Germany's Drive to the West (Drang Nach Westen)

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THE GERMAN offensive against the West, based on the
"Schlieffen Plan," rolled off with expected precision as soon
as war was declared on August 1, 1914. Violating the neutrality of
Belgium, six German infantry brigades reached Liège by August 5,
and two days later took this strongest obstacle to Germany's pro­
jected encircling move. On August 18 the five armies of invasion
had taken up positions and began their gigantic turning move
around the pivot of Diedenhofen. Their advance in the north was
marked by a succession of victorious battles, while at the same time
the left wing of Germany's western army, under Crown Prince
Rupprecht of Bavaria, repulsed the French in the Battle of Lorrainenum
Thirty-five days since mobilization," the Kaiser could
boast, "and Rheims has been occupied, the French government has
moved to Bordeaux, and the advance-guards of our cavalry stand
fifty kilometers from Paris." Yet the very same day, Germany's
Commander-in-Chief, Generaloberst von Moltke, observed: "We
have had successes, to be sure, but we have not won. Victory
means the destruction of the enemy's power of resistance. When
millions of soldiers meet, the victor should take prisoners. Where
are our prisoners?" This ineffectual heir to a proud military
tradition had failed to carry out his great predecessor's last will.
The Schlieffen Plan had failed.

After September 4, the French launched their counter-offensive,
the "Battle of the Marne," climaxed by the famous "miracle," the
sudden withdrawal of German forces on September 9. There fol­
lowed the somewhat misnamed "race to the sea," and by the middle
of October, when the Germans reached the Atlantic, warfare in the
west had changed from a war of movement to a war of position.

1 For a brief discussion of military events in 1914 see E. O. Volkmann, Der grosse
Krieg 1914-1918 (Berlin, 1938), pp. 35 ff.
3 Ibid.
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The Kaiser's army had failed to deliver a knock-out blow to the Allied forces, and for the next few months, in view of the added Russian pressure in the east, Germany was in a by no means enviable military position.

Yet the majority of Germans were quite unaware that things had not gone according to schedule. They believed what they saw, namely, that their armies had carried the war deep into enemy territory and had conquered vast areas—almost all of Belgium and the most valuable regions of eastern France. No wonder, then, that many Germans looked longingly towards the west. The table had been set for the annexationist feast.

The Government and Western War Aims

The declared aim of the German government at the outbreak of war was a negative one—the defense of the Fatherland. Most Germans felt that their country had become involved in a war against her will, a feeling to which the Emperor's speech on August 4 gave voice: "Not lust of conquest drives us on," he said. "We are inspired by the unalterable will to protect, for ourselves and all coming generations, the place which God has assigned to us." His Chancellor, von Bethmann Hollweg, fully agreed. It had always been Germany's aim, he held, to fight only "in defense of a just cause." "The day has now come," he said, "when we must draw our sword, against our wish, and in spite of our sincere endeavors." Yet at the same time, much to the dismay of German patriots, Bethmann admitted that Germany's invasion of Belgium was "a breach of international law." "The wrong—I speak frankly—the wrong we thereby commit, we will try to make good as soon as our military aims have been attained." And as if to live up to his promise, Germany, on August 7, offered Belgium a peace which would not interfere with a continued war against France. But Belgium preferred to stay on the side of the Allies. Germany's hopes of concluding a similar peace with a defeated France were dashed at the Marne.

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5 Ibid., p. 10.
6 Ibid., p. 13.
The initial successes of Germany's armies in the west soon changed the official attitude of moderation. A first hint came as early as August 26, when Bethmann asked his Secretary of the Interior for a report on the French iron deposits in the Briey-Longwy region and on the extent of Germany's pre-war share in their exploitation.\(^9\) Two weeks later, the Chancellor apparently had decided to annex these districts, together with certain strategic regions along the Franco-German border and the fortress of Belfort.\(^10\) As far as Belgium was concerned, Bethmann's aims during these early days of the war are not quite so clear, though there is evidence that he was ready to consider the annexation of parts of northern Belgium, leaving the southern section as a buffer state between Germany and France.\(^11\)

When it became clear in early September, however, that Germany's western offensive had failed to reach its objective, Bethmann Hollweg temporarily abandoned whatever annexationist aims he had. The disaster on the Marne had spoiled all chances for a quick military decision, and the only hope now was for a separate peace with one of Germany's adversaries, to lighten the burden of a war on two fronts. Although the Chancellor's pre-war foreign policy of rapprochement with Great Britain had proved a fiasco, Bethmann's first peace efforts in 1914 and early 1915 were directed towards England.\(^12\) In this he had the support of most Germans, who at this time still considered Russia and not England Germany's chief enemy.\(^13\)

The best way to achieve such a separate understanding with Great Britain, probably, was to engage first in a show of military and naval force, and then to offer an acceptable compromise, especially on the crucial question of Belgium.\(^14\) Instead, Bethmann Hollweg not only opposed all strong measures and demonstrations against England, but he slowly maneuvered himself into a most

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\(^10\) Ibid., p. 36.
\(^11\) Tirpitz, Dokumente, II, 65.
\(^13\) E. Dahlin, French and German Public Opinion on Declared War Aims 1914-1918 (Stanford, 1933), pp. 14-17.
\(^14\) H. Stegemann, Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben und aus meiner Zeit (Stuttgart, 1930), pp. 305-06.
ambiguous position on the future of Belgium. A first step in this direction was the publication of documents from the Belgian archives, intended to prove that Belgium had forfeited her pre-war neutrality when she entered into military discussions with Great Britain. Published in October and November of 1914, these documents seemed to revise Bethmann’s earlier admission of guilt towards Belgium. At the same time, in justifying Germany’s invasion of Belgium, they supplied the annexationist element with potent arguments against restoring the latter’s independence. Even the more moderate groups felt indignant over the “perfidy” of Belgium and demanded that measures be taken to keep her from ever again becoming an ally of France and England.

While the German people thus slowly developed an appetite for annexations, Bethmann Hollweg preferred to remain vague. On the one hand he called the Grand Duke of Oldenburg’s program for the annexation of Belgium “a great mistake,” and continued to be evasive on the future of eastern France; yet on the other he still insisted in a Reichstag speech of December 2 on a “stronger Germany,” so powerful and secure that “no one would dare again to disturb” her peace. As for other leading statesmen, their war aims during this early period were almost exclusively moderate. This was especially true of Foreign Secretary von Jagow and his chief assistant, Zimmermann, as well as of the Kaiser and his military staff. Moltke, in a letter to the Emperor, recommended that Germany not expect much territory in Europe but instead extend her holdings in Central Africa. Moltke’s successor, General

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17 U. A., 4. Reihe, IV, 251-52; B. Schwertfeger, Der geistige Kampf um die Verletzung der belgischen Neutralität (Berlin, 1925), passim.
von Falkenhayn, repeatedly expressed concern over the people's optimism and stressed the vast difficulties still ahead. Similar views were held on the eastern front by Hindenburg and Hoffmann. Only Admiral von Tirpitz, eagerly awaiting an opportunity to use his navy against Great Britain, came forth with a series of annexationist demands: Antwerp, the Flanders coast, and a substantial colonial empire (as additional raison d'etre for a powerful German fleet).

Such colonial war aims, though strictly speaking in a separate category, are often included in continental annexationist programs. But while almost all western annexationists advocated some degree of colonial expansion, many people in favor of such expansion did by no means favor annexations in Western Europe as well. To many Germans the western conquests were a kind of pawn (Faustpfand), to be exchanged at a future peace conference against the former German colonies (most of which had fallen into allied hands soon after the outbreak of war) plus some additional colonial holdings. The most noted representative of this group was the Colonial Secretary, Wilhelm Solf. He was opposed to German annexations on the continent, but throughout the war he stressed the need for a larger colonial empire in Africa, advocating a general re-distribution of all colonial holdings on that continent. These colonial aims found wide support among annexationists of all classes, especially from members of the Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft.

The declared war aims of Germany's statesmen during the first months of war, as these examples show, were on the whole moderate. But this does not exclude the existence of more detailed and far-reaching plans for the future of Western Europe. In October of 1914 the Prussian Minister of the Interior, von Loebell, wrote a lengthy memorandum on the future peace settlement; and in December a similar document was prepared by Germany's Secretary

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23 Tirpitz, *Dokumente*, II, 58-59, 65, 144-5, 179; Tirpitz, *Erinnerungen*, pp. 422, 440; see also *Dokumente*, II, 142 for similar views of Admiral von Pohl, the navy's representative with the Supreme Command.
of the Interior, Clemens von Delbrück, and Under-Secretary Zimmermann. Both memoranda are important steps in the evolution of western war aims.

Von Loebell looked upon France and England rather than Russia as Germany's natural enemies, and demanded that these two be weakened as much as possible. To become a truly great world power, Germany, according to Loebell, had to strengthen her continental position against England and at the same time gain unconditional freedom of the seas, defensible colonies, and the necessary naval stations to maintain overseas communications. As far as Western Europe was concerned, France had to be beaten and rendered harmless once and for all. Strategic frontier rectifications, surrender of her coal and iron districts, and a high indemnity would bring about such permanent weakening. As to Belgium, her fate depended largely on the outcome of Germany's conflict with England. Only by the defeat of England could Germany hope to keep Belgium. But this possibility von Loebell doubted, because he realized that England would fight to the very last against a German annexation of the Lowlands. The final contest would thus be postponed, though it was inevitable. "Great Britain now has pitted her vital interests against ours. She is the enemy with whom sooner or later we shall have to force a showdown; because she will never tolerate at her side a strong Germany, actively engaged in world affairs." 

The idea that the World War was only the preliminary step in the final overthrow of Great Britain, the "First Punic War" as the Kaiser called it, was quite current among German annexationists. Its proponents suggested that Germany should first of all strengthen and consolidate her position on the continent, thus preparing herself for the final bout with England. Such continental strength had to be won at the expense not only of France but of Russia as well; and to achieve this it might even be necessary—as Bethmann Hollweg had tried—to come to a temporary understanding with England, so as to be able to concentrate all forces against the east. But at the same time there were other annexationists who felt that Germany could defeat England and thus take her place as a world power in this first world war. To these exponents of the

27 U. A., 4. Reihe, XII (1), 188.
Drang nach Westen England was the immediate enemy, the Hauptfeind, and they advocated a separate peace with Russia to make possible a concentration of forces against the West. Throughout the war, the question of who could best be annihilated first and who best appeased temporarily, England or Russia, played an important part in Germany's debate on war aims.28

Of still greater interest than von Loebell's memorandum were the proposals of Delbrück and Zimmermann for "the treatment of Belgium in case of a decisive German victory." Written at the request of the Chancellor, the general idea of the memorandum was to find a way short of open annexation by which Belgium could be put completely under German domination. As a result this document (which should be viewed as an impartial report rather than a manifestation of the two Secretaries' war aims) stands as the most specific elaboration of the expression "military and economic guarantees," through which Germany hoped to maintain her influence over Belgium.

The main purpose of German "military guarantees," according to Delbrück and Zimmermann, should be to make sure that Belgium would never again serve as a base of operations against Germany. To prevent this, the following measures were suggested:

(1) All fortresses, the whole Belgian coast and its defenses, must remain under German control. The same applied to all means of transportation and communication.

(2) In addition, Belgium must give up her army. The money she thus saved could be used to maintain Germany's army of occupation.

(3) German military domination of Belgium also required certain limitations of Belgian sovereignty. German troops must be subject to their own jurisdiction. There must be no independent foreign policy for Belgium, and in internal matters Germany must have a veto over all laws and administrative acts conflicting with her military interests. Under certain conditions the Kaiser must have power to decree martial law for all or part of Belgium.

So much for Germany's military control. What little freedom Belgium retained would be taken away through "economic penetration." This would involve the following measures:

28 For a discussion of this problem see S. Eggert, "Die deutschen Eroberungspläne im ersten Weltkrieg," Neue Welt, II (1947), 45-47
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(1) Belgium must join the German customs union as a non-voting member.

(2) The Belgian system of rail- and waterways must be closely integrated with that of Germany.

(3) Germany's monetary system must be extended to Belgium.

(4) To impose identical burdens on German and Belgian industries (preventing unfavorable competition which might result from a customs union) Germany must introduce her system of taxation and social legislation into Belgium.

Here, in brief outline, we have the 1914 version of Germany's "New Order" for Belgium. It is the clearest and most ruthless official definition of "veiled annexation" available for the period of the World War. In comparison, as a memorandum from the Ministry of Public Works pointed out, "complete annexation appears as a milder form of securing influence." At the time it was drafted, of course, this memorandum was a mere theoretical discussion of a possible solution in case of complete German victory. But before long, references to this type of solution began to appear in Bethmann Hollweg's statements on war aims. In the spring of 1915, for instance, the Socialist Deputy Scheidemann, alarmed by the widespread annexationist propaganda, asked the Chancellor about his plans for the future of Belgium. Bethmann in reply clearly dissociated himself from the wild schemes of the Pan-German annexationists and assured Scheidemann that he had no intention of annexing Belgium.

I imagine that we might obtain closer economic relations with Belgium and, perhaps, also agreements of a military kind; and if I should succeed in obtaining a slight adjustment of the frontier in the Vosges which now runs below the crest of the range, that in itself would be of great importance, just as the dismantling of Belfort would be, if we could obtain it. We have had to make terrible sacrifices on those parts of the frontier.

Note the reference to closer economic and military agreements. As Bethmann's stand against outright annexation of Belgium became known in annexationist circles, Count Westarp (leading Conser-

vative in the Reichstag) wrote him a worried note, asking for further clarification. The Chancellor's reply, according to Westarp, left nothing to be desired. It did object to the annexation of large areas in northern France; but the statements on Belgium went further than those made to Scheidemann:

If a lasting peace is to be won, Belgium must be rendered harmless. We must gain military, political [!] and economic guarantees that England or France will not be able to use Belgium against us in future political controversies. Such guarantees require at least [!] the military and economic dependence of that country upon Germany.\textsuperscript{31}

To make completely sure of the Chancellor's position, a delegation of deputies from the annexationist parties of the Right and Center visited Bethmann on May 13, 1915, to request a definite statement on the government's war aims. The similarity between the Chancellor's views expressed on this occasion and the Delbrück-Zimmermann Memorandum is unmistakable. "Belgium," he said, "must be rendered harmless, she must become Germany's vassal state." Here is Count Westarp's summary of the statement:

Occupation of the whole country and complete economic domination. His statement did not make it quite clear whether he was thinking of political independence, i.e. some kind of federal relationship, or of annexation, the latter in any case without conferring any political rights. Economically, the Chancellor is considering a customs union, German influence over [railway?] rates—the acquisition of railways he considers difficult, since 80,000 German employees would have to be moved to Belgium—complete economic domination over the port of Antwerp, introduction of German civil law, legal procedure (doubtful) and social legislation, to ensure to German industry the ability of competing with that of Belgium. . . . Imposition of German Imperial laws, administration through one or several military governors.\textsuperscript{32}

In regard to France, Bethmann did not go quite so far as the annexationist deputies should have liked to see, though his statement to the effect that "France had to be weakened as much as possible, regardless of any later sentiment in the matter" recalls the tone of the Loebell Memorandum. The Chancellor also intended

\textsuperscript{31} Westarp, II, 46-50; see also Under-Secretary Wahnschaffe's reassuring letter to the Pan-German Franz von Bodeschwingh, who had expressed similar concern over Bethmann's weak aims in regard to Belgium: F. von Bodeschwingh, \textit{Inner Hemmungen kraftvoller Aussenpolitik} (Hannover, 1919), p. 44.

\textsuperscript{32} Westarp, II, 37, 51-52.
to take the ore region of Briey and Longwy, the fortress of Belfort, and to require some small rectifications of the Vosges frontier. Count Westarp's general impression of Bethmann's aims was that they were essentially the same as his own. Yet the Count, as we shall see, was one of the most radical German annexationists.

Up to this point, all of Bethmann's statements on the future of Western Europe had been made in private. The first public pronouncement on the subject did not come until May 28, five days after Italy had declared war on Austria-Hungary. "We must persevere," he said in an address to the Reichstag, "until we have created and won for ourselves all possible real guarantees and securities that none of our enemies... will again dare to engage us in armed conflict." 33 This statement certainly was ambiguous enough; yet both the Reichstag and the German press applauded it as an acknowledgment of Germany's need for annexations. "The demonstrative applause which this statement found among all bourgeois parties," the Socialist Leipziger Volkszeitung wrote on May 29, "made it plain to everybody that the Chancellor has now come out in favor of some sort of annexationist policy and has thus revoked his declaration of August 4, 1914." 34

The significant change that Bethmann Hollweg's attitude on the future of Western Europe underwent, at least outwardly, during the first ten months of war, was the direct result of external and internal factors. Externally, this period proved the futility of Germany's first attempts at a negotiated peace. The history of the various peace moves is too intricate to be discussed here.35 It is sufficient to say that the first efforts, between September 1914 and April 1915, primarily directed at England, were unsuccessful.36 "If there were possibilities of peace during the first months of 1915," Bethmann wrote in 1921, "which I personally doubt, then surely at the most for a peace based on the status quo ante, with reparations for Belgium, that is, for just the opposite of the programs

33 Thimme, p. 35.
34 For similar press comments from Right to Left see: Deutsche Tageszeitung, May 29, 1915; Post, May 29, 1915; Kreuzzeitung, May 30, 1915; Vorwärts, June 1, 1915.
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proclaimed at that time." To give up a country whose past neutrality was doubted and whose future neutrality was doubtful, would have aroused "the most bitter feeling among the German people." Yet this very thing, plus a possible indemnity to Belgium was the conditio sine qua non for England's willingness to discuss peace.

When by spring and early summer of 1915 negotiations in the west had proved unsuccessful, similar moves were made towards Russia. These moves, significantly enough, coincided with Bethmann's change of attitude towards Belgium. But despite continuous German military successes in the east, these moves were likewise condemned to failure. The more important reasons for Bethmann's change, however, are to be found in the German domestic scene. Here the Chancellor was subjected to the pressure of a public opinion which became increasingly annexationist during this early period. To a study of this pressure, both spontaneous and artificially stimulated, we must turn for a real understanding of Bethmann's change of position.

The Reichstag and Western War Aims

Because of the strict censorship imposed on the discussion of war aims soon after the outbreak of war, it is difficult to determine the extent of annexationist sentiment among the German people. Contemporary observers agree, however, that most Germans soon abandoned their passive attitude of the first days of war and demanded the annexation of enemy territory, especially in Western Europe. These popular aims, however, were nebulous at first and had to undergo a formative period of several months before they crystallized into a series of definite demands. To understand these German hopes for annexations, we must remember the apparent military successes of the first months of war, the publication of Belgian documents already mentioned, and the sanguinary character of warfare in Belgium which cost the lives of many German soldiers. To give up "the soil which had been won with so much German blood," many Germans felt, would be ungrateful to the soldiers who gave their lives to secure it.

37 Bethmann Hollweg, II, 26-27.
40 Bethmann Hollweg, II, 27.
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The influence of this annexationist opinion on the conduct of the German government is difficult to measure. In Germany people had even less direct influence in governmental affairs than elsewhere, and even the voice of their elected representatives in the Reichstag played only a small part in the formation of policy, at least until the pressure of events forced the government to make some concessions in the course of the war. But despite its lack of direct power, the Reichstag debates remained the most significant single expression of public opinion in the country.

The Kaiser's words on August 4, 1914: "I no longer know parties, I only know Germans," and the Socialist vote for the war budget, these two events symbolized the closing of a long-standing gulf between Germany's classes and masses. But this Burgfriede was a truce rather than a peace; it did nothing to remove some of the most blatant political injustices, and its days were numbered from the start. The first event to disturb this precarious domestic peace, significantly enough, was the controversy over war aims.

The majority of Social Democrats, true to their ideals of universal peace and international conciliation, soon adopted a more or less consistent stand against annexations and in favor of a "peace of understanding" or a "Scheidemann Peace" as it was called after its leading proponent. They had made clear this stand as early as August 4 in a declaration which said: "We demand that, as soon as the aim of protection shall have been attained and the enemies be inclined toward peace, the war be ended by a peace which shall render possible friendship with our neighbors." But we must not assume that this Socialist opinion was predominant among the German people or even its lower classes this early in the war.

Even a number of Socialists soon began to modify their views, though the party itself reiterated its earlier stand on several later occasions. Beginning in late September, several members began to express approval of annexationist aims and by March 22, 1915, the Socialist Frankfurter Volksstimme held that "the renunciation of all demands of annexation is in itself not a serviceable program."

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41 Lutz, German Empire, I, 9.
42 Ibid., p. 16.
43 U. A., 4. Reihe, XII (1), 34; V, 97; Scheidemann, Memoiren, I, 260.
44 Germany, Reichstag, Verhandlungen des Reichstages, XIII. Legislaturperiode, II. Sitzung, Stenographischer Bericht (henceforth cited as Reichstag), vol. 806, p. 21; Scheidemann, Memoiren, I, 370.
Social Democracy must put forward positive demands, and these demands can and must include modification in maps. All must not remain as it was.” There was Paul Lensch, for instance, Socialist Reichstag deputy and editor of the hyperradical *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, who in 1914 had voted against war credits; then suddenly his position changed—he wrote a book *Weltkrieg und Sozialdemokratie* in which he defended the government’s war policy, and later in the war he joined his fellow socialists Haenisch and Winnig (who had undergone a similar change of heart) in the editorship of a Socialist periodical with annexationist leanings, *Die Glocke*, financed by the enigmatic “Parvus” Helphand. The end of Lensch’s leftist affiliations came in 1925, when he was made editor of the nationalist *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*. The Socialist trade unions were equally reluctant to declare themselves against any and all annexations, considering the close community of interests between the working class and heavy industry, both of whom stood to gain from annexations in the west.

Besides these right-wing, annexationist Socialists (sometimes called “Imperial Socialists”) there developed, in the course of the war, two left-wing factions within the Socialist Party. The smaller and more radical one, under Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, not only was violently opposed to annexations, but hoped to stir up the lower classes against the annexationists of the Right, using the resulting discontent and disorder for the overthrow of the Hohenzollern regime. These “Spartacists,” as they were later called, never became very influential and their activities were seriously curtailed by government interference in the spring of 1915. The other, less radical group, rallied around Haase, Bernstein, and Breitscheid. They were just as strongly opposed to annexations as the Liebknecht group, but advocated protests and strikes rather than outright violence. We shall see how this second group finally seceded and formed its own Independent Socialist Party.

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48 Forster, p. 24; Grumbach, p. 432.
The attitude of the bourgeois parties of the Reichstag was neither as moderate nor as consistent as that of the Socialists. Most of them refrained from definite statements on war aims this early in the war; though the declarations of their leaders and newspapers made it perfectly plain where they stood. The majority of the Progressive Party took a middle course between extreme annexationism and renunciation of all territorial expansion. Some members like Heckscher, Wiemer, Müller-Meiningen, and Pachnicke were definitely for large annexations, while others like Dove, von Payer, Gothein, and Haussmann were opposed to all but colonial aggrandizement and small frontier rectifications. The Center Party during this period was, on the whole, annexationist, although there was a moderate faction as early as 1915. Its chief organ, the Kölnische Volkszeitung, and its most influential member, Mathias Erzberger, because of their close ties with the industrialist Thyssen, were extremely annexationist. The case of Erzberger is an example of the clever methods employed by German industrial interests to further their territorial ambitions. Through native intelligence and extreme diligence, Erzberger had created for himself a position of great but hidden influence. Alfred Hugenberg called him "the most powerful man in Berlin. With his recommendation one gets everywhere, without it one gets nowhere." It is not surprising, then, that old August Thyssen, leading Ruhr industrialist and member of the Center Party, chose Erzberger to present his annexationist plans to the German government. Officially the Erzberger-Thyssen affiliation did not begin until June 1915, when the Centrist deputy, for a salary of 40,000 marks, joined Thyssen's board

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82 Besides being a leading member of his party, Erzberger ran a semi-official, government-supported propaganda agency in Berlin; he went on secret missions to Rome and Vienna, tried to buy a French newspaper during the war, and was instrumental in Bethmann Hollweg's dismissal in 1917. See M. Erzberger, Erlebnisse im Weltkrieg (Stuttgart, 1920), pp. 1 ff., 41 ff., 110 ff.; U. A., 4. Reihe, VII (2), 108-09.  
83 H. Class, Wider den Strom (Leipzig, 1932), p. 320. There are a number of character sketches of Erzberger, mostly unfavorable: "A" [Adolf Stein], Gerichtstage über Erzberger (Berlin, 1920); Wacker, pp. 28-29; for a more favorable view see M. Harden, Köpfe (4 vols., Berlin, 1924), IV, 431 ff.
of directors.\textsuperscript{54} But already on September 2, 1914, Erzberger had
drafted a memorandum for the government which set forth the
following minimum aims for a German peace: Military domination
over Belgium, the French coast to Boulogne, and the Channel
Islands; German annexation of the region of Briey-Longwy and the
fortress of Belfort; large annexations in the East; an extensive
German colonial empire in Central Africa; and finally a high indem­
nity to repay Germany’s war costs.\textsuperscript{55} There is no proof for
Erzberger’s later claims that he withdrew this memorandum soon
after he had written it; though his subsequent public utterances
on war aims were somewhat less radical.\textsuperscript{56}

The further we move to the Right, the more annexationist Ger­
many’s parties become. The National Liberals, party of big business
and heavy industry, refrained from any very specific statement on
war aims and merely declared “that the tremendous results of
our incomparable army and our death-defying fleet must be fully
utilized politically.”\textsuperscript{57} Their leaders, however, were somewhat more
specific. Professor Hermann Paasche, Vice-President of the Reichs­tag and connected with numerous industrial concerns, refused “to
give up the enemy territory conquered with so much German
blood.”\textsuperscript{58} The head of the party, the lawyer Ernst Bassermann,
who had been very pessimistic at the outbreak of war but had
changed his mind after Germany’s military successes, made several
almost identical statements.\textsuperscript{59} Of special interest is an address by
Gustav Stresemann, which stressed the favorite Pan-German idea
that England was the \textit{Hauptfeind}. Stresemann demanded expan­
sion to the east and west, especially the annexation of the Channel
coast, including Calais! Like Paasche, Bassermann and Stresemann
were closely tied up with industrial interests.\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{54} Erzberger gegen Helfferich (Berlin, n. d.), pp. 13-14, 18-20, 22-23; S. Löwen­
stein, \textit{Der Prozess Erzberger-Helfferich} (Ulm, 1921), passim.
\textsuperscript{55} Tirpitz, \textit{Dokumente}, II, 69 ff.
\textsuperscript{56} Erzberger, p. 228; Westarp, II, 53; \textit{Allgemeine Rundschau}, XI (1914), 709;
\textsuperscript{57} D. Schäfer, \textit{Der Krieg 1914-16, 1916-18} (Leipzig, 1916-20), II, 5; Grumbach,
p. 38; P. Fuhrmann, \textit{Das deutsche Volk und die gegenwärtige Kriegslage} (n. pl,
n. d.).
\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Chronik des Deutschen Krieges}, IV, 422-23.
April 9, 1915.
\textsuperscript{60} G. Stresemann, \textit{Deutsches Ringen und Deutsches Hoffen} (Berlin, 1914); \textit{Vor­
On the extreme Right, both Conservative Parties, the smaller and less important Free Conservative Party as well as the main German Conservative Party, were openly annexationist. The former worked in close collaboration with the Pan-German League, and its leader, Baron von Zedlitz-Neukirch, expressed hope for indemnities and other compensations, such as the iron deposits of French Lorraine.\textsuperscript{61} The German Conservatives, on the other hand, remained vague in their public statements on war aims, and although keeping in touch with the Pan-German League, they refused to endorse its far-reaching program. The two leading Conservatives, von Heydebrand und der Lasa and Count Westarp, opposed premature declarations of German war aims and refused to consider areas as possible annexations before they had been conquered.\textsuperscript{62} Heydebrand merely asked for “securities worthy of our sacrifices,” and Westarp demanded “free access to the sea.”\textsuperscript{63} In a memorandum to Bethmann Hollweg, the latter became somewhat more specific. “Belgium,” he held, “must be permanently and securely kept in our hands . . .” as a protection against England and France. “This can only be achieved through far-reaching political and economic attachment (Angliederung).” Westarp’s letter ended in the veiled threat: “A government which, without urgent necessity . . . relinquishes Belgium, will lose the support of the largest and best sections of the German people and thus endanger the monarchy and the future of our country.”\textsuperscript{64} Other Conservatives—notably von Grumme-Douglas, Prince Salm-Horstmar, Roesicke, and von Gebsattel—went even further in their demands; while the Conservative members of the Prussian Upper House, men like Counts Schulenburg, Groeben, and Seidlitz, were more moderate.\textsuperscript{65}

To sum up briefly the attitudes of the various political parties towards war aims, we may say that there was a definite divergence between the non-annexationist stand of most of the Social Democrats and the more or less annexationist programs of the remaining parties. This divergence of opinion first came into the open after

\textsuperscript{61} Class, Strom, pp. 358-60; Grumbach, pp. 50-53.
\textsuperscript{63} Westarp, II, 41; Grumbach, p. 46; Vorwärts, April 7, 1915; for similar views by other leading Conservatives see Vorwärts, Jan. 3, 1915, Jan. 30, 1915.
\textsuperscript{64} Westarp, II, 46; see also his Reichstag speech on May 29, 1915 in Reichstag, vol. 306, p. 172.
\textsuperscript{65} Westarp, II, 309-11.
the Chancellor’s Reichstag address of December 2, 1914. On the one hand the Socialists, through their spokesman Haase, declared that the facts which had become known since the publication of Belgian documents, in the opinion of the Social Democrats, “did not justify any change of attitude in regard to Belgium and Luxembourg from that taken by the Chancellor on August 4.” The bourgeois parties, on the other hand, in a declaration read by the leader of the Center Party, Peter Spahn, made veiled allusions to an indemnity for the sacrifices of war: “In this most difficult of all wars, wantonly forced upon us, we shall hold out until we have won a peace which corresponds to the immense sacrifices made by the German people. It must give us lasting protection against all enemies.”

The controversy thus begun between Socialist and bourgeois parties was continued in similarly vague statements by Haase and Spahn in the Reichstag session of March 10, 1915. The following day, in a closed meeting of the Budget Committee, the issue emerged somewhat more clearly. While the Socialists opposed annexations of any kind, and the Progressives declared the whole discussion premature, the remaining parties all came out in favor of more or less far-reaching war aims. The National Liberal Bassermann demanded radical corrections of Germany’s western frontier, but left the annexation of Belgium open. Gröber, for the Center Party, wanted “veiled annexation” of Belgium through military and economic penetration. Westarp was for outright annexation.

The Chancellor’s speech of May 28, in which he demanded for the first time “real guarantees and securities” for Germany’s future was followed the next day by declarations much like those of December 2 and March 10. By now the annexationist parties—National Liberals, Conservatives, and the Center Party (occasionally joined by the Progressives) had formed a definite parliamentary bloc, a Kriegszielmehrheit (as Westarp calls it) in favor of expansionist war aims. This bloc, deciding on a course of action in each case, worked together until the end of 1916 and was able to wield...

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66 Thimme, Bethmann Hollweg, pp. 13 ff.
68 Ibid., p. 55.
70 Haussmann, p. 31; Westarp, II, 54.
considerable influence. We have already seen it in operation on May 13, when Bassermann, Spahn, Baron von Gamp (Free Conservative) and Count Westarp brought its views before the Chancellor with the, apparently successful, intention of converting him to annexationism. Here, then, in the Kriegszielmehrheit of the German Reichstag, we have one of the pressure-groups which help account for Bethmann's change of position during the first year of the war.

The Pan-German League

A much more important factor than the Parliamentary Kriegszielmehrheit in the evolution and propagation of western war aims was a number of small but influential groups outside the Reichstag. Collectively these groups have been referred to as the Kriegszielbewegung to express the close collaboration among different annexationist groups and individuals in the hope of influencing the policy of the German government. There was often considerable overlapping between this Kriegszielbewegung and the Kriegszielmehrheit, since the members of both had identical social and economic backgrounds. Among the various forces that went into the making of the Kriegszielbewegung, two stand out most prominently—the Pan-German League and the great industrialists of Western Germany.

The League was founded in 1890 by a group which included the future director of Krupp’s, Alfred Hugenberg. It had been led, since 1908, by Heinrich Class, who is best characterized by his deep admiration for Treitschke, from whom he inherited the anti-semitism which he made part of the Pan-German program. When asked by von Heydebrand, why he did not join the Conservative Party, Class replied: “Because the Conservative Party is too democratic for my taste.” The membership of the Pan-German League

72 Ibid., II, 52-54.
73 In both Houses of the Prussian Diet the majority was equally in favor of strong war aims. See U. A., 4. Reihe, V, 61; Vorwärts, March 25, 1915; Grumbach, p. 43; Graf von Schwerin-Löwitz, Kriegsreden-und Aufsätze (Berlin, 1916), pp. 8, 10, 39 ff.
74 Class, Strom, pp. 15-16, 87; see also p. 131 for Class’ relations with Professor Schemann, propagator of Gobineau’s racial theories.
usually fluctuated between 15-25,000, but during the war it increased considerably until by 1917 it numbered some 34,000. It was not so much its size, however, but the social and economic position of its members which gave the League its importance. They were drawn almost exclusively from the upper bourgeoisie and nobility, with a majority of teachers, professors, industrialists, business and professional men. Various attempts to gain a following among the lower classes had proved unsuccessful.\textsuperscript{76} The importance of the League was further increased through a number of subsidiary and allied organizations, numbering 84 in 1914. Often these organizations were founded by Pan-Germans themselves, and though nominally independent, they worked in close co-operation with the League. Among these organizations were the Army League, the Navy League, the Association against Social Democracy, and the Association for Germans abroad (V.D.A.). The leaders of most of these groups held prominent positions in the Pan-German League, and their members increased its direct and indirect following to over 100,000.\textsuperscript{77}

The League had no daily paper, but among its members were the editors of some of the most important German dailies—Reismann-Grone of the industrialist Rheinisch-Westphälische Zeitung, Rippeler of the Tägliche Rundschau, Pohl of the industrialist Post, and Liman of the Leipziger Neueste Nachrichten. During the war a group headed by Class bought the Deutsche Zeitung and made it into an organ of annexationist propaganda. There were also a number of Pan-German journals—the official Alldeutsche Blätter, Das größere Deutschland under Bacmeister, the Deutsche Zeit­schrift, and several anti-semitic magazines—Die Nornen, Heimdall, Der Hammer, and Deutschlands Erneuerung.\textsuperscript{78}

Politically, the League's main support came from the National Liberals (notably Gustav Stresemann), and only secondarily from the Conservatives. In 1916 fifteen of its members sat in the Reichstag, among them eight National Liberals and three Conservatives. Its strength in the western, more highly industrialized regions of

\textsuperscript{76} L. Werner, Der Alldeutsche Verband (Berlin, 1935), pp. 43, 62, 64, 287; Wertheimer, p. 214; W. Wenck, Alldeutsche Taktik (Jena, 1917), p. 29.

\textsuperscript{77} Wertheimer, p. 237; Class, Strom, pp. 221, 273; U.A., 4. Reihe, XII (1), 49; “Junius Alter” [Franz Sontag], Nationalisten (Leipzig, 1930), pp. 16-17; Handbuch des Alldeutschen Verbandes (Mainz, 1914), pp. 56 ff.

\textsuperscript{78} Wenck, p. 24; Werner, pp. 77-78.
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Germany, was greater than in the agricultural east. The majority of its members were Protestants.\textsuperscript{79}

This brief survey of the Pan-German League shows that it was not a popular movement but a pressure group, the "shock troop of German nationalism," the "national conscience of the German people."\textsuperscript{80} One of its most active members, the publicist Franz Sontag, close friend of Class' and editor of the \textit{Alldeutsche Blätter}, refers to the League as the "germ-cell" of post-war German nationalism. "Whoever holds a prominent position in our national or \textit{völkisch} movement today [i.e. 1930] belonged, with few exceptions, at one time to the Pan-German League, or at least maintained close relations with the League and its leaders."\textsuperscript{81}

While the majority of Germans had no very clearly defined war aims at the outbreak of war, the Pan-Germans could draw upon a vast array of pre-war plans and writings; they constituted a kind of "general staff for war aims propaganda," which carried its aims into the war and was received enthusiastically by the parties of the Right.\textsuperscript{82} Immediately upon the outbreak of war, while the government was still talking of a "war of defense," a special edition of the \textit{Alldeutsche Blätter} on August 3, 1914, already called the war "a struggle for our greater future" which "cannot end through a weak compromise."\textsuperscript{83} Right afterwards, Class and his chief assistant in the administration of the League, Baron von Vietinghoff-Scheel, began to work on an outline of Pan-German war aims. By August 28, barely four weeks after the outbreak of war, they were ready to call a meeting of the League's Executive Committee, to discuss these aims.\textsuperscript{84} In his opening address Class launched an impassioned attack upon those individuals and groups most hated by the Pan-Germans. Besides Bethmann Hollweg, these included "the bankers, the socialists, the intellectuals, and the Jews." Class particularly bemoaned the possibility of Prussian electoral reform in the direction of greater democracy, as propagated by these people. Such reform, Class held, would mean the loss of the war on the home


\textsuperscript{82} \textit{U. A.}, 4. Reihe, VII (1), 378.

\textsuperscript{83} \textit{Alldeutsche Blätter}, Sondernummer, Aug. 3, 1914.

\textsuperscript{84} Class, \textit{Strom}, p. 319.
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front. The only means of counteracting and silencing the proponents of these reforms was a far-reaching movement in favor of annexations, diverting people’s attention from domestic to foreign affairs. Here we have a first example of the close relationship between the problems of war aims and domestic reforms. To most German annexationists, a “Greater Germany” seemed necessary not only for military and economic reasons, but because it helped to justify and maintain the existing political order. “The monarchist,” according to Count Westarp, “was afraid that the radicalization which had to be expected after the war, would assume dangerous proportions, if the returning soldier found nothing but an increased tax bill as a reward for his deeds. He might easily think that the government of the Empire did not know sufficiently well how to make use of our military successes.” The result of such widespread disappointment might be revolution and the overthrow of the Hohenzollern regime. We shall encounter this same theme throughout this study.

The main body of Class’ speech was devoted to his program of war aims. Except for large agricultural areas in the east, most of these aims were directed towards the west. France must hand over her remaining mineral deposits and must agree to an extension of Germany’s frontier to the mouth of the Somme. Belgium, in its entirety, was to be brought under German domination, with differing treatment for the Walloons and the “Germanic” Flemings. England must relinquish her dominance of the seas, and in addition must make colonial concessions to Germany. These aims, of course, are not really so different from the ones we have already encountered. Remarkable about them is only the early date at which they appeared and the cruel procedure which Class proposed for the Germanization of the conquered areas. Not only did he want to close Germany’s frontiers against further immigration of Jews, but he demanded all new lands free from their inhabitants. The vanquished nations would have to care for their unfortunate compatriots thus driven out by Germany’s “rightful need for expansion.” The leaders of the Pan-German League, after thorough discussion, expressed complete agreement with Class’

85 Ibid., p. 321.
87 Class, Strom, p. 322.
88 Ibid., pp. 363-64.
speech and he was given full powers to take any action necessary for the propagation of his aims and for gaining annexationist allies in other quarters.⁸⁹

Many Pan-Germans changed their minds, however, when Germany's western offensive did not proceed according to original expectations. As a result, a second meeting was called in October, this time of a larger and more representative group of members. Again the demands of Class, now in printed form, found unanimous and enthusiastic approval.⁹⁰ When favorable news from the Russian front in December seemed to make the collapse of that country merely a matter of time, Class decided to put his views before a still wider audience. On December 22, 1914, copies of his memorandum were sent to 1,950 influential public figures, among them the Supreme Command and the Chancellor. Though officially suppressed, the Class memorandum became one of the most effective and influential weapons of annexationist propaganda during the war, with profound influence on other similar programs.⁹¹ "My memorandum," Class tells us, "started the discussion of war aims . . . and gained for myself a great number of new personal contacts." ⁹²

The League officially adopted an abbreviated version of the Class memorandum as its own official program, and in turn this document was sent to Bethmann, this time with a letter by the League's Vice President, General von Gebsattel. The General reiterated the idea that a weak peace would bring revolution to Germany, because the soldiers would expect rewards for their heroic deeds. If instead they merely found a larger tax bill, they would revolt and perhaps abolish the monarchy.⁹³ Here again is the idea of war aims as a lightning-rod to avert domestic discontent and as an indirect means of perpetuating the disproportionate political influence of the propertied classes which made up the bulk of the League's membership. The League’s memorandum itself differed little from the speech of Class on August 28, 1914. Again the emphasis was on western aims. "To secure our future," it read, "at least one of our flanks must be

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 322-23.
⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 343; H. Class, Denkschrift betreffend die national-, wirtschafts-und sozialpolitischen Ziele des deutschen Volkes im gegenwärtigen Kriege (n.pl., 1914).
⁹² Class, Strom, p. 394.
⁹³ Ibid., pp. 404 ff.; Alldeutsche Blätter, Dec. 9, 1916, no. 50.
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permanently liberated. Since there will always be a large Russian people and hundreds of millions of Mongols in the east, the lasting liberation of our flank cannot be sought there but only in the west.”

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Of the various subsidiary organizations of the Pan-German League, it was primarily the Army League which raised its voice in favor of annexations during the first months of the war. As early as August 29, 1914, its founder, the Pan-German General Keim, asked for a “peace worthy of the immense sacrifices”; the same line was subsequently taken by its official magazine, Die Wehr (circulation 108,000). 95 On December 5, 1914, the Army League held its first national convention at which it demanded “a peace which will permanently secure Germany’s leading position in the world.” 96 In February, it passed a more specific resolution which asked “not only for financial indemnities but also for an increase of German territory and influence inside and outside of Europe.” A memorandum in March was still more specific: “Germany’s permanent possession of Belgium,” it said, “is an absolute necessity for military, völkisch, and economic reasons.” 98 A simultaneously issued circular expressed the same idea. “Belgium,” it said, “is ours. Our self-preservation demands that she remain in German hands.” 99 A meeting of the Army League in May dealt almost exclusively with problems of Belgium and France. The Pan-German Kurd von Strantz, President of the League in the absence of General Keim (who was military governor of the Belgian province of Limburg), used linguistic arguments to urge German westward expansion as far as “Boonen” (his “Germanic” version of Boulogne). 100 Finally Keim himself, in a newspaper article, added his demands for “a large prize of victory.”

94 Ibid., p. 478.
95 Tägliche Rundschau, August 29, 1914; Grumbach, pp. 151, 170; A. Keim, Erlebtes und Erstrebes (Hannover, 1925), pp. 174-76.
96 Vorwärts, Dec. 9, 1914.
97 Ibid., Feb. 23, 1915; Grumbach, pp. 152, 170.
100 Vorwärts, May 23, 1915; Grumbach, pp. 152-53.
101 Ibid., p. 24.
The Western Industrialists and their War Aims

The second important element of the Kriegszielbewegung, Germany's western industrialists, is not so clearly defined a group as the Pan-Germans. A number of outstanding individuals, they were united not through membership in a political or expansionist pressure group, but through common and very tangible ambitions in Western Europe. They were not concerned with finding Lebensraum for Germany's growing population, or maintaining, through annexations, the power of Germany's ruling class. Their foremost aim was to secure for themselves and their industries the considerable supplies of iron ore, which the Franco-Prussian War had left in the hands of France. When Bismarck came to make peace in 1871, he was at first unaware of the fact that Alsace-Lorraine contained the most valuable iron deposits on the European continent. Only when Wilhelm Hauchecorne, Director of the Prussian Academy of Mines, called his attention to this fact, was the new frontier drawn to include the richest of the iron beds.\(^1\) The remaining deposits, partly undiscovered, and consisting of a highly phosphorus ore called "minette," were of little use until after the invention of the Thomas converter in 1879. At that date, France again became the possessor of important metallurgical resources, concentrated chiefly in the regions of Briey, Longwy, and Nancy. Of Europe's reserves of iron ore, France, before the World War, held 33 per cent as compared to Germany's 22 per cent.\(^2\)

If France was superior to Germany in her resources of iron ore, Germany was superior in the extent and quality of her coal deposits. The Ruhr valley, one of the world's largest coal regions, only gained in importance because of its close proximity to the iron mines of Lorraine. This happy marriage of coal and iron, facilitated by extremely favorable communications, made Germany one of the chief iron producing nations of the world. Between 1860 and 1910, she climbed from fourth place to second, while during the same


period France fell from second to fourth. But since Germany's supply of iron ore was limited, her iron industry came to depend increasingly on foreign sources. In 1871 all the iron produced in Germany had been smelted from German ore. By 1890 this was true for only three-quarters of Germany's iron production; and by 1913 about half the needed ore had to be imported.

Germany's chief sources of supply were Spain, Sweden, and France. The greater distance of the first two increased the cost of transportation, but the high quality of their ore made up for this disadvantage. During the last years before the war, however, Spain's reserves of the highest grades of iron ore began to approach exhaustion. At the same time Sweden imposed restrictions on her export of that commodity. Increasingly, therefore, Germany became dependent on her third chief foreign source. Between 1900 and 1913, Germany's imports of iron ore from France increased from ca. 20,000 to 3,811,000 metric tons. To keep this source, on which their industries depended, from drying up, and to gain additional supplies elsewhere, were two of the most important problems facing the industrialists of western Germany.

More successful, however, than these Moroccan ventures, were the pre-war attempts of Germany's industrial magnates to gain indirect control over the French iron mines in Lorraine and Normandy. As a background to Germany's western war aims, this slow economic infiltration is of immense importance. Between 1900, when the firm of August Thyssen acquired the concession of Batilly

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104 Ungeheuer, Technik und Wirtschaft, IX, 98.
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in the Briey region, and the outbreak of war in 1914, about 18 such concessions had passed either completely or partly into German hands. Most of these mines were situated in the Briey district, richest and most productive of the minette deposits. Although specific data are difficult to obtain, it has been estimated that ca. 15 per cent of France's iron reserves in this region were under German influence by 1914.109

In this exploitation of French resources, the pioneering efforts of Thyssen were followed up by most of the prominent industrial concerns of western Germany. The brothers Röchling controlled half the mines of Valleroy and in addition held the concession of Pulventeux. The Deutsch-Luxemburgische Bergwerks A. G. of Stinnes owned one-fourth of the Société de Moutiers and part of the Société des Forges de Brévilly. Four-fifths of the Société des Mines de Murville were controlled by Peter Klöckner's Auetz-Friede, and three-fourths of the Société des Mines de Jarny and parts of the concession of Sancy were in the hands of a group made up of Haspe, Hoesch, and Phönix. The Dillinger Hüttenwerke of Stumm owned one-third of the Société des Mines de Conflans. And finally—Kirdorf's Gelsenkirchener Bergwerks A. G. controlled ca. 2,000 hectares in French Lorraine, surpassed only by Thyssen's holdings of 2,200 hectares in the same region.110

Among the deposits in Normandy, German influence was still more prevalent. The first concessions in that region had been granted as far back as 1875, but technical difficulties had prevented their exploitation. When the mines were finally made productive around the turn of the century, it seems to have been due largely to German initiative, since French industry did not dare risk the large investments necessary to make the mines profitable.111 Again Thyssen led the way. In 1907 he acquired the concessions of Dielette, Soumont, and Perrieres. Phönix, Haspe, Hoesch, Deutsch-Luxemburg, and the Gutehoffnungshütte followed his example in 1907-11. The firm of Krupp bought Larchamp in 1909, and a combine of Krupp, Thyssen, and Stinnes, using the Dutch financier de Poorter as a front, jointly acquired control over Jurcques, Oude-

111 Bruneau, pp. 79 ff.; Ungeheuer, Technik und Wirtschaft, IX, 161 ff.
fontaine, Bourberouge, and Mortain in 1911. Of twenty concessions granted prior to the war, only two were exclusively in French hands. Roughly three-fourths of Normandy’s iron fields were under German influence, Thyssen alone holding one-sixth of the total area. The latter’s contracts with Swedish iron mines were to expire in 1917, a fact which explains his special eagerness to find substitute sources of supply elsewhere.

August Thyssen, in many ways, was a typical example of the great West-German industrialist. Of simple tastes and insignificant appearance, he combined great ability and resourcefulness with a passion for work. Living in outward splendour at his castle of Landsberg, where, among his famous Rodin collection, he received his friends the Ludendorffs, his real home was among his workers, who deeply respected “the old gentleman,” even though in labor matters his heart was “as hard as his steel.” His life’s sole purpose and ambition was the success of his firm, and nothing was allowed to interfere with it. As long as his own interests and those of Germany were identical, August Thyssen was a patriot. But when they disagreed, he (and for that matter his favorite son Fritz) did not hesitate to join the enemies of their country.

The French, naturally, were alarmed at this growing German encroachment upon their mineral resources, and a flood of articles and books during the first decade of the century warned against the dangers of such infiltration. To counteract this agitation and to evade the enforcement of a law prohibiting direct foreign ownership of French mines, the Germans were forced to camouflage their French holdings, employing French citizens as intermediaries, or making use of the close relations between French and German banking houses. Again Thyssen showed the greatest ingenuity

113 Friedensburg, p. 44.
114 Ungeheuer, Technik und Wirtschaft, IX, 223.
116 P. Arnst, August Thyssen und sein Werk (Leipzig, 1925), pp. 69 ff.
117 F. Engerand, Le fer sur une frontière (Paris, 1919), pp. 221 ff. cites an article from the Danish Aftenpost, Sept. 8, 1918, in which August Thyssen denounces the Hohenzollern regime. After being partly responsible for the rise of Hitler, his son Fritz again left the sinking ship: F. Thyssen, I paid Hitler (New York, 1941).
119 Ungeheuer, Technik und Wirtschaft, IX, 220; Friedensburg, p. 45; on Germany’s influence over French banking see: J. E. Favre, Le Capital français au
and enterprise. His Société des Mines de Boulogny, for instance, was run by the Belgian Société Métallurgique de Sambre et Moselle, in which August Thyssen himself was vice president, and in which his son Fritz and several of his German directors held leading positions.\textsuperscript{120} Thyssen even went so far in 1909 as to consider French citizenship for one of his sons, so as to evade all future legal restrictions.\textsuperscript{121} Thyssen’s rival, Hugo Stinnes, was equally skillful at this game of economic penetration. “Give me three or four years of peace,” he boasted to Class in 1911, “and I shall silently secure Germany’s European predominance.” To shield himself against losses in a future war, he carefully selected trusted Frenchmen as directors for his foreign enterprises.\textsuperscript{122}

Compared to France, Germany’s penetration of Belgian pre-war economy was much less spectacular. Economic relations between the two countries were most active; but such relations—consisting in the investment of capital, the sending of commercial representatives, and the founding of industrial branches on foreign soil—are common phenomena of our industrial age. Their existence is not necessarily proof of some sinister plot on the part of one nation for the exploitation and eventual extermination of another, as has sometimes been asserted.\textsuperscript{123}

There were no German interests, comparable to those in the Briey and Normandy regions, in pre-war Belgium; no interests, that is, on whose maintenance the continued prosperity of one of Germany’s most important branches of industrial production depended, as did (or at least it thought it did) the iron industry of western Germany upon the iron deposits of eastern France. There were sufficient industrial and commercial advantages to be gained from an annexa-

\textsuperscript{120} Ungeheuer, \textit{Technik und Wirtschaft}, IX, 290. A still greater masterpiece was Thyssen’s camouflage of his steel works in Caen: Bruneau, pp. 123 ff.

\textsuperscript{121} Class, \textit{Strom}, pp. 217-18, 329.

tion or “assimilation” of Belgium, however, to make it a welcome addition to the war aims of German industry. In many respects, Germany was the economic hinterland of Belgium, and the actual economic interdependence of the two countries was considerable.

It is difficult to determine the exact extent of Germany’s share in Belgium’s industry prior to the World War. Existing estimates differ widely. In the iron and steel industry, “the capital stock held in 1914 by German interests is estimated at 60 million francs, representing 17 per cent of the total value.”\(^\text{121}\) The main German shareholders in Belgian heavy industry, apparently, were Thyssen, Stinnes, and Klöckner.\(^\text{125}\) Another branch of Belgian industry, in which Germany had a large share, was armament works, e.g., the Fabrique nationale d’armes de guerre and the Ancien établissement Peiper, both at Herstal. Chemical, shipping, and metal industries likewise showed prominent German influence.\(^\text{126}\)

Besides these industrial ties, German banking houses had a strong foothold in Belgium, either directly through branch offices (so the Deutsche Bank, Dresdener Bank, and Diskontgesellschaft), or indirectly through control of Belgian establishments. The Banque d’Outremer, the Banque Belge de Chemin de Fer, the Crédit Anversois, and especially the Banque Internationale de Bruxelles, were partly in German hands.\(^\text{127}\) The most numerous and important links between Germany and Belgium, however, were commercial. Germany held first place among the receivers of Belgian goods, and her own exports to Belgium, 5 per cent of her total exports, were surpassed only by those of France.\(^\text{128}\) German influence was particularly strong in the port of Antwerp, which was almost as much a German as it was a Belgian port, particularly vital as an outlet for Germany’s western industries.\(^\text{129}\)

Economic relations between the two countries were not entirely

\(^{124}\) Brooks-Lacroix, U. S. Geological Survey, p. 84.
\(^{127}\) Strasser, p. 64; Favre, pp. 42-43; Handelskammer Frankfurt, p. 18.
without their negative aspects, however. There was considerable competition, for instance, between certain branches of Belgian and German industry, and in case of articles produced by mass-production, Belgium with her lower wages definitely held the upper hand. Furthermore, Belgium’s economy depended as much on England and France as it did upon Germany, and a German-dominated Belgium might easily prove a heavy liability, since these important commercial ties would be broken. It is not surprising, therefore, that some German industrialists were not quite so enthusiastic about the annexation of Belgium as they were about the Briey-Longwy region in eastern France.\textsuperscript{130}

This latter region, because of the rapid German advance in August 1914, had suddenly been delivered into German hands. There is no evidence to suggest that this immediate German occupation was due to any preconceived plan. Nor was the importance of this acquisition so great for Germany at this time as it has been made out to be. Before the war, Germany had imported ca. 10 per cent of her iron ore from French Lorraine; and although after a victorious war she would undoubtedly have drawn much more heavily on these resources, due to war conditions she actually took less from the mines of Briey than she normally did in time of peace.\textsuperscript{131} Even so, it was most annoying to many Frenchmen that Germany seemed able to enjoy freely the fruits of her conquest. They asked particularly, why their armies did not destroy their own mines and thus make German exploitation impossible. When no satisfactory explanation came forth, it was rumoured that a plot had been hatched between French and German industrialists in which the Germans on their side bound themselves not to shell the French coal mines opposite their lines in northern France.\textsuperscript{132}

Continuous demands of the French public finally resulted in a parliamentary investigation, which failed to substantiate these suspicions; but the story has persisted into the present.\textsuperscript{133}

\textsuperscript{130} Handelskammer Frankfurt, \textit{passim}.

\textsuperscript{131} Friedensburg, pp. 119, 182.

\textsuperscript{132} Friedensburg, pp. 90 ff.; Streit, pp. 7, 27, 36 ff.; K. Graf Hertling, \textit{Ein Jahr in der Reichskanzlei} (Freiburg, 1919), pp. 94-95.

\textsuperscript{133} \textit{Le Rôle et la situation de la métallurgie en France}, Question de Briey, Annales de la Chambre des Députés, Documents Parlementaires 1919, Annexe No. 6026, pp. 225 ff.; see also \textit{New York Times}, Nov. 18, 1914: Obituary for M. Eugène Schneider. For an interesting account of a similar failure to destroy the French
In the light of their pre-war interest in these regions, it should cause little surprise to find Germany’s industrialists demanding the annexation of Briey and Longwy as well as some sort of control over Belgium, as soon as these regions were in German hands. As early as August 28, 1914, the firm of Thyssen (already supported by Erzberger) approached the government with an appropriate petition, and a few days later August Thyssen repeated his demands in person.\textsuperscript{134} The brothers Röchling, in a memorandum addressed to Bethmann Hollweg, likewise demanded their share of the Briey district.\textsuperscript{135} Hugo Stinnes made clear his stand when he called on the President of the Pan-German League in early September, in order to express his complete agreement with the latter’s memorandum on war aims and to promise his support of these aims. “This promise,” Class tells us, “he kept faithfully.” In some respects Stinnes even went beyond the Pan-German aims. To strengthen Germany’s strategic position against England, and to gain the iron deposits of Normandy, he proposed the annexation of the whole northern coast of France.\textsuperscript{136} Emil Kirdorf, founder of the Rheinisch-Westphälisches Kohlensyndikat and head of the Gelsenkirchener Bergwerksgesellschaft likewise subscribed to the aims of the Pan-German League, of which he was a leading member.\textsuperscript{137} Krupp von Bohlen agreed with Class’ aims, until German reverses on the Marne temporarily changed his attitude.\textsuperscript{138}

This individual agitation in favor of western annexations was supplemented by public statements and petitions of various economic and industrial organizations. Since they had to comply with censorship regulations, their tone was usually quite vague. In this category belongs the speech, in December of 1914, of Dr. Schweighoffer, Secretary of the Zentralverband Deutscher Industrieller, as well as a number of addresses delivered by industrial leaders before the Industrieklub of Düsseldorf.\textsuperscript{139} In February of...

\textsuperscript{134} “A” [Adolf Stein], Erzberger, p. 19; U. A., 4. Reihe, XII (1), 36.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{136} Class, Strom, pp. 327-29.
\textsuperscript{137} W. Bacmeister, Emil Kirdorf, Der Mann, Sein Werk (Essen, 1936), p. 138; Class, Strom, pp. 354-55.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., pp. 326-27, 329-30, 352-54.
\textsuperscript{139} Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, Dec. 10, 1914; W. Hirsch, Wirtschafts- und Verkehrsfragen im Kriege (Essen, 1915), speech delivered Jan. 20, 1915; M. Schinkel,
1915, the *Verein Deutscher Eisen- und Stahlindustrieller*, leading organization of heavy industry, demanded the usual peace “worthy of the immense sacrifices,” a “greater Germany,” and more specifically, an increase of Germany’s colonies. The various Chambers of Commerce (*Handelskammern*) of Western Germany, under the direction of Hugenberg, likewise expressed their approval of Pan-German war aims and at a joint meeting in April 1915, demanded the extension of Germany’s territory to increase her military, maritime, and economic strength. Finally, on April 1, 1915, the four most important organizations of business employees joined the ranks of their employers and demanded a rectification of Germany’s frontiers and territorial expansion both in Europe and overseas.

The most specific and effective of these industrialist statements in favor of annexations, however, was the so-called “Petition of the Six Economic Organizations,” first issued on March 10, 1915, and repeated, in a slightly altered version, on May 20, 1915. It was one of the landmarks of German annexationist propaganda and the result of the *Kriegszielbewegung*, i.e., the close collaboration between the Pan-German League and German industry.

*The Kriegszielbewegung*

The close community of interests and personnel between the Pan-German League and German heavy industry necessarily suggested concerted action. An alliance between the financial resources of the latter and the effective propaganda machine of the former naturally presented obvious advantages to both. The first to think of such an alliance was Heinrich Class, who brought it to the attention of Alfred Hugenberg, representative of heavy industry, as early as August 1914. Hugenberg, Class tells us, shared his views: “So we went to work immediately; the German *Kriegszielbewegung*,

Unsere Geldwirtschaft (Essen, 1915), speech of March 6, 1915 by the head of the Discontogesellschaft and the Norddeutsche Bank; W. Beumer, *Eine Bismarckrede zum 1. April 1915* (Essen, 1915). Beumer, like Hirsch, was member of the Prussian Lower House.

140 Vorwärts, Feb. 19, 1915.

141 Class, *Strom*, p. 352; Vorwärts, April 22, 1915. As promoter of commercial and industrial interests, the German *Handelskammer* is of vastly greater importance than the American Chamber of Commerce. The two, actually, have very little in common.

THE EVOLUTION OF WESTERN WAR AIMS

which played an important role in the course of the great conflict, had begun.” A plan of campaign was drawn up in subsequent discussions between Class and Hugenberg.\(^{143}\)

Hugenberg, whom we have already encountered, had himself been one of the founders of the Pan-German League. In 1909 he had become Chief Director of Krupp’s, a position which made him particularly suitable as a link between the two leading annexationist factions. His talent for organization, moreover, made him a valuable asset not only to the Krupps, but to German heavy industry in general. In some ways he might be considered its most influential and most typical figure. Reserved, immobile, stubborn, and ruthless, he quickly gained the confidence of all the great in Germany’s iron, steel, and coal industry. “Hugenberg is not a man, he is a wall,” secretive and strong like “the vault of a great bank.”\(^{144}\)

Shortly after he began his work with Krupp, Hugenberg was made joint chairman of the Chambers of Commerce of Essen, Mülheim, and Oberhausen. In 1912 he became President of the Bergbaulicher Verein, which represented the interests of all large Ruhr concerns. Hugenberg, in co-operation with Emil Kirdorf, used this position to build up a most important organization, the so-called Wirtschaftsvereinigung. Its purpose was to concentrate in one hand the various financial contributions which the Ruhr industrialists were constantly called upon to make to charitable and political organizations. A committee under the direction of Hugenberg decided in each case whether a cause warranted the financial backing of heavy industry. Many political and other groups, by accepting such backing, put themselves under the control of the Hugenberg committee. Hugenberg had thus become the holder of the Ruhr industry’s purse strings, a position which he held until long after the war.\(^{145}\)

As the opening move of the Kriegszielbewegung Class instigated

\(^{143}\) Class, Strom, pp. 319, 330, 352-53.
\(^{145}\) Bernhard, pp. 56 ff.; “Morus” [R. Lewinsohn], Das Geld in der Politik (Berlin, 1930), p. 172. Hugenberg also set up a number of news and propaganda agencies—the Auslands G. m. b. H., Vera, Ala, and Telegraphen Union. In 1916 he was instrumental in buying the Scherl publishing house as another propaganda agency for his nationalist-industrialist sponsors.
a meeting, in late September of 1914, of various industrial, commercial, and agricultural organizations, to express the unanimous confidence of Germany's economy in the successful completion of the war. The list of speakers was impressive (Dr. Kaempf, Progressive and President of the Reichstag, Count von Schwerin-Löwitz, President of the Prussian Lower House, Roetger, head of the Bund der Industriellen, and Wolfgang Kapp, famous annexationist) and the general tenor of the speeches delivered was annexationist, though in rather veiled terms. In a telegram addressed to the Emperor, the participants expressed hope for a peace "which will correspond to the enormous sacrifices of this war and make its repetition impossible."

In October 1914, the Zentralverband Deutscher Industrieller, the Bund der Landwirte, and the Conservative Party met, on invitation from Hugenberg, to discuss the problem of food supply. In November the Pan-German League joined in, and the discussion shifted from grain to war aims. As its first action this newly-constituted group asked Class and Hugenberg to prepare a program of war aims based on the Class memorandum of September 1914. This program was presented at a meeting of these organizations on December 15, 1914. The mention of Stinnes indicates that probably other industrialists besides Hugenberg were present. On this occasion the Conservatives, led by Westarp, opposed some of the more far-reaching among the Class-Hugenberg proposals, and when they found no sympathy among the other delegates present, they withdrew at a later meeting their active participation in the Kriegszielbewegung. This did not mean that the Conservative Party was opposed to annexations, but merely that its leaders objected to some of the exaggerated aims of the Pan-Germans and their friends, considering them unrealistic and utopian. Several Conservatives moreover, such as Roesicke and von Wangenheim, did not share their party's views and continued to take part in future meetings.

In the meantime, as we have seen already, Class had sent out the 1,950 copies of his own memorandum. Among the many enthusiastic replies was a letter from Hugenberg, expressing the agree-

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147 Westarp, II, 42-46, 382; Class, Strom, pp. 360-61.
ment of himself and of "the other industrial gentlemen." 148 In late January 1915, the annexationists got together again, to continue their discussion of the memorandum which Class and Hugenberg had worked out during the preceding months.149 Their plan was to use this memorandum as a declaration of the leading industrial and agricultural organizations, and, if possible, of the parties of the Kriegszielmehrheit as well. The January meeting was attended by some thirty persons, Hugenberg presiding. Of leading industrialists, Kirdorf, Stinnes, Beukenberg, Reusch, and von Bor­sieg were present. The Bund der Industriellen, in which Stresemann played a leading role, was represented by its chairman Friedrichs, and the Bund der Landwirte by Baron von Wangenheim and Roesicke. Besides Class, the Pan-Germans had sent General von Gebsattel, Admiral von Grumme-Douglas, and Johannes Neumann, a Lübeck senator.

Class delivered the main address, based on his own memorandum. It was received in deep silence and without comment, until Hugo Stinnes rose to speak. Here is Class' description:

Stinnes was no speaker. His sentences kept flowing evenly, without a raising or lowering of his voice. . . . But there could be no doubt—in spite of his cold and businesslike manner, he was quite aware of the importance of our age. One can imagine, therefore, the impression it made when he put the whole weight of his personality behind my proposals . . . promising to use his influence with the Zentralverband Deutscher Industrieller to urge their acceptance by that group.150

Hugo Stinnes, whose speech made such an impression, was the youngest at the meeting. Barely 44 years old, he already was one of the wealthiest and most influential of European industrialists. In addition to his chief enterprise, the Deutsch-Luxemburgische Bergwerks—und Hütten A.G., covering large regions in the Ruhr and in Alsace-Lorraine, he controlled—together with Thyssen—the Rheinisch-Westphälische Elektrizitätswerks A.G., which supplied most of western Germany with electricity. During and after the war he expanded his holding to include not only additional mines and iron-works, but also shipping companies, power plants, paper works, hotels, and newspapers, building up one of the world's

149 For this and the following see Class, Strom, pp. 354 ff.
150 Ibid., pp. 354-55.
largest vertical trusts. Albert Ballin once said: "As some children cannot let alone a piece of cake, or some men a beautiful woman, so Stinnes cannot let business alone; he wants to make everything his own, even if it should happen to belong to somebody else."

Like most of his colleagues among Germany's captains of industry, Stinnes preferred the actuality of power to its outward manifestations. He never abandoned the simplicity of dress and manner which made him like one of his workers, "a walking piece of coal." His business transactions were usually carried on in an atmosphere of secrecy, which only helped to magnify their importance in the eyes of outsiders. Already during his lifetime, and still more so after his early death in 1924, the figure of Stinnes, unlike that of any of his colleagues, became almost legendary. His pale face, his black, pointed beard, and his manner of speaking coolly and dispassionately in a "weary whisper," earned him names like "Assyrian King," "Flying Dutchman," or "Christ of Coal." His influence on the political affairs of Germany is difficult to determine, since most of his political, like his economic activities, were carefully hidden from public scrutiny. That his influence was considerable can be gathered from numerous references in contemporary accounts. Especially during the second half of the war, when much of the Government's actual power was centered in the Supreme Command, Stinnes paid frequent visits to headquarters and seems to have been consulted on many questions. His friendship with General Ludendorff was particularly close.

To return to the annexationist meeting in Berlin—once Stinnes had endorsed the views of Heinrich Class, they found immediate and full support of those present. Baron von Wangenheim, welcoming the possibility of large-scale German settlements, notably in the east, pledged the support of the Agrarian League. Friedrichs

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152 Harden, Köpfe, IV, 425.

153 Harden, IV, 412-13; R. Oertmann, Hugo Stinnes, ein Künstler und ein Vorbild (Berlin, 1925), passim.

added his approval in the name of German industry. After general agreement had thus been registered, a detailed discussion of each point of the Hugenberg-Class memorandum followed, in which everybody took part. At the close of the meeting, its oldest participant, Emil Kirdorf, urged the dissemination of the war aims agreed on at the meeting among the whole German people, regardless of governmental opposition.

Kirdorf was another outstanding member of the aristocracy of coal and iron, in a class with Thyssen and Stinnes. Founder of the Gelsenkirchener Bergwerks A. G. (the largest Ruhr enterprise, employing 65,000 workers) he was the only great industrialist who openly and consistently supported the annexationists. A small and unpretentious man, much like his chief rival, August Thyssen, this “Bismarck of German coal mining” concealed, behind a genial front, an iron will and ruthless determination, which appeared in his many conflicts with Thyssen and in his stubborn fight against labor unions.

Class and Hugenberg, with the help of the latter’s associate, Hirsch, now incorporated the results of the January meeting into a second draft of their memorandum. In a later session, this version was adopted and signed by the representatives of the various economic organizations which had participated in the preliminary discussions—the Zentralverband Deutscher Industrieller, the Bund der Industriellen, the Bund der Landwirte, the Deutscher Bauernbund, and the Reichsdeutscher Mittelstandsverband. On March 10, 1915, this declaration of the five economic organizations was presented to the German Chancellor. Simultaneously, the same organizations, with added support from the commercial Hansa Bund, petitioned the Reichstag to permit the public discussion of peace aims, expressing the hope “that our German Fatherland shall emerge from its fight for existence—which has been forced upon it—greater and stronger, with secured frontiers in the west and the east and with the European and colonial extensions of

\[155\] Class, Strom, pp. 247-48.
\[156\] Ufermann-Hueglin, p. 18; R. Martin, Deutsche Machthaber (Berlin, 1910), pp. 429 ff.; Vorwärts, April 18, 1915. See also the favorable biography by W. Bacmeister, Emil Kirdorf, Der Mann, Sein Werk (Essen, 1936).
territory necessary for the maintenance of our sea power as well as for military and economic reasons."  

It should be noted that for tactical reasons the chief annexationist wire-pullers, the Pan-Germans and industrialists, do not appear in either petition, except indirectly. To remedy this omission, Hugenberg, Stinnes, and Kirdorf, together with several historians and geographers and with the Westphalian branches of the National Liberal and Center Parties, issued an additional memorandum in favor of annexations in March of 1915. As a further consolidation of the annexationist front, the collaborator of Class and Hugenberg, Dr. Hirsch, also tried to establish an alliance between the signatories of the Hugenberg-Class memorandum and the bourgeois and annexationist parties of the Reichstag. At a meeting on May 1, however, both the Conservatives and the Center expressed their preference for independent action. The result of this decision, the conversation between Bethmann and the representatives of the annexationist parties on May 13, 1915, we have already discussed.

But even if this attempt to link the Kriegszielbewegung and the Kriegszielmehrheit failed, the annexationist parties, especially the National Liberals and the Free Conservatives, were very much in favor of the aims proclaimed by the Pan-Germans and the Economic Organizations. Even the Conservatives, in spite of their earlier secession, still maintained “close contact and agreement” with the Kriegszielbewegung. Roesicke and Admiral von Grumme-Douglas, besides holding leading positions in the Agrarian and Pan-German Leagues respectively, also played prominent roles in the Conservative Party. Further co-operation between the various annexationist groups was maintained through the Auskunftsstelle Vereinigter Verbände, founded by Dr. Poensgen, which counted among its members Professor Dietrich Schäfer, Bassermann, Stresemann, and Mathias Erzberger. Its purpose was the collection and co-ordination of the various annexationist programs and pronouncements and their propagation through meetings and publications.

159 U. A., 4. Reihe, XII (1), 50.  
160 Westarp, II, 50. See above, pp. 15-16.  
161 Class, Strom, pp. 355, 358.  
162 Westarp, II, 44, 162, 164; U. A., 4. Reihe, VII (1), 124. For collaboration between Pan-German and Agrarian Leagues see Class, Strom, pp. 270-71.  
163 D. Schäfer, Aus meinem Leben (Berlin, 1926), p. 174. Poensgen was chairman of the Oberbilk Steel Works, affiliated with the firm of Thyssen.
On May 20, 1915, the petition of March 10, in almost its original form, was again addressed to the Chancellor and the Ministries of the various federal states. Besides the original five organizations, a sixth, the *Christliche Deutsche Bauernvereine* added its signature, thus making it the well-known "Petition of the Six Economic Organizations." Although not quite so radical as the memorandum of Heinrich Class, it clearly shows the influence of its Pan-German and industrial godfathers. To satisfy commercial circles it demanded "a colonial empire adequate to satisfy Germany's manifold economic interests." Agrarian needs were to be met "by annexation of at least parts of the Baltic Provinces and of those territories which lie to the south of them. . . . The great addition to our manufacturing resources which we anticipate in the west, must be counterbalanced by an equivalent annexation of agricultural territory in the east."

It was in regard to the west that the petition was most emphatic and specific. The future which it painted for Belgium was much like the proposal Bethmann Hollweg had made to the representatives of the bourgeois parties on May 13, 1915. From France the Six Associations demanded the coastal districts, including the hinterland, as far as the mouth of the Somme, to improve Germany's strategic position against England. In addition they asked for the district of Briey, the coal country of the *Départements du Nord* and *Pas-de-Calais*, and the fortresses of Verdun, Longwy, and Belfort. Class' suggestion for "land free from inhabitants" was not included in the petition, a fact for which the Conservatives claim credit.

The total area that the Six Organizations demanded from Western Europe amounted to some 50,000 square miles, with a population of ca. 11 million. The arguments used to justify these annexations ranged from the rather vague—"the prize of victory must correspond to our sacrifice"—to most specific military and economic considerations:

The iron-ore and coal districts mentioned above are demanded by our military necessities and not by any means in the interests only of our manufacturing development. . . . As a raw material for the production of pig

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165 For this and the following see Lutz, *German Empire*, I, 314 ff.
166 Westarp, II, 43.
GERMANY’S DRIVE TO THE WEST

iron and steel . . . , minette is being employed more and more. . . . If the output of minette were interrupted, the war would be as good as lost.\textsuperscript{167}

This, however, might easily happen, since the mining and industrial region of Lorraine was directly in the shadow of French guns:

Does anyone believe that the French, in the next war, would neglect to place long-range guns in Longwy and Verdun and would allow us to continue the extraction of ore and the production of pig-iron? . . . Hence the security of the German Empire in a future war imperatively demands the possession of the whole minette-bearing district of Luxemburg and Lorraine, together with the fortifications of Longwy and Verdun, without which this district cannot be held.\textsuperscript{168}

Most of these arguments were demolished almost immediately.\textsuperscript{169}

It was maintained, for instance, that strategically the possession of the French coast would not in the least ensure Germany’s domination of the English Channel, especially in the age of the airplane of which people were just becoming aware; and economically, Belgium and northern France, far from having an excess of coal, had to import that commodity to meet the needs of their considerable industries, and thus were an economic liability. Still, we must realize that there were considerable advantages to be gained for German industry from these western annexations, such as the domination, and, if necessary, elimination, of Belgian and French industrial competition; or the assurance to Germany’s iron masters of a continued supply of ore from eastern France. We have already treated the significance of this last question during the pre-war period and have traced the attempts of Germany’s industrialists to solve it by economic penetration of French Lorraine and Normandy. The growing French demand for the elimination in the future of this German influence threatened German industry with the loss of these valuable sources of supply, even if the war ended on a \textit{status quo ante} basis.\textsuperscript{170} For Germany’s heavy industry, therefore, it was a question of all or nothing. Either Germany would gain complete

\textsuperscript{167} Lutz, \textit{German Empire}, I, 317-18. \\
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{169} P. H. von Schwabach, \textit{Aus meinen Akten} (Berlin, 1927), pp. 274-8; Friedensburg, p. 50; Grumbach, pp. 375 ff. \\
control of France's iron supply, or else she would lose even the small foothold she had gained before the war. It is this fact which explains the deep interest of German industry in the war aims problem.

**Annexationist Propaganda**

The question as to how far the views of the annexationists expressed the opinion of the majority of Germans, is difficult to answer. For reasons of censorship, most annexationist programs could not be put before the general public. The publication of the Six Economic Organizations, for instance, was prohibited by the government, though it became known in other ways.\(^{171}\) Yet despite censorship restrictions, the amount of articles, pamphlets, and speeches during the first months of the war, dealing with German westward expansion, was considerable. Whether this propaganda was the result of a widespread popular demand, or whether it was intended to help create and increase such a demand, is again difficult to determine. The average citizen has little real opportunity of voicing his approval or disapproval of the propaganda to which he is subjected. Many observers testify, however, to the artificial character of German annexationist propaganda; and its origin among the annexationist pressure groups certainly lends credence to this view.\(^{172}\) Whether artificial or spontaneous, however, the result of these writings was to popularize the idea of territorial expansion and direct the nebulous hopes of the German people into specific channels.

The most important means of influencing opinion, of course, was the press. We have already seen how the *Tägliche Rundschau*, *Leipziger Neueste Nachrichten*, *Rhinisch-Westphälische Zeitung*, and *Post* were indirectly under Pan-German influence.\(^{173}\) It should not surprise us, therefore, to find more or less veiled hints in favor of annexationist aims in these papers, even while the public debate of such aims was still prohibited by the German government.\(^{174}\)


\(^{173}\) See Jung, p. 25, for a list of Pan-German papers.

\(^{174}\) For references to such articles see *Vorwärts*, Oct. 16, 17, 29, 1914; Feb. 16, 28, March 16, 25, 29, April 18, May 6, 8, 1915; *Tägliche Rundschau*, May 1, 1915; *Leipziger Neueste Nachrichten*, March 24, 1915.
At times these articles lost all their vagueness and became openly and bluntly annexationist. The Post on October 25, 1914 wrote: “The German Reich... may and must annex Belgium and must under no circumstances show any leniency when it comes to the imposition of an indemnity. The German people expect the Germanization of Belgium as a matter of course and a physical necessity...” Other prominent papers with annexationist leanings, the Tag, the Kölnische Volkszeitung, and the Kreuzzeitung wrote in a similar vein. The latter, under the editorship of the Conservative Party’s secretary, Schroeter, was a direct outlet for Count Westarp’s views on war aims. Even the semi-official Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung and the Berliner Lokalanzeiger dropped occasional hints that a “greater Germany” should result from the war.

One of the outstanding annexationist papers was the Deutsche Tageszeitung. Its editor was Ernst Georg Oertel, a leading Conservative and member of the Bund der Landwirte, which mainly supported his paper. The outstanding contributor was “E. R.,” i.e., Count Ernst von Reventlow. A former columnist on foreign affairs for the liberal Berliner Tageblatt and Maximilian Harden’s Zukunft, Reventlow had used his position for frequent attacks upon the naval policy of Admiral von Tirpitz. Suddenly, in 1908, for reasons never satisfactorily explained, he changed his attitude and became an ardent supporter of the Admiral. He severed relations with his former employers and took over the foreign desk of the Tägliche Rundschau and later of the Deutsche Tageszeitung. He also served his time with the Pan-German League, as head of its Berlin branch and editor of the Alldeutsche Blätter; and though he left the League in 1910, he maintained contact and resumed collaboration during the World War.

Reventlow’s relations with the Reichsmarineamt of Admiral von Tirpitz were close, although both he and the Admiral denied the rumor that Reventlow was the paid propagandist of Tirpitz and

175 On the industrial affiliations of the Post see H. Wehberg, Die internationale Beschränkung der Rüstungen (Berlin, 1919), p. 344.
177 Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, April 24, 30, 1915; Vorwärts, Oct. 17, 1914.
178 L. Persius, Graf Ernst zu Reventlow (Berlin, 1918), passim.
his naval policy.\textsuperscript{179} The similarity of their aims was, to say the least, suggestive of some sort of collusion. Both Tirpitz and Reventlow considered Great Britain Germany's most dangerous enemy, and both demanded the coast of Belgium and northern France as base for a powerful German fleet. Such a fleet would be the only means of securing their version of the "freedom of the seas," substituting Germany's naval predominance for that of Great Britain.\textsuperscript{180} The elusive concept "freedom of the seas" reappeared continually in the writings of most western annexationists, because it gave an excellent excuse for the annexation of extensive coastal areas and eventually of the hinterland as well.\textsuperscript{181} Such annexation would prevent another English blockade, the pinch of which was increasingly felt by the Central Powers. We shall run across the demand for "freedom of the seas" in many variations throughout this study. Its constant reiteration by "E. R."'s quick and biting pen won a large following both for western annexations and for the \textit{Deutsche Tageszeitung}.\textsuperscript{182}

Periodical literature in Germany, especially if known for its annexationist leanings, was more seriously affected by governmental censorship regulations than the press. The \textit{Alldutsche Blätter}, as we have seen already, wanted a "greater future" for Germany.\textsuperscript{183} \textit{Das grössere Deutschland} published articles on German eastward expansion by Paul Rohrbach, on a large colonial empire in Central Africa by Paul Arndt, and on annexations in France and Belgium by Count Reventlow.\textsuperscript{184} Rohrbach, as the war progressed, became increasingly opposed to the Pan-Germans and their \textit{Drang nach Westen}. But at this early stage he was by no means averse to complete German domination of Belgium.\textsuperscript{185} \textit{Des neue Deutschland}, a Free-Conservative weekly edited by Adolf Grabowsky, was still more outspoken than either of these two journals.\textsuperscript{186} \textit{Die Grenzboten} had advocated co-operation between Germany and her west-

\textsuperscript{179} Tirpitz, \textit{Dokumente}, II, 628 ff.
\textsuperscript{180} \textit{Deutsche Tageszeitung}, Sept. 7, Oct. 27, 1914; March 20, 28, April 14, 1915.
\textsuperscript{181} For a discussion of the question and for various writers on the subject see Ch. Meurer, \textit{Das Programm der Meeresfreiheit} (Tübingen, 1918), esp. 101 ff.; A. Gray, \textit{The Upright Sheaf} (London, 1915), pp. 45 ff.
\textsuperscript{182} Westarp, II, 180-81.
\textsuperscript{183} \textit{Alldutsche Blätter}, Aug. 3, 1914.
\textsuperscript{184} \textit{Das grössere Deutschland}, Sept. 19, 1914; April 3, May 8, 1915.
\textsuperscript{185} Kanner II, 118.
ern neighbors ever since the early nineteenth century, and it continued this policy during the war. Specifically it suggested the extension of Germany’s political and economic sphere by incorporating parts of Belgium and Holland into the German Reich.\(^{187}\) *Handel und Industrie* published a series of articles by Kurd von Strantz, president of the Army League, in which he demanded the annexation of Belgium as a counterweight against Great Britain.\(^{188}\) Even the Catholic *Hochland* wished for the annexation of Belfort, and (in an article by Professor Martin Spahn, son of the prominent Centrist) for the economic and military domination of Belgium and the annexation of sections of eastern France.\(^{189}\)

This list of annexationist articles could be considerably enlarged. Even the sophisticated *Zukunft* of Maximilian Harden temporarily was affected by the annexationist mania. As early as August 22, 1914, Harden defended Germany’s “right to extend her territory.” In September he reminded Belgium that she owed her culture, her colonies, and her independence to Germany, and that she had forfeited her privileges because of her cruel warfare against the invading Germans. A month later, Harden joined the most radical of the annexationists: “We shall remain in the Belgian Netherlands,” he wrote, “to which we shall add a thin coastal strip up to and beyond Calais . . . From Calais to Antwerp, Flanders, Limburg, Brabant, and beyond the line of the Meuse: Prussian. . . .”\(^{190}\)

More effective than this periodical literature, however, were the innumerable books and pamphlets which dealt with a post-war settlement. It is impossible to determine their exact number, but a conservative estimate would put such writings during the first year at close to a hundred.\(^{191}\) Not all were of equal significance, of course, nor did they all reach an equally wide audience. Some were sent out by mail to a limited number of important persons, a practice started by Heinrich Class, to evade the watchful eye of the censor. Professor Fabarius, for instance, Pan-German and director


\(^{188}\) *Handel und Industrie*, Sept. 12, Oct. 10, 1914; March 6, 1915.


of the *Deutsche Kolonialschule,* expressed his war aims (Belgium, Northern France, French and Belgian colonies) in a typescript which was privately distributed. Another example was the Pan-German Franz von Bodelschwingh, whose memorandum to Bethmann, asking for the annexation of Belgium, was privately printed and widely circulated by mail. But the majority of annexationist propaganda was carried on quite openly, reaching a considerable audience.

It is unnecessary for our purposes to discuss each publication in detail, since the aims advanced are little different from the ones we have already encountered. The National Liberal imperialist Arthur Dix, for instance, advocated that Belgium "in one form or another" should "come under German influence." As for France, "the German and French mines in both parts of Lorraine already to a large extent encroach upon each other. To join them together in German possession appears an appropriate step to make France economically dependent." Colonies in Central Africa and naval stations all over the globe were to complete Germany's gains. Pamphlets by Gustav Stresemann, Professor Max Apt, and Professor Conrad Borchling made similar suggestions, though not always in such outspoken manner. The role of university professors in German annexationist propaganda, as we shall see, was considerable. Already shortly after the outbreak of war, a number of them had pledged their support to the government's war policy. Now they went one step further and joined the annexationists in their demands for German expansion. Julius Wolf, economist and founder of the *Mitteleuropäischer Wirtschaftsverein,* in addition to territorial demands, wanted a substantial indemnity. Colonial expansion, often in connection with annexations

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on the continent, was the subject of books or pamphlets by Professors Mirbt (Theology), von Liszt (Law), Backhaus (Agriculture) and even the well-known editor of the Preussische Jahrbücher, Hans Delbrück.\textsuperscript{198} The idea of some of these writers, that Germany’s continental conquests should be exchanged against a more extensive colonial empire, found little favor with the majority of the Pan-German and industrial annexationists.\textsuperscript{199}

In dealing with the future of Western Europe, some of these writers advanced solutions which had a novel ring. We have already run across references to the division of Belgium’s population into the Germanic Flemings and the Romance Walloons. The German government, as we shall see, was much aware of this dualism and the advantages it offered. To the annexationists, the historic and ethnographic arguments in favor of a division of Belgium into its component parts, and a rapprochement of the Flemish section with its Germanic “mother country” supplied welcome material for propaganda. “We have not indeed begun the war [one of them writes] to support the Germanic Flemings in their struggle against French tendencies; but after we have been forced to war, and after making such an astonishing acquaintance with the Belgian people, it is our duty to make good old omissions, and to pay closest attention to the national claims of the Belgian people.”\textsuperscript{200}

The Flemish state, some writers held, should become part of a Teutonic federation under German leadership.\textsuperscript{201} Other Germanic nations—Holland, Switzerland, Denmark, and parts of Austria—might also be included in such a federation.\textsuperscript{202} Another plan called for the separation of Belgium into her Flemish and Walloon components and their inclusion into an economic Mitteleuropa under German domination.\textsuperscript{203} The Pan-German Rudolf Thedeen went


\textsuperscript{199} G. W. Schiele, \textit{Überseepolitik oder Kontinentalpolitik} (München, 1917), pp. 13 ff.

\textsuperscript{200} Borchling, p. 5.


\textsuperscript{202} E. Deckert, \textit{Panlatinismus, Panslawismus, und Panteutonismus in ihrer Bedeutung für die politische Weltlage} (Wien, 1914), p. 29.

\textsuperscript{203} H. L. Losch, \textit{Der mitteleuropäische Wirtschaftsblock und das Schicksal Belgiens} (Leipzig, 1914), pp. 34-37.
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still further. "If Belgium should participate in the war [he wrote in August 1914], she must be struck off the map." 204 The Walloons should be handed over to France and the Flemings to Germany or to Holland, if the latter would consent to become a German federal state.

This and other similar proposals to solve the Belgian problem caused considerable concern to the Dutch. 205 Under-Secretary Zimmermann tried to allay these fears in an interview with the Dutch Socialist Troelstra in October 1914. 206 But when the output of propaganda continued, the Secretary found it necessary to address a reproachful letter to the Pan-German League. "The largest share of the suspicion [he wrote], which meets our efforts to create some understanding abroad for Germany's aims, results from the boundless character of Pan-German writings and speeches. I say this on the basis of my observations over many years." 207

To the list of annexationist writings (which could be much enlarged) 208 we should add the many speeches and public statements to which Zimmermann referred in the letter just quoted. Many of these we have already discussed. Next to the politicians, Pan-Germans, and industrialists, it was the university professors who were most vociferous. Already in August 1914, Ernst Haeckel, by now over eighty years old, asked for the division of Belgium, the annexation of northern France, and even the occupation of London. 209 Johannes Haller, noted historian, opposed a peace which would leave Germany territorially unchanged. Other speeches by Professors Schwalbe, Ruge, von Gruber and Ostwald made similar demands, the latter advocating a United States of Europe under the presidency of the German Emperor. 210

In conclusion, there are one or two general observations that should be made on this annexationist propaganda during the first

206 Gray, p. 65.
207 Jung, pp. 30-31.
208 For further writings see Grumbach, pp. 265 ff.; Great Britain, Foreign Office, German Opinion on National Policy since July 1914 (London, 1920), passim.
210 J. Haller, Warum und wofür wir kämpfen (Tübingen, 1914); Grumbach, pp. 170-71; 290; Class, Strom, p. 376; Gerlach, p. 235.
few months of the war. Both the large number and the early date of these publications indicate that, while to the average German the war was at first one of defense, to a small minority it was almost immediately converted into a struggle for territorial gains. Another fact worth pointing out is that so many of the annexationist plans showed such striking similarities, which has been attributed to the influence of Heinrich Class' basic memorandum.  

There was general agreement, for instance, on the desirability of colonial gains, especially in Central Africa. There was widespread demand for sections of eastern France. The only region over which there was considerable disagreement was Belgium. But even here most annexationists agreed that Germany should maintain some hold, direct or indirect, over Belgium’s political and economic life.

The “Moderates”

One of the most interesting insights into the extent of annexationist opinion in Germany can be gained from a study of those organizations and individuals who were generally attacked because of their moderate attitude on the question of war aims. Because surprisingly enough, to be a moderate or a *Flaumacher* (as the Pan-Germans called it), did not necessarily mean the rejection of any and all annexations.

We have already discussed the most prominent and consistent group among the anti-annexationists, the Social Democrats, particularly their more radical members. As early as August 1914, Karl Liebknecht had organized meetings to oppose the growing clamor for territorial expansion.  

In November, Klara Zetkin, Secretary of the Women's International, published a manifesto against all annexations, while Eduard Bernstein turned specifically against the annexation of Belgium, which was demanded, he said, by “large sections of the people, including the ranks of the workers.”  

The Socialist press took a similar stand, especially in its leading organ, the *Vorwärts*.  

Compared to the Social Democrats, the various non-political organizations opposed to annexations were too small to be of much

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211 *U. A.*, 4. Reihe, XII (1), 50.
212 Dahlin, p. 29.
213 Grumbach, pp. 448, 448.
practical significance. The first of them, the Bund Neues Vaterland, was founded in October 1914 under the leadership of Baron von Tepper-Laski and Otto Lehmann-Russbült. Its importance has been much overrated. It did oppose the ultra-annexationist programs current in Germany and produced a detailed memorandum against the "Petition of the Six Economic Organizations." But even the Bund Neues Vaterland, so violently persecuted by its Pan-German adversaries, did not completely forego all hope for German aggrandizement after the war:

We can and must gain real guarantees to secure our position. If peace should be concluded under present military conditions, we must use the territories occupied by our troops as pledges or objects of compensation. The most obvious thought in this connection would be of colonial acquisitions, improvements of our frontiers for military protection, and indemnities; perhaps also naval and coaling stations.

Germany's leading Pacifist organization, the small Deutsche Friedensgesellschaft, was equally opposed to large-scale annexations on the European continent and advocated a peace "which does not contain the seeds of new wars." Many of the society's writings and its journal Der Völkerfriede were subsequently prohibited for the duration of the war. Yet again this very moderate organization was not entirely averse to German expansion overseas. Its president, Professor Quidde, suggested the principles of the "open door" and "freedom of the seas" as alternate war aims, and in return for the evacuation by Germany of the occupied areas in Western Europe, he hoped to gain a German colonial empire in Central Africa, consisting of the Belgian Congo and additional territories, plus naval stations and strategic improvements of Germany's western border.

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216 For a humorous description of one of the Bund's meetings see Kanner, II, 189.
217 Grumbach, pp. 375-409.
218 Ibid., pp. 407-08.
219 G. Fuchs, Der deutsche Pazifismus im Weltkrieg (Stuttgart, 1928), pp. 61-62.
221 L. Quidde, Reale Garantien für einen dauernden Frieden (n. pl., 1915), pp. 20 ff.; Fuchs, p. 61.
In the same category as the two previous organizations belongs the Freie Vaterländische Vereinigung, founded in February 1915, which arranged for discussions among its members and representatives of various parties, to arrive at a moderate program of war aims. Its president, Professor Kahl, made it perfectly clear that he was not averse to "territorial expansion to gain military, political, and economic security."  

What we have just discovered for the so-called "anti-annexationist" organizations—namely that they were by no means opposed to all, but merely to large-scale continental annexations—also holds true for certain prominent individuals who, in the course of the war, became the leading opponents of Pan-German expansionism. In his speech before the leaders of the Pan-German League on August 28, 1914, Heinrich Class had mentioned, besides the Socialists, the intellectuals, Jews, and German high-finance as chief opponents of Pan-German war aims. Admiral von Tirpitz subsequently defined this group somewhat differently as "the Hapag, the banks, all former ambassadors and diplomats, and the Wilhelmstrasse." We must not think in this connection, however, of a well-organized opposition group with a clearly defined program. Socially and politically, these moderates differed little from their annexationist adversaries. Both groups recruited their main following from the upper levels of society and the parties of the Right. The main difference was in their attitude towards Germany's domestic and foreign policy. In opposition to the ultra-annexationists and their reactionary domestic policy, the moderates advocated a conciliatory, more liberal policy, both at home and abroad. Their cultural, financial, or commercial ties with Great Britain made most of them, if not actual Anglophiles, at least admirers of the British Empire and its institutions. They hoped for some kind of agreement with their Anglo-Saxon cousins, giving Germany a due share in the colonial wealth and the commercial activities of the world. In return she would refrain from annexing Belgium and thus upsetting the balance of power on the continent. Such an agreement, they held, would best serve Germany's wide commercial and industrial

\footnote{222 Die Tat, IX (1917), 187.} \footnote{223 U. A., 4. Reihe, XXI (1), 52-53; W. Kahl, Die Freie Vaterländische Vereinigung (Berlin, 1915), passim.} \footnote{224 Class, Strom, p. 321.} \footnote{225 Tirpitz, Erinnerungen, p. 469.}
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interests. Even so, during the early days of the war, many of these moderates hoped to maintain some sort of control even over Belgium. Count Wedel, formerly Statthalter of Alsace-Lorraine and in 1916 to be president of the moderate Nationalausschuss für einen Deutschen Frieden wrote in January of 1915: "I agree that Belgium (which in addition must be induced to cede some of its territory) must be secured in some fashion. But I think this can be achieved through economic Anschluss and a military convention." 226 The former Colonial Secretary Dernburg, later known for his moderate views on war aims, stated in April 1915, that "Germany cannot renounce Belgium," since that country "had been conquered with great sacrifices of blood and money and offers Germany’s western trade the only free access to the sea." 227 Count Monts, formerly ambassador to Italy, whose moderation and Anglophilism aroused the ire of the German Empress and her confidant, Admiral Tirpitz, 228 had his eye on both the French and Belgian Congo. In a letter to Theodor Wolff, editor of the liberal Berliner Tageblatt, he added the French railways in Anatolia, a war indemnity, and the iron fields of Briey; also Liège and Luxemburg as necessary protection for Germany’s western industrial area. 229 Theodor Wolff himself had hinted at annexations as early as August 10, 1914. 230 And even the Frankfurter Zeitung, leading organ of liberal and moderate elements in Germany, wrote as a comment on Bethmann’s speech of May 28, 1915: "The question is not annexations or no annexations. The question is, how can Germany best secure the fulfillment of her world tasks? If the annexation of foreign districts is necessary in order to secure our military position or to get closer to our aim, we favor it." 231

One of the outstanding opponents of German continental expansion was the Berlin historian Hans Delbrück. "May God prevent Germany," he wrote in October 1914, "from following the

228 Tirpitz, Erinnerungen, p. 474. The influence of the Empress, though difficult to determine, was an important element in German policy; see also T. Wolff, Der Marsch durch zwei Jahrzehnte (Amsterdam, 1936), p. 249; O. Braun, Von Weimar zu Hitler (New York, 1940), pp. 45-47.
229 Wolff, Der Marsch, p. 92.
231 Frankfurter Zeitung, May 31, 1915 (2d ed.); also March 12, 1915.
course of Napoleon’s policy after the victory which we expect! Wars without end would be the result. However heavily we might chain other nations, we cannot keep them in fetters forever. Europe is agreed on this one point, never to submit to the hegemony of one single state.” The aim of the war, he declared, should be “that on land the balance of power must be maintained as it is, and that on the sea a similar balance must be attained.” 232 These moderate views which, as the Vorwärts pointed out, “demanded exactly what Emperor William formally proclaimed at the beginning of the war,” caused violent outbursts in annexationist circles. The Tägliche Rundschau called the article a “crime against the German cause.” The Post more explicitly accused Delbrück of criminal subserviency to Germany’s enemies. Reventlow in the Deutsche Tageszeitung wrote in a similar vein.233 At this point the censor intervened, the author was reprimanded and his article confiscated. Delbrück appealed to the censorship board headed by a close friend of the annexationist Conservatives, General von Kessel, contending that Bethmann Hollweg held the same views on war aims as he, Delbrück, did. “So much the worse for the Chancellor,” the General replied, “but that does not change my views in the least.” 234

The moderation among Germany’s intellectuals and former diplomats, as this brief survey has shown, was by no means so great as the attacks of the Pan-Germans may lead us to believe. The same can be said for her financial and commercial interests. Although the war seriously curtailed the international activities of Germany’s leading banks, the boom of domestic industries helped to make up for any losses abroad. Their attitude during the early days of the war, therefore, was definitely optimistic.235 The leadership of German high finance, according to Class, was in the hands of director

233 For a summary of press comments on Delbrück’s article see Vorwärts, Oct. 3-4, 1914.
235 Kanner, II, 19.
von Gwinner of the Deutsche Bank.\(^{236}\) Gwinner, who became considerably more moderate as the war progressed, was sufficiently impressed by Germany’s early victories to hope for a large indemnity and France’s colonies as possible German gains.\(^{237}\) His colleague, Paul von Schwabach of the Diskonto-Gesellschaft was still a better example of the moderately annexationist German financier. He opposed the exaggerated aims of the ultra-annexationists, especially the Six Economic Organizations.\(^{238}\) Instead he wrote a detailed memorandum of his own, in which he revealed himself as by no means averse to certain moderate war aims. The annexation of the French mining region of Briey, he felt, was desirable and presented few geographical obstacles. As to Belgium, he was against outright annexation and instead suggested German economic domination and military control. The few specific suggestions which he made in this connection, such as German supervision over Belgian tariffs, railroads and canals, the dismantling of her fortresses, and the reduction of the Belgian army to a bare minimum, were but a weaker version of the aims current among radical annexationists.\(^{239}\)

Walter Rathenau, head of Germany’s leading electrical trust, the A. E. G., and member of more than a hundred German and foreign business concerns, was the chief industrial exponent of a moderate peace. This was due partly to the nature of the “light” industries he represented. While the “heavy” industry of coal and iron stood much to gain from a prospective German expansion to the west, the lighter industries, such as chemicals, railways or electrical interests, had few economic stakes in that region. Rathenau’s personality, a curious blend of shrewd businessman, artist and philosopher, likewise helps to explain his moderation. Though at the same time, the drastic efficiency he showed in the creation and administration of the Kriegsrohstoffabteilung (whose purpose was the co-ordination of the various sources of German raw-materials, and which led to the confiscation of large amounts of enemy property) made a moderate peace settlement considerably more difficult.\(^{240}\) “Rathenau,” a con-

\(^{236}\) Class, Strom, 321.
\(^{237}\) Tirpitz, Dokumente, II, 67.
\(^{238}\) Schwabach, pp. 281-82.
\(^{239}\) Ibid., pp. 274 ff.
temporary observed, "when it came to politics, was an industrialist first and last." Rathenau deplored the exaggerated expectations of the annexationists. Instead he wanted the German government to issue a reassuring declaration concerning the future of Belgium, realizing that to England this question was of foremost concern. A Central European economic union with both France and Belgium participating, might be a more organic and lasting achievement than the annexation of Belgium; especially if one believed, with Rathenau, "that the economic union between these neighbors would eventually include a political union." To destroy and annex Belgium," he said to Conrad Haussmann in December 1914, "would be the greatest mistake Germany ever made."

Of the various economic groups affected by the outbreak of war, none suffered more severely than Germany's commercial and shipping interests. Cut off from the rest of the world through Britain's naval blockade, their policy, naturally, was directed towards a speedy termination of the war. Their spokesman was Albert Ballin, Director of the Hapag and close friend of the Emperor. In the enthusiasm of the first weeks of war, Ballin had hoped for large financial indemnities and colonial concessions. Yet a few weeks later, when Germany's knock-out blow against France had failed, his enthusiasm declined noticeably. "I was in Berlin during the week," he wrote to Admiral von Tirpitz on October 1, "and I was alarmed when I became acquainted with the wild schemes which are entertained not only by the people of Berlin, but by distinguished men from the Rhineland and Westphalia." Ballin, more than most people, realized how much Germany's success depended on a quick military decision. "My opinion is that the result of this world war, if it lasts twelve months, will be exactly the same as if it lasts six months. If we do not succeed in acquiring the guarantees for our compensation demands within a few months, the further progress of events will not appreciably improve our chances in this direction." As to war aims, Germany "must find compensation by annexing valuable territories beyond the seas; but for the peaceful enjoyment of such

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241 Mendelssohn Bartholdy, p. 224.
243 Haussmann, p. 20.
244 Tirpitz, Dokumente, II, 68.
overseas gain, we shall be dependent on the good-will of Great Britain.” To assure this good-will, we must aim at “a new grouping of powers around an alliance between Germany, Great Britain, and France. This alliance will become possible as soon as we shall have vanquished France and Belgium, and as soon as you [i.e., Admiral von Tirpitz] have made up your mind to bring about an understanding with Great Britain concerning the naval program.”

Here we have a clear expression of the moderates’ creed: the colonization and commercial exploitation of the world not in opposition to, but in friendly competition with Great Britain. That such a policy, which had the sympathy and support of the government, was possible, Anglo-German relations on the eve of war had proved. Yet the voices of moderation and conciliation were drowned by the clamor of Anglophobe annexationists, patriotic Pan-Germans, naval enthusiasts, and greedy industrialists for the complete and final defeat of the British Empire.

At the beginning of January 1915, Ballin wrote an article for the Frankfurter Zeitung which caused considerable discussion. Its title, “The Wet Triangle,” together with such terms as “real guarantees and securities” or “freedom of the seas,” soon became one of the clichés of annexationist propaganda. The term referred to that section of the North Sea between the island of Heligoland and the mouths of the Elbe and Ems. Hemmed in between the narrow confines of this triangle, the German fleet, according to Ballin, lacked effective bases from which to operate successfully against the blockading British navy. “We must, therefore, find a naval base beyond the limits of the North Sea,” he wrote, “which will secure us in the future the same opportunities in this part of the world as England now possesses and ruthlessly exploits.”

Although this latter statement, as Ballin’s friend and biographer Huldermann points out, probably referred to a naval base on the Atlantic, in Northern Africa perhaps, it was sufficiently vague to be applicable to the coast of Belgium. This was promptly done by the supporters of Belgian annexation. Nor was Ballin himself

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246 Ibid., pp. 237-40; Tirpitz, Dokumente, I, 131, 134.
247 E. F. Willis, Prince Lichnowsky, Ambassador of Peace (Berkeley, 1942), chs. IV and V.
249 Huldermann, pp. 234-35; Hoetzsch, I, 51.
as disinterested in the acquisition of a German foothold in Belgium as Huldermann would have us believe. Since he was against outright annexation, he suggested that Germany acquire a lease over the port of Zeebrugge as well as a voice in the administration of Antwerp. On February 8, 1915, Ballin, in a memorandum to the government, suggested far-reaching economic co-operation between Germany and Belgium.

In concluding this brief survey of moderate opinion in Germany we may say that any real opposition to territorial aggrandizement was rare, even among people known as anti-annexationist. Return to the status quo ante bellum seemed desirable only to the Social Democrats; and even here, as we have seen, opinion was divided. Some concessions, perhaps in the colonial field, some territorial or financial indemnity, appeared justifiable even to the most moderate German. Because he believed, just as strongly as most of his annexationist compatriots, that the Fatherland had suffered a premeditated encirclement and attack from a conspiracy of jealous enemies. It was a question of degree and not of principle that separated the ultra-annexationists from their moderate opponents.

The Government and the Annexationists

It has been necessary to treat the formative period of Germany’s war aims in some detail, because it helps us to understand the changing attitude of the German government, as represented by Bethmann Hollweg, towards western expansionism. We have seen how, when war broke out, both government and people had no aim beyond that of defending the Fatherland. The initial victories and sacrifices of Germany’s army, however, soon created an almost universal, though still vague hope for some kind of tangible reward. Except for the majority of Social Democrats, almost all Germans expected an increase in colonial holdings and, perhaps, a few minor improvements along the frontiers.

Yet despite this growing sentiment in favor of some degree of expansion, the government maintained its initial attitude of vagueness, hinting at the necessity for “real guarantees and securities,” but failing to define that term, at least publicly. It was possible,

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therefore, for the moderate section of the German people, especially the Socialists, to claim official support and to set the government against those of their countrymen who hoped for considerable and tangible gains on the European continent as well as overseas. At the same time, however, we find the German Chancellor committing himself in private to a program of western expansion which, to be sure, only called for the annexation of parts of eastern France, but which also outlined a plan for the political, economic, and military domination of Belgium which, in some ways, was more extreme than outright annexation.

To explain the rise of annexationist hopes among the German people and political parties entirely as a natural phenomenon, however, in which the expansionist appetite developed as the table was set with increasingly inviting territories along the western border, would be much too superficial. Still less would it be correct to attribute the changes in Bethmann Hollweg's attitude to such a cause. For he, more than the rest of the German people, was deeply aware of the artificiality of Germany's initial military successes. To understand the rise of annexationism in its more extreme forms, we had to turn to those groups within Germany in which this annexationism was not entirely spontaneous: the Pan-Germans and the representatives of heavy industry. The pre-war writings of the former and the pre-war economic policy of the latter point towards Western Europe as the most desirable field for expansion. This, plus the fact that the war was barely a month old before both groups had voiced their specific demands, belies the assertion that with them, as well, the rise of annexationist aims was a spontaneous affair.

However the advantages to be gained from this more extreme annexationism were by no means equally obvious to the whole German people. To convince those parts of the population who were either opposed to it, who held moderate views, or who were undecided (perhaps the largest number, and often referred to as Laubfrosch Annexionisten, tree-frog annexationists, "who jumped up when the war news was good, and jumped down when it was bad"), a propaganda barrage was let loose which soon made it appear as though the whole German people in equal spontaneity demanded the annexation of large sections of Western (and Eas-
tern) Europe. How far this propaganda succeeded and what share it had in converting already existing vague demands into a definite program is hard to say. At the very least, the expansionists made the government and many people believe that the majority of Germans demanded the annexation of Belgium and parts of northeastern France.

It was towards the German government that most of the annexationist propaganda was directed, since the government, and not the people, was responsible for the conduct of war and the conclusion of peace. It was for the government's benefit primarily that innumerable memoranda and petitions were drawn up and presented and that cleverly concealed pressure-group tactics were employed. Germany's annexationists suspected, with good reason, that their Chancellor did not fully share their territorial ambitions. Bethmann definitely belonged in the camp of the moderates. Germany's successful pre-war policy, especially in her economic and commercial gains, was ample proof to the Chancellor that she did not need any considerable expansion to gain her place in the sun. Imperialism, Weltpolitik, while leading to international conflict, might just as easily lead to a type of international cooperation, of which international finance and the international working-class movement were already existing examples. One of Bethmann's closest associates had laid down some of these ideas in a most interesting book, which had great influence on the Chancellor.253

Here was one of the chief causes for the annexationist attack upon Bethmann. To the influence of some of his colleagues, notably Tirpitz, and the pressure of "public opinion," we must add the uninterrupted bombardment with propaganda from annexationist quarters, if we want to understand Bethmann's change of attitude between August 1914 and May 1915. Most of these plans for westward expansion, though primarily concerned with France and Belgium, really aimed at the defeat of the one nation most deeply hated by the protagonists of the Drang nach Westen—Great Britain. Napoleon's dictum: "Antwerp is a pistol, directed at the heart of England," became a much-used cliché to express this ultimate aim of westward expansion.254 Anyone opposing this

253 "J. J. Rüdorffer" [Kurt Riezler], Grundzüge der Weltpolitik in der Gegenwart (Berlin, 1913); see also Bethmann Hollweg, II, 16; Schäfer, Leben, pp. 168-69; Stubmann, p. 265; Kanner, II, 120.

Anglophobia, of course, laid himself open to the merciless attacks of the annexationists. The government’s failure both to take strong military or naval measures against England, and to declare itself openly in favor of far-reaching western annexations, to serve as bases against the British Isles, fostered malicious rumors among its opponents. Perhaps the fact that the Kaiser was related to the British royal family, or his investments in the Bank of England, or the indebtedness of Bethmann Hollweg to “international Jewish finance” (to meet the debts of his son) might help to explain the mildness of Germany’s policy towards England? In this connection we should also mention the mysterious and abortive attempts in the fall of 1914 to overthrow the Chancellor “because he refused to keep Belgium.” They were led by Dr. Witting, director of the National Bank, formerly mayor of Posen, and brother of Maximilian Harden (their real name being Wittkowski), in collaboration with various annexationist newspapers and members of the Army League. It is interesting to note that the change in Bethmann’s attitude towards the future of Belgium between March and May 1915, coincided with a period of intensified annexationist propaganda and attacks, and in one instance at least (Bethmann’s answer to Westarp’s letter of April 17, 1915) had a direct connection with such an attack.

If, despite Bethmann’s concessions to the annexationist spirit of the period, the ultra-annexationists still persisted in their attacks upon his person and his policy, we find a partial explanation in the fact that the Chancellor’s sympathies and traditional policy were friendly towards Great Britain. Yet there was a still deeper cause for this annexationist antagonism against Bethmann. We have already pointed out the relationship between expansionist aims and domestic reforms. While the annexationists denied the necessity for such reforms and hoped to divert any demands for more representative government by the promise of territorial expansion, the Chancellor believed that, no matter how the war ended, governmental reforms had to be one of its lasting results. “

255 Westarp, II, 36. For other attacks on Bethmann see Class, Strom, p. 391, and Bodelschwingh, pp. 37 ff.
256 Haussmann, p. 17; Scheidemann, Memoiren, I, 396-97; Stubmann, p. 255.
257 See above, p. 15. Professor Schäfer admits the possible connection between the numerous annexationist petitions in May and Bethmann’s speech on May 28: Schäfer, “Kriegszweibewegung,” Der Krieg, II, 5. Bethmann himself stated that he felt helpless before the propaganda campaign of the Pan-Germans: Valentini, pp. 226-27; Wolff, Marsch, p. 93.
the most perfect victory,” he wrote after the war, “had to secure
the influence of the lower classes in the state, their co-operation
and joint responsibility.” 258 To him the Kaiser’s words of August
4, 1915: “I no longer know parties, I only know Germans,” repre­
sented a most binding obligation. At this he hinted in his Reichs­
tag speech of December 2, 1914: “When the war is over,” he said,
“parties will reappear. For without parties, without controversy,
there is no political life, even for the freest and most united people.
But we want to fight—and I for one promise to do so—we want
to fight for one aim: that in this controversy there will be only
Germans.” 259

To the Pan-Germans and the parties of the Right, this threat
of impending governmental reforms, through which they would
lose most of their disproportionate political influence, could only
be averted by getting rid of Bethmann Hollweg. It is here that
we have to look for the real cause of opposition against the Chan­
cellar. “My God,” Class exclaimed, when he read the Kaiser’s
August proclamation, “we have lost the war on the domestic
front!” 260 It was the mission of the Pan-German League, he and
his friends decided, to “lead the fight against Bethmann Hollweg.”
In this he was joined by industrialists, Conservatives, and many
National Liberals. 261 Hugenberg, his brother-in-arms, even went so
far as to attempt an alliance between the Six Economic Organiza­
tions of the famous petition and the bourgeois parties (such as
Hirsch had contemplated in the field of war aims), to counteract
Bethmann’s democratizing domestic policy. The plan, according
to Westarp “too beautiful to be true,” came to nothing. 262 It
was more popular and ultimately just as effective, to launch
patriotic attacks against the Chancellor’s weak foreign policy,
instead of reactionary and unpopular attacks against his liberal
and far-sighted domestic policy.

Bethmann Hollweg, instead of taking the determined leadership
in a policy which expressed his ideals of moderation abroad and
reform at home, followed a course of vagueness, which satisfied

258 Bethmann Hollweg, II, 33 ff. On the whole problem of domestic reform see
260 Class, Strom, pp. 306-07.
261 Ibid., pp. 328, 355-56; Westarp, II, 24-25; T. Wolff, Vollendete Tatsachen
262 Westarp, II, 51.
everyone and no one. The term “real guarantees and securities” which he used in his speech on May 28, 1915, to describe Germany’s war aims is a case in point. Yet he was guilty at times of more than mere vagueness. In the question of Belgium, for instance, he showed an amazing ingenuity in adapting his statements to the taste of his audience, without basically changing them. In early March 1915, he received the Socialists Haase and Scheidemann. “The war aims, which the Pan-Germans demand, are nonsense!” he proclaimed. “I don’t think of realizing them. To annex Belgium! A country with an entirely foreign population.”

Yet a few weeks later, the Chancellor presented the annexationist Count Westarp with a program of war aims, “against which [according to the Count] no objection could be raised.” Again in May, Bethmann told his aims to an annexationist delegation, which was entirely satisfied with his statement. To the Socialists, a few days later, he presented a milder version of the same views, which “breathed sincere and deep longing for peace.”

Behind the Chancellor’s vacillation stood his desire to maintain the artificial unity of the Burgfriede, and thus the strength of the German nation in time of war.

For the sake of German unity [Bethmann wrote after the war] no policy could be conducted during the war but a policy of the ‘diagonal.’ Especially in times of excitement and restlessness, in which extremes fight each other, thus increasing their antagonism, such a policy is an ungrateful task. It is attacked from both sides, must seek its followers according to circumstances, and lacks the glamor as well as the momentary force which are characteristic of a more reckless policy. . . . Decisive measures, open controversy in domestic questions, were possible and perhaps necessary when peace was secured and the external struggle was ended. During the war, I considered it my patriotic duty, to walk the narrow path of cool-headedness among passions, tensions, and delusions.

Bethmann’s middle-of-the-road policy turned out badly, as we shall see. Yet that it was the result of his sincere endeavor for the well-being of his country cannot be denied. His honesty, experience, knowledge, thoroughness, and patriotism were recognized even by some of his most bitter political opponents.

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263 Scheidemann, Memoiren, I, 34.
264 See above, pp. 15-16.
265 Scheidemann, Memoiren, I, 349.
266 Bethmann Hollweg, II, 34-36.
267 Westarp, II, 361; W. Ziegler, Volk ohne Führung (Hamburg, 1938), p. 43.