slightest doubt on this subject.

Ludendorff shouted: 'Get a hold of the people; carry them with you. Mr. Ebert, can't you do that? We must do it.' But how were they to conceal from the people the spectre of inevitable and ultimate defeat? Did they not recognize that Roumania was sure to come back into the war after the surrender of Bulgaria, and to deprive Germany of the petroleum indispensable for the submarine campaign? Did they not recognize the fearful numerical inferiority of the German army, sure to be increased by the defection of all their allies? The spirit of the German people was so disheartened, so permeated with Bolshe-

vism, that the contagion of its despair would be fatal to the army if the armistice made it necessary to withdraw the troops from the frontier.

On October 20, Hindenburg had the Chancellor telephoned: 'Turkey has commenced peace negotiations; Austria will follow immediately; very shortly we shall be left alone. Are the German people ready to fight to the last man to defend their honor?' There was no answer to this appeal. The same day the German Government consented to President Wilson's conditions, 'confident that none of them will be incompatible with the honor of the German people and with the establishment of a just peace.' On October 23, the President replied that he had asked the Powers with which his government was associated in the war to cause armistice conditions to be drafted by their military experts in conference with those of the United States, providing 'that these Powers are willing to conclude peace according to the principles announced.'

On October 25, Ludendorff visited the Ministry of the Interior to see the Vice-Chancellor, Von Payer. He wanted to extract a promise from that gentleman that if the armistice conditions were too harsh he would appeal to the people to rise *en masse*. The Vice-Chancellor refused. The day of fighting was over. Upon leaving, Ludendorff, moved by profound emotion, said: 'All hope is lost; Germany is undone.' The next day he resigned. On October 27, the Emperor of Austria reported to Kaiser Wilhelm that since his people had neither the strength nor the will to continue the war, he would ask for a separate peace and conclude an immediate armistice. The latter was signed on October 30. It placed at the disposal of the Allies all the railways of Austria. The following day Turkey capitulated. Uprisings oc-

curred in Bohemia and Poland. Germany was at the mercy of the Allies, who could attack it from every side and give it the *coup de grâce*. Would they accept Wilson's programme, which was Ludendorff's sole hope? Berlin cherished little hope. In a memorandum dated October 31, the Secretary of State, Solf, expressed himself as follows:

Wilson desires a peace of justice as the basis of his programme. The Entente rebels against accepting this programme. It wishes to conclude peace on its own terms, which are much more severe. At the same time, the Republican party in America, influenced by Roosevelt, demands the unconditional surrender of Germany. Wilson as a politician dare not run counter to public opinion, since the elections for Congress will be held in America on November 5, where the Democratic party, which is supporting Wilson, has but a small majority.

So the decision rested in the hands of the Entente. Recently there has been published a detailed account of the historical scene that occurred on November 3, 1918, in the cabinet of M. Pichon at the Foreign Office, where Lloyd George, Clemenceau, and Colonel House, who represented President Wilson, were present. The military conditions of the armistice were settled. Whereupon Colonel House declared that before submitting them to Germany, President Wilson demanded the adherence of England and France to the conditions of peace which he had formulated in the Fourteen Points of his address of January 8, 1918. Clemenceau objected that this seemed incredible, and that he had never even read these articles. Thereupon they began to read them. When the second one, relative to the liberty of the seas, was read, Lloyd George in the name of England made a reservation stating that he would not permit the question of maritime supremacy to be raised. That was the article which public opinion in America supported most

strongly. It was surrendered, however, upon the insistence of Lloyd George, who also required that the Germans should be bound to compensate civilians for their losses. These two modifications were specified in President Wilson's message to the German Government, dated November 5, as the only reservations which the Allied Governments made in accepting the conditions of peace formulated in the Fourteen Points. This message was received in Germany with joyous surprise. Our enemies had solemnly promised to observe the Fourteen Points promulgated by Wilson. The German people considered the war over. Wilson was the most popular man in the country.

England, thanks to the frankness of its representatives, was able to place beyond question, before the matter began to be discussed, the reservation which it considered essential for its interests. But what did France gain? Clemenceau, in accepting the Fourteen Points, did not make a single reservation. Was he thinking solely of the eighth, which mentions, 'reparation for the wrong caused France in 1871,' considering that it embraced all the guaranties and reparations which the successive violations and mutilations of our Eastern frontier for the past hundred years justified our demanding? Did it mean that we were to have back our boundary of 1814? It is admitted in case of Poland, that its rights still survive after a century and a half of Prussian occupation. Now, France does not demand the four departments on the left bank of the Rhine, annexed by Prussia in 1815, but it may justly insist that the population of the Rhine valley shall be withdrawn from Prussian control, against which it once vigorously protested. It is not necessary to detach them from Germany, which was the only plan M.

Tardieu discussed when he defended the Peace Treaty before the Chamber of Deputies, but to let them form a government within the German federation distinct from Prussia. They are not attached to Prussia by tradition or sentiment. Instead of reserving membership in the League of Nations solely to the conquerors, why not admit the Rhinelanders and place the Capital of the League in their province, where at the tomb of Charlemagne the traditions of the Holy Roman Empire, the grandest international political conception which the world has ever seen, still survive? How would the erection of such a German state, bound to perpetual neutrality, violate the programme of President Wilson?

As late as November 3, France might have followed the example of England before accepting the Fourteen Points, and have enforced the modifications which it considered necessary. However, its representatives endorsed them unconditionally. Did this mean without mental reservations? M. Pichon seems to have given the Committee of Foreign Affairs of the Chamber of Deputies the impression that it was merely a pro-forma acceptance, given on the assumption that the details would be discussed anew when Mr. Wilson arrived in France. Mr. Wilson, however, like the English, considered that 'the character of the contract entered into between Germany and the Allies, resulting from the terms of the armistice, is clear and unequivocal.' That accounts for the disapproval with which our allies later received our protests, and for the serious misunderstanding in which we are involved with the United States. Count Brockdorff-Rantzau was perfectly right in saying to M. Clemenceau on May 8, 1918: 'You yourselves have given us an ally.'

[*Berliner Tageblatt* (Democratic Daily), January 25]

THE REPARATION COMMISSION

BY BERNHARD DERNBURG

POWERS and duties of very wide extent are entrusted to the Reparation Commission by the Peace Treaty. Its function is to assure for the Entente for a generation or more the maximum indemnity which it will be possible to squeeze out of Germany. This at once brings us to the fundamental condition of the problem, which is that this situation creates a powerful community of interest between the Entente and Germany, even though that interest be one-sided. For it is at once evident — as the general memorandum accompanying the treaty states — that Germany's economic activity and capacity for production must not be strangled. Indeed, more than this, our economic vigor must be restored by supplying us with raw materials and provisions, something likewise provided for in the Peace Treaty. So far, to be sure, we have no indication of the source from whence these are to come and have witnessed no deliveries. We need such things urgently. I do not share the government's optimism as to their speedy arrival.

This community of interest, which resembles that existing between a creditor and an insolvent debtor to whom he has advanced money as receiver, therefore centres in the desire of this creditor to increase the debtor's ability to pay what he owes. All clear-sighted men will recognize this as soon as the economic provisions of the treaty are removed from the field of theoretical discussion to that of practical application.

The former French Minister of Finance, Klotz, recently described the situation by saying: 'France has become Germany's banker, to whom it has advanced already twenty-five billion francs in the sums that it has spent for restoring its war-devastated territories.' The main thing now is to work out practical measures for dealing with this theoretical situation.

First of all, let us sketch briefly the essential conditions required in order that Germany may be able to comply with its obligations — obligations which no one who knows our people intimately doubts our desire honestly to fulfill. We may be perfectly aware that it never will be possible for us to fulfill many of these conditions, but that is something to be demonstrated after confidence between all parties has been reestablished.

The first principal requisite is settled government in Germany itself. The only form of settled government possible as things are at present is a democratic republic. Consequently, the first task is to perfect and strengthen this form of political organization. It is the only kind of government which guarantees the degree of order and security necessary for a resumption of production. The Entente cannot hope to get a thing either from a Bolshevik Germany, or from a Germany torn by civil wars and seduced by chauvinist or imperialist visions. Consequently, the Allied governments must avoid doing anything that will imperil the existence of the