

COULD GERMANY HAVE AVOIDED THE WAR?

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[This article contains the salient passages from a long and rather rambling article on The Past, Present, and Future of Germany, the greater portion of which is of merely historical interest.]

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At the London Conference, on March 1 of this year, Lloyd-George reiterated, as the official spokesman of the Entente, the statement that the onerous peace of Versailles is based upon and justified by Germany's avowed responsibility for the outbreak of the war. This allegation shows how important the responsibility question is. Whoever gives thought to this matter must realize that falsehood is here securing one of its greatest triumphs through the deft propaganda of our enemies. But just because a large part of the world has succumbed to this propaganda, it behooves those who, through personal experience or from thorough investigation, are acquainted with the facts, to make clear the truth about the pre-war political manœuvrings.

Now, a part of this 'responsibility' allegation rests upon the idea that, by creating a great navy we acted improperly, irritated the English unnecessarily, and thus provided an important impulse toward war. As I am particularly responsible for the upbuilding of our navy, I want to have my say on this matter.

A word by way of historical introduction. Toward the end of the last century, we Germans entered a new economic epoch, which called upon us either to renounce our future by handing over to other nations our excess population, or to retain this surplus, if we could, for our benefit and theirs. History's log-

ical process pointed us to the latter alternative, and we chose it without clearly realizing that the changed conditions brought with them entirely new tasks.

After Germany became an economic unit, her progress pushed rapidly on, leaving even that of England behind. Various factors contributed to this progress — German science with its exact methods; the intelligence, quality, and training of our industrial leaders and workers. A third important factor was Germany's splendid geographical position, in the middle of the Continent, making her the natural business centre of Europe.

In the light of this progress, can one be astonished that the English, a nation of shopkeepers, should begin to think of pushing aside those who threatened their century-old monopoly? Is it believable that Germany, hat in hand, without any naval power, would have been allowed to develop a serious and successful competition? Sharp economic competition between Germany and England was, in the nature of things, inevitable. The vital question is: Was it also inevitable that this rivalry should lead to war?

The great turn of the tide from friendship to rivalry took place in the nineties of the last century. Its first outward manifestations were the flare-up over the Kruger message and the 'Made in Germany' requirement — the aim of

the latter being to handicap Germany in international trade. So, having met the animosity of a world-power, we could face it successfully only if we, too, became a world-power; which means that we had to build a navy.

England, at that time, aimed at separating us from Russia, and even from Austria. If Germany, thus isolated, could have been brought into an entente with England; we should then have been completely under her control. England's underlying motive demonstrates that not an entente, but the development of our own power, was the proper policy. Not until we had built up a navy could the question of an entente with England be discussed. Suppose we had proved able to surpass England commercially without possessing a fleet — there can be no doubt, especially after our late and bitter experience, that England would have strangled our supremacy without risking anything. On national, economic, and cultural grounds, it was necessary for us to build a navy; and in 1897 one of the last opportunities in this field was given to us. It was late, indeed, but not too late.

Now comes the further question: Could this necessary development have been carried on without coming to blows with England? Personally, I am inclined to think it was possible; for when a series of political mistakes brought us into conflict in 1914, the real danger point had already passed.

What was the political situation of Germany in 1897 and 1900? When we passed our navy laws, Russia and France stood in strong opposition to England, which was isolated and not dangerous. America and Japan were politically indifferent to us. As long as the French indulged in an aggressive colonial policy, thus threatening to break through England's Africa-Mesopotamia-India connection, a

Franco-British alliance was unthinkable. But when, after Fashoda, France abandoned her far-reaching African plans, confining herself to her North-African provinces, the whole situation changed. With this shift France was brought under England's influence. The idea of an *entente cordiale* with England presently took its place in the French mind.

So long as the Russians, on the other hand, were occupied at Port Arthur and in the settlement of Siberia, their powers of expansion were fully engaged. But after being expelled from Port Arthur by England and Japan, there revived the time-honored and popular Russian idea of establishing the Cross on the Hagia Sophia at Constantinople. After that turn in affairs, we should have more assiduously cultivated the friendship of our eastern neighbor.

The second Far-Eastern power, Japan, had been forced into antipathy to us by our participation in the Shimomoseki ultimatum. How inept our Japanese policy was can be inferred from the fact that our minister at Tokyo let himself be persuaded by the Russian and French ministers to deliver personally this ultimatum to the Tokyo Foreign Office. In spite of this, I have reason to believe that, both at that time and later, an understanding with Japan could have been arrived at.

After the Russo-Japanese War our international situation, on the whole, was less favorable. England had her hands free and could concentrate her energies against Germany. As early as 1905 the English admiralty realized that the development of our sea-power must prove to be a great factor in affairs. Even as the British, prior to 1905, had underrated our navy, so at that date they began to overrate it. Our navy was not strong enough at that time to come to grips with the English fleet. So it is not surprising that the

chief of the English admiralty, Lord Fisher, desired to destroy the Germans at once. His words were: 'Let's Copenhagen the German Fleet' — that is, pounce upon the German navy in piping times of peace, as happened to the Danish fleet in 1807. This was the time when our navy presented an actual danger to peace.

But the English cabinet thought it better to gain Russia as an ally against Germany. And that was the situation in 1909, when Bethmann-Hollweg became chancellor. In the same year England openly approached Russia, whereupon Germany was put to the problem of seeking a real understanding with Russia, or of submitting to England. Had we chosen the latter, we should have had to reckon with a Russo-German conflict, and the necessity, not only of building up a formidable land-power, but of obliging Austria to do the same. By taking neither side, we laid the same burden on ourselves. So long as the English danger was not out of the way, we had to continue our navy programme, which, however, was badly neglected under Bethmann. But his great shortcoming was his lack of clear-sighted policy. By sending Liman Sanders to Constantinople, we irritated the Russians; by building the Bagdad railway, we stirred up not only the Russians, but the English as well. Thus, we helped drive England and Russia into each other's arms.

The correspondence between the Russian Government and its foreign ministers at the various European courts has recently been published. It clearly proves three things: first, that Russian policy before the war had one goal to which all the other questions were subordinated — the Dardanelles; second, that the French steadily encouraged the Russians to take the route to Constantinople by way of Berlin; and third, that the English, fully informed

on this point, promised assistance to both Russians and French, on condition that their diplomacy should succeed in placing Germany as a malefactor before the eyes of the world.

Not until 1913 did the Russian war party begin to gain the upper hand, and it was as late as February 8, 1914, that the Russian Government decided in a conclave that the road to Constantinople was as good by way of the Balkans as through the Caucasus or by sea.

So we see that Germany's naval policy had nothing to do with the outbreak of the war. Not only did the existence of our navy make England hesitate about entering the war in 1914, but it offered to clever diplomats the earlier chance of coming to a full understanding with Russia, and even with Japan. Had they availed themselves of it, history would have taken a different course.

While the Entente was being formed, Bethmann began to seek an understanding with England. Now I do not think these negotiations had any chance, because in English eyes the Entente was already as good as achieved. There was, however, no reason not to make the attempt. I supported Bethmann in his endeavors along this line, but our procedure was wrong in principle because we failed to approach Russia at the same time. Only if England had fears of a Russo-German understanding, would she have been inclined to an understanding with us. And whether or not such an understanding would have proved permanent is doubtful.

On the other hand, I am convinced that it would have been possible at that time to have come to an understanding with Russia, if only we had proceeded logically and energetically. There was nothing irreconcilable in the vital interests of Russia and Germany; these interests lay then, as now, in the

same direction. The common foe of both countries was British Imperialism, which could have desired nothing better than to see Russia and Germany fighting each other. That the Tsar was of this opinion, I know from my personal acquaintance with him.

If it had been understood further that the Russians did not require to go by way of the Balkans in order to reach Constantinople, concern about Austria would have been needless. Once the Russian bear and the British whale were confronted with each other at Constantinople, Germany as well as Austria would be rid of the danger. Bearing in mind our inevitable antagonism to England, our interest in such a solution should have been great enough to place us in support of Russia so far as possible. The fact that we did not do this when we opened negotiations with England was a serious mistake, which we repeated in a grotesque way during 1916, when we slapped Russia in the face by our 'proclamation to the Poles'—and in the same breath solemnly invited England to make peace with us. Lloyd George's answer was, of course: 'Knock 'em out.'

I repeat that the critical period with England, so far as our fleet is concerned, was in 1905, when the English admiralty yearned for war with its superiority still undisputed. When, in 1912, England realized that we had finally settled the strength of our navy, it ceased to be a matter of controversy between us. England and her admiralty had come to regard our navy as an accomplished fact. In 1913, under Mr. Churchill, England made proposals in the direction of an understanding, and these I declared in the Reichstag to be acceptable. From this time on, our navy really was an aid to the cause of peace; because the English admiralty was fully aware of the risk involved in a war with Germany. It is quite natural

that the English should not have regarded our navy with friendly eyes. But if they had deemed its growth to be a cause for war, they would not have waited until our navy was strong enough to be a very dangerous enemy—which was indeed the situation in 1914. The English admiralty realized that a clash of the two fleets would shatter the English sea-power in any event. And the battle off Jutland showed unmistakably the superiority of our fleet, not in size or numbers, but in the quality of its personnel and material. Yet, this battle took place at a time when circumstances were much less favorable to us than at the beginning of the war.

All this shows how great a risk England incurred by entering the war. It was one of the gravest mistakes of Bethmann's pre-war policy not to have augmented this risk by strengthening our military and naval power. All the information that we received during 1913 made us confident that our relations with England had passed the critical point. Recall the adjustment of Anglo-German colonial controversies in the course of that year. It was only as the result of extraordinary circumstances that we, nevertheless, came to blows. I am convinced, therefore, that the stabilization of our empire was possible without war, and that, once having engaged in a war, we need not have lost it.

Now, our Fatherland is torn to pieces. Is there any hope left to us? We all look forward to a healing of the nation's wounds, but every one ought to realize the abounding difficulties of our task. To reason from the analogy of the situation which existed after the crushing of the German nation by Napoleon is wrong. At that time the physical and moral strength of our people was unbroken, and the foundations of the state had not been shattered. Immediately after the collapse

of 1806, far-reaching reforms were put through by energetic leaders, so that Napoleon at St. Helena used to say: 'My greatest mistake was that I did not completely destroy Prussia.'

To-day, conditions are different. The Revolution has destroyed the very foundations of our state. The defensive forces which we created for the protection of our borders have been systematically obliterated by the leaders of the new democratic régime. The strength and integrity of our old government was proved by the invincible resistance, which ended in catastrophe because German people assassinated their own state, while the foe stood before the gates.

Let us face the truth: we shall not need whole centuries for our recovery as was the case after the Thirty Years' War. History now moves with a rapid

stride. Being an old man, I cannot hope to see the rising of the new sun. But if I none the less feel confident that it will some day shine again upon our fortunes, I do so because of the strong patriotism which pulses in our youth, a patriotism which I believe will extend to all Germans. The first gleam of our renaissance will be the general conviction that nothing but madness and a deficient sense of honor can ever induce us to accept responsibility for the war. From this conviction will result the indomitable will to rebuff the impossible and dishonorable demands of our enemies, and to bear the consequences with the dignity that befits a noble nation.

Then, and only then, will the odium now resting upon us be cast off, and we shall gain our rightful share of friends in the world.

OIL AND EMPIRE

BY E. EBERLIN

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THE conflict of interests between England and the United States cannot be denied. These two most powerful maritime states of the world have taken their respective positions and are already at grips. Their principal battlefield will not be the continent of Europe, and that is why events in Central America, which are superficially of so little importance, stir Mr. Lloyd George more deeply than German disturbances. At present, the question of prime importance in the

minds of the cabinets, both at Washington and at London, is the control of petroleum.

Until the last few years, and for more than half a century, the oil industry was predominantly American. Naphtha was first discovered and exploited in the United States, and it was there that Rockefeller developed his ingenious scheme of pipe-lines, the gigantic tubes through which the petroleum flows to the immense reservoirs at the refineries. Thereafter, the price fell