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Gatzke, Hans W.

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CHAPTER V

THE VICTORY OF THE ANNEXATIONISTS — THE DEFEAT OF GERMANY
(NOVEMBER 1917—SEPTEMBER 1918)

The history of German war aims during the last year of the war, particularly as concerns Western Europe, is a melancholy tale. The struggle between the Reichstag majority and the expansionists ended with a victory of the latter, and whatever expectations had been aroused by the Peace Resolution and the Papal Peace Note were now shattered. While the majority of Germans still clung to the futile hope of an early negotiated peace, a small minority of annexationists, with the active co-operation of the Supreme Command and the acquiescence of a weak civil government, continued to pursue its ambitious policy to the bitter end.

Count Hertling and the Supreme Command

The circumstances of Count Hertling's appointment differed most significantly from the selection of his predecessor. While in Michaelis' case the Reichstag had not been informed, let alone consulted, the days prior to November 1 were spent in careful negotiations with the leaders of the majority parties. There were a number of objections to Hertling's candidacy, and it was due chiefly to Kühlmann's successful handling of the situation that the parties finally gave their support to the Bavarian Prime Minister.\(^1\) Parliamentary government had won a triumph. For the first time in the history of the German Empire, the Reichstag had been able to overthrow a Chancellor entirely by itself and to take part in the selection of his successor. Not only that—in discussions with Hertling, prior to his appointment, the inter-party committee, made up of the majority parties and National Liberals, had secured his adherence to a five-point program which included a demand for the earliest possible presentation of a Prussian franchise bill, less stringent handling of censorship and assembly restrictions, and

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\(^1\) Max von Baden, pp. 150-51; Helfferich, Weltkrieg, p. 512.
in the field of foreign policy the program laid down in the answer to the Pope of September 13, 1917, i.e., the note sent to Rome on September 19. It is this last point which is of chief interest here. Instead of tying the new Chancellor to a definite program of war aims in general and the crucial problem of Belgium in particular, this demand was at best a veiled adherence to the vague Peace Resolution of July 19, 1917, which could be interpreted almost any way. The Reichstag had missed its opportunity of imposing a moderate peace program upon the new government. Maybe the fact that besides Hertling’s appointment, the Progressive von Payer and the National Liberal Friedberg were made Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President of the Prussian Ministerial Council respectively, was considered sufficient guarantee for a moderate government course.\(^2\)

The selection of Hertling, on the whole, seemed a fortunate one. As President of the Bundesrat’s Committee on Foreign Affairs he had gained experience in the field of foreign policy. He also looked back on a distinguished parliamentary career as member of the Reichstag from 1875 to 1912, a valuable asset in future dealings with that body. In addition, as one of the outstanding members of the Center Party’s conservative wing, he could expect to command the allegiance of this important party. And finally, in view of growing friction between Bavaria and Prussia, the appointment of a South-German seemed a singularly astute move. The most apparent drawback to the new Chancellor was his age—he was over 75. It remained to be seen to what extent the old gentleman was capable of holding his own against Germany’s real rulers, the Supreme Command.

The first weeks of Hertling’s chancellorship were a most promising period of domestic peace, embellished by spectacular successes of Austro-German forces on the Isonzo front. The public discussion of war aims and peace negotiations was temporarily in abeyance. In private conversation the Chancellor expressed moderate views, favoring a peace of understanding, opposing annexations, and approving plans for the exploitation of the Briey-Longwy region by way of commercial agreements rather than through annexation.\(^3\) On November 29, Hertling delivered his inaugural address before the Reichstag. On war aims his statements were noncommittal:


\(^3\) Naumann, *Dokumente*, pp. 297-98.
From the first day our war aim has been the defense of the Fatherland, the inviolability of its territory, and the freedom and independence of its economic life. We are therefore able to greet the Pope's appeal for peace with joy. The spirit from which our reply to the Papal Note proceeded still lives today, but our enemies should understand once and for all—this answer signifies no carte blanche for a criminal prolongation of the war. For the continuation of this terrible massacre, for the destruction of irreplaceable cultural values, for the insane mutilation of Europe, our enemies alone bear the responsibility. They will have to bear the consequences.4

Hertling's statements on other vital issues, notably internal reforms, were no more specific. The fact, however, that on December 5 the Prussian Reform Bill was officially presented to the Prussian Lower House quieted any fears on that count.

The high respect of his former Reichstag colleagues and the sufficiently ambiguous character of his statements made for a friendly reception of Hertling by almost all parties.5 “We consider the new government an improvement,” Scheidemann said, “provided that it sticks to its program.” Count Westarp expressed the “deep respect” of himself and his political friends for the new Chancellor. He objected, however, to the inclusion of the Peace Resolution into Germany's answer to the Pope, which Hertling had indicated in his speech. Stresemann raised a similar objection but then went on to say that the Peace Resolution had been superseded by events anyway and did therefore no longer tie the hands of the government. Only the Independent Socialist Haase injected a critical note into his speech, citing a statement which Hertling was reported to have made earlier before the Bavarian Lower House. “No binding promises concerning the Belgian question have been made to Rome,” Hertling had said, “and it would not be advisable to make any definite proposals about Belgium at this time. . . . The status quo ante, especially in regard to Belgium, is no longer possible, the Belgium quo ante does no longer exist.” Haase also read a telegram which Hindenburg had sent in reply to a congratulatory message of the Pan-German League. “Every one must admit,” it concluded, “that our Rhenish-Westphalian industry would be greatly endangered through a Belgian state leaning towards England and France.” Here were indications that the attitude of the government would not be greatly changed with the

5 For the following see ibid., pp. 3949, 3953, 3961.
appointment of a new chief executive. Additional proof of this fact was to appear shortly.

On November 29, the prominent British Conservative and ex-Foreign Secretary, Lord Lansdowne, wrote a letter to the Daily Telegraph, urging the conclusion of an early peace and pointing to Belgium as the most significant issue of the war. Like the peace-feelers in late September, Lansdowne's letter failed to have any specific results, though it testified again to the central significance of the Belgian question. What was the new Chancellor's attitude on that question? The Supreme Command was determined to find out. On December 11, 1917, Hindenburg suggested to Hertling a re-definition of Germany's Belgian aims:

The basis of our intentions in Belgium is the memorandum of the Kreuznach discussion on April 23, 1917, approved by his Majesty the Kaiser: "Belgium will continue to exist and will be taken under German military control until it is ripe politically and economically for a defensive and offensive alliance with Germany... Nevertheless, for reasons of military strategy, Liège and the Flanders coast, including Bruges, will remain permanently in Germany's possession (or on a 99-year lease). The cession of this territory is an imperative condition for peace with England. The foreland of Liège must include Tongeren and the railway line Liège-Stavelt-Malmédy... The occupation must secure the advance of the German army against France on the Franco-Belgian frontier." The Supreme Command repeated these demands at the conference in Kreuznach with Your Excellency's predecessor on the 9th August, 1917... In the discussion presided over by His Majesty in Berlin on the 11th September, 1917, it was decided after great hesitation to renounce the permanent occupation of the Flemish coast, if at this price peace could be obtained this year and if in addition the British would leave France... The presupposition which led to the Crown Council taking this decision, no longer holds good. Since, in addition, our military situation has developed especially favorably, I can no longer recognize the necessity for a partial renunciation of the military demands but must prefer them once more to their full extent, as laid down unanimously in the Kreuznach conferences of 23rd April and 9th August 1917. I therefore consider that a fresh decision with regard to the Belgian question is necessary.

This request of Hindenburg's to reconsider the question of Belgium was taken up at a meeting in Kreuznach on December 18. Belgium, it was decided at this time, should be brought under German influence through economic measures, military occupation, and continuation of the Flemish policy, as agreed at the Bellevue

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Conference on September 11. Beyond that, however, "an agreement with Belgium should be obtained to the effect that the Belgian coast, which we have fortified, must not come under English influence, but that the Belgians must pledge themselves to protect this coast under all circumstances in the interest of Germany and Belgium." While not going so far as the program of April 23, these demands of December 18 certainly came close to the aim of Germany's naval authorities for a hold over the Flemish coast. In regard to Luxemburg it was decided to incorporate the Grand Duchy into Germany as a federal state. To overcome the objections of its inhabitants, study at German universities was to be encouraged and facilitated. No reference seems to have been made to France at the December 18 meeting. Earlier in the month, however, the liaison officer between the Foreign Office and the Supreme Command, von Grünau, had been asked by Hertling to sound out the army on the question of giving up some of Germany's aims in the Briey region. On December 14 he reported:

I do not want to pass on the suggestion about Briey at present as conditions are unfavorable for a good reception of it and the impression would be created that Your Excellency wishes to be very lenient towards France. They are feeling very big here at present and are entertaining ideas of smashing the enemy. I would advise rather raising the question when its practical decision is necessary.9

From December 1917 on, Germany's attention was almost exclusively absorbed by the negotiations with Russia at Brest-Litovsk. On December 15, an armistice had been signed between Germany and Russia, and a week later the first peace congress of the World War was under way. Prior to the departure of the German delegation the various party leaders were given an opportunity of expressing their views on the Russo-German settlement. While both Scheidemann and Erzberger insisted on a firm adherence to the July Peace Resolution, the Centrist Fehrenbach, supported by Westarp, declared that the Resolution had lost its validity.10 On December 24, Germany and Russia agreed on the principle of "no annexations and indemnities" as basis for a post-war settlement, provided the Allies were willing to join in a general settlement on the same terms. Despite this last evasive clause, which invalidated

9 Lutz, German Collapse, pp. 48-49.
10 Westarp, II, 566.
the agreement from the start, since neither England nor France would ever subscribe to it, the Supreme Command and the annexationist press were furious at this policy of complete renunciation. Over this issue there grew up a serious controversy between Germany’s political and military leaders, which ultimately boiled down to the fundamental issue, the question of responsibility for the conduct of the Reich’s political affairs. Without going into detail we may say that Hertling and Kühlmann gained at least a nominal victory when, on January 24, the Kaiser took their side against Hindenburg and Ludendorff.

Although this January crisis had primarily grown out of the eastern question, the west had also played its part. On January 2, General Ludendorff, in a statement before the Bundesrat’s Committee on Foreign Affairs once again defined the Supreme Command’s war aims in the west, in terms with which we are sufficiently familiar. Hertling’s attitude towards these aims did not quite satisfy the Supreme Command. At the height of the January crisis, Hindenburg wrote to the Emperor, complaining about the negotiations at Brest-Litovsk and including the following brief reference to Belgium:

In all the conferences with the Imperial Chancellor over which Your Majesty presided, we pointed out the importance of secure frontiers as a vital question for Germany. It is doubtful whether such frontiers will be obtained, and this causes me the greatest anxiety. . . . In the discussions with regard to Belgium I have encountered nothing but the greatest reserve on the part of the Imperial government with regard to military demands.

Hindenburg’s suspicion of the government’s attitude on Belgium, however, was unjustified. The very same day that Hindenburg wrote to the Emperor, January 7, Hertling wrote a letter to Hindenburg in which he referred to the contemplated offensive on the western front:

If, therefore, the proposed new offensive under your Excellency’s experienced leadership, supported by the heroic courage and will to victory of our soldiers, leads, by the grace of God, to the complete success hoped for, we shall be in a position to lay down the terms for a peace to be concluded with the western powers which will be necessary after the war to secure

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11 Helfferich, p. 541.
14 Lutz, German Collapse, p. 25.
our frontiers, our economic interests, and our international position. I hope
that we shall succeed in convincing the Reichstag, with the exception of
the Social Democrats, of this. Efforts in this direction will not be wanting.¹⁵

Kühlmann, in a memorandum on January 10, defined the govern­
ment's position still more clearly. "The Belgian question," he
wrote, "was very thoroughly dealt with in a Crown Council at
Kreuznach in the presence of His Majesty. There is no cause at
present for a modification of the attitude adopted by the Imperial
Chancellor."¹⁶ In a letter to the Emperor on January 23, Hertling
enlarged upon these views. To go beyond the general principles
laid down at earlier discussions with the Supreme Command was
premature, he held, and would tie Germany's hands at the future
peace conference.

It need not be especially stressed that questions of military security will not
be overlooked. In what way they will be achieved, depends upon the
political and military situation at the time peace is concluded. We shall
have to take into consideration how far our future economic and political
relations to this neighbor [i.e. Belgium] and especially the development
of our Flemish policy will diminish the probability of a future war with
her and thus decrease the necessity for military safeguards.¹⁷

These various pronouncements of Count Hertling make it perfectly
clear that by January of 1918 the Chancellor, as far as war aims
were concerned, was definitely on the side of the Supreme Com­
mand. As further proof we may cite his conversation with the
Conservative leader von Heydebrand on January 17, in which he
said that Germany now had an entirely free hand in the west,
that there would be no more peace offers, and that the Peace
Resolution of July 19 was completely and definitely dead.¹⁸ The
same day an interesting document was sent to the Chancellor's
liaison officer with the Supreme Command, Count Limburg-Stirum.
Drafted by Under-Secretary of State von Radowitz, it was endorsed
by Hertling. The following passage is of special interest:

The Supreme Command, the Kaiser, and the Crown Prince insist that the
Chancellor at this time, through an appropriate declaration before the
Reichstag, withdraw publicly and positively from the Resolution of July
19. The Chancellor, like the authorities just mentioned, holds the opinion
that the assumptions under which the government agreed to the Resolution

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 33.
¹⁶ Ibid., p. 35.
¹⁸ Westarp, II, 549.
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no longer hold good, and that consequently the government has a free hand against the Western Powers.\textsuperscript{19}

The Supreme Command had succeeded completely in making its views on western war aims prevail. It had been assisted in its "conversion" of Hertling by the various groups of annexationists, who at this time launched another major propaganda offensive.

\textit{Supreme Command and Kriegszielbewegung}

There is some evidence that the army actually approached the leaders of heavy industry, asking them to increase their annexationist propaganda. The result of the request is said to have been the creation of an industrial propaganda fund.\textsuperscript{20} If the responsibility for the renewed wave of industrial propaganda at the end of 1917 cannot definitely be placed, its actual existence cannot be overlooked. The most important example is the petition presented by the Verein deutscher Eisen-und Stahlindustrieller and the Verein deutscher Eisenhüttenleute, under the presidency of Albert Vögler, director of the Stinnes concern.\textsuperscript{21} Based on the research of two of the most eminent German authorities in the field of mining geology, Professors Beyschlag and Krusch of the Prussian Royal Geological Academy, the memorandum went into a most careful examination of Germany's post-war supply of iron ore. Its conclusions were as follows: Germany's domestic supplies of ore would last only about forty to fifty years. It was thus highly desirable to find additional sources of supply, and the most suitable region was French Lorraine. To secure a steady supply from the Briey basin, however, its military occupation and domination by Germany was absolutely necessary. Mere treaty arrangements to guarantee Germany's share in the mineral riches of France were not sufficient. Already before the World War, German owners of French mines had faced a great many obstacles and in most cases had to conceal their ownership behind French directors. These difficulties would be multiplied after the war, if Germany's influence in the Briey district rested entirely on paper guarantees. Not only for economic, but for strategic reasons as well, the petition continued,

\textsuperscript{19} U. A., 4. Reihe, II, 337.
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Ibid.}, I, 238.
Germany's western border must be extended, so that even the most powerful guns cannot reach industrial establishments in German Lorraine. Not only did the Briey-Longwy area constitute ancient German soil, but France would still keep some of the world's richest iron deposits in Normandy; though even here France must grant Germany the rights she had before the war. The annexations which the memorandum suggested would not merely favor the industrialists, but the working classes as well. While lack of iron-ore would cause unemployment and result in the mass-migration of workers (who thus were lost to the armed forces) the annexation of French Lorraine would provide work for at least 30,000 additional miners. And finally, the production of fertilizer as a by-product from the phosphorous minette ore was of vital significance to German agriculture. The whole German people, therefore, stood to profit from the annexation of Briey-Longwy. On the other hand, "if this opportunity is missed," the petition concluded, "the German people, in a future war, will be doomed to destruction." As in the case of Germany's military authorities, the final argument of the industrialists was preparation for future war, the "Second Punic War," about the certainty of which there never seemed the slightest doubt.

There were other similar products of industrial propaganda at this time. The firm of Thyssen published a pamphlet entitled "The significance of the Briey Basin for Germany's Economic and Military Future," demanding the iron deposits of French Lorraine.22 One of Krupp's directors, Ernst Haux, in several speeches before the employees of the Krupp works, stressed the proximity of Germany's industrial regions to the frontier. The French, Haux pointed out, could have destroyed important sections of German Lorraine through long-range guns at the outbreak of war, if they had chosen to do so. To prevent such danger once and for all, Germany should acquire a protective glacis which would keep her enemies at a safe distance.23

In view of the vital significance which the French iron regions had for German heavy industry, these writings are understandable. The fact that so many of them appeared at this time can be explained by the threatening increase of plans proposing to

22 Gewerkschaft "Deutscher Kaiser," Die Bedeutung des Briey-Beckens für Deutschlands volkswirtschaftliche und militärische Zukunft (n. pl., 1917)
solve the iron-ore problem by commercial agreements rather than conquest. The additional encouragement from Hindenburg and Ludendorff sufficed to keep alive the fondest hopes of German industrialists.24

Together with the Supreme Command and heavy industry, the annexationists launched a frontal attack upon the exponents of moderate war aims. The Pan-German League at its yearly meeting in October passed a resolution containing the standard set of annexationist aims, with special emphasis on Belgium.25 Heinrich Class’ famous memorandum on war aims came out in a revised edition, including suggestions for the racial and cultural improvement of the German “master race.”26 The Independent Committee had stepped out of the limelight and made room for the Vaterlandspartei; though Dietrich Schäfer continued to be active. “A peace without an extension of Germany’s sphere of power and without indemnities,” he wrote on December 31, “would be equal to our destruction.”27 Colonial demands continued to be the most generally accepted war aim. Both the Colonial Society and Colonial Secretary Solf constantly repeated their arguments for a large Mittelafrrika and for a series of naval stations.28

The Vaterlandspartei took the lead in annexationist propaganda. Its president, Admiral von Tirpitz, was constantly on the move, addressing large meetings in all parts of Germany. On November 10 he told a Munich audience that it was Germany’s mission to serve as protector of Belgium.29 Later in the month, in two overflow meetings at Dresden he again dealt with his favorite subject—Belgium. Several Saxon Ministers of State were present at these meetings and supported Tirpitz, a fact which led to a heated debate in the Saxon Lower House.30 On November 30 the Admiral ad-

24 G. Raphaël, Krupp et Thyssen (Paris, 1925), pp. 180-81; Vossische Zeitung, Feb. 5-7, 1918; Düsseldorfer Tageblatt, Feb. 24, 1918; Der Metallarbeiter, March 2, 1918.
27 Schäfer, Leben, p. 222.
29 Wortmann, p. 47.
30 Deutsche Tageszeitung, Nov. 21, 1917; Schulthess, vol. 59 (1), p. 17.
dressed six thousand persons at Essen, heart of the Ruhr district. The rich coal region of the Belgian Campine, he said, "must not be allowed to fall into English hands, to be developed into a powerful rival to our Rhenish-Westphalian territories. On the contrary, it must be made part of our economic strength, in opposition to Anglo-Americanism." 31 The Fatherland Party’s opposition to the Reichstag’s Peace Resolution came out at almost every meeting. 32 On November 28 it asked the Reichstag to give up the Resolution “as once and for all superseded by recent events,” and instead “to manifest a firm will for the achievement of a peace which will assure all the essentials of Germany’s existence.” 33

To complete the picture of annexationist agitation during the last months of 1917, we should also mention the large number of pamphlets and books dealing with war aims that continued to flood the German market. They can be divided into two groups, according to the significance of their authors. A large number of them were unknown and it is surprising that their uninteresting writings ever found publishers and readers. 34 Yet others were written by some of Germany’s outstanding intellectual figures who thus gave added prestige to the clamor of the annexationists. The Leipzig historian Erich Brandenburg gave an intelligent discussion of German territorial needs which, in the west, agreed in most respects with the aims of the government and Supreme Command. 35 Alfred Hettner, the Heidelberg geologist, advocated the annexation of Briey-Longwy, but was dubious about keeping a German foothold in Belgium. There was some justification, in his opinion, for the annexation of small sections, especially Liège. But on the whole, Hettner believed, a truly neutral Belgium was possible and he suggested that the country be given up in exchange for Germany’s

32 Wortmann, p. 49.
33 Deutsche Tageszeitung, Nov. 30, 1917 (ev. ed.).
34 The following are examples from a much longer list: A. Konietzko, Unsere Wirtschaftliche Zukunft bei einem Verszichtfrieden (Weimar, 1917); F. Lauterbach, Wenn wir heimkehren (Leipzig, 1917); L. Schwering, Belgien, der Angelpunkt des Weltkrieges (Regensburg, 1917); H. O. Schmidt, Deutschlands Friede und Freiheit (Dresden, 1917); A. Meister, Unser belgisches Kriegsziel (Münster, i. W., 1917); A. Stoll, Deutsche Kriegsziele im Westen (Cassel, 1917); R. C. Hentsch, Friedensziele—Kriegsziele (Annaberg, 1917).
pre-war colonies. The historian Ziekursch favored the usual "veiled annexation" for Belgium which would give Germany maximum advantages without the disadvantages of a large foreign minority. Other distinguished contributors to the discussion and propagation of war aims included Georg von Below, who suggested the division of Belgium between France and Germany, and the geographer Felix Hänsch. The significance of these writings, however, must not be overrated. They presented few new arguments and probably were always read by the same annexationist clique. There was a time at the beginning of the war when the writings of such authorities did much to mold public opinion. But after more than three years of unfulfilled hopes, most Germans had made up their minds in favor of a moderate peace, and few were affected by the constant repetition of hollow promises on the part of a small minority. The most interesting characteristic again noticeable in some of these annexationist pamphlets was a change of emphasis from the advantages to the necessities of annexations, from the economic motive of gain to the strategic motive of protection. But even that generalization holds true for a limited number of writings only. The majority wrote in 1917 as they had written in 1914, utterly oblivious of any changes in Germany's military and political situation.

The annexationists were alarmed not merely over the prospect of having to abandon their dreams of westward expansion. There was the equally if not more important threat of domestic reform, which became acute with the rise of parliamentary government and the introduction of the Prussian Franchise Bill on December 5 (the bill was promptly relegated to a Committee, from which it did not emerge until April 30, 1918). "The controversy over war aims," Prussia's Minister of the Interior wrote on February 13, 1918, "which at present dominates the domestic scene in Germany, has been able to gain its depth and intensity only because each side recognizes in the representative of opposing peace demands also its opponent in domestic issues." On December 8,

40 Volkmann, Der Marxismus, p. 298.
Germany’s “classes,” alarmed at these internal developments, founded a subsidiary organization to the Vaterlandspartei, the Bund der Kaisertreuen. “The Deutsche Vaterlandspartei fights against the same enemies we fight against, to gain a peace for Germany that will secure its further development. But it has publicly and definitely declared that it will take no part in the domestic controversies of Germany. In this direction the Bund der Kaisertreuen will supplement it.” 41 The influence of the organization, which included a number of high-ranking political, military, and industrial figures, was considerable; it claimed, for instance, to have had a hand in the later dismissals of the Kaiser’s chief political adviser, von Valentini, and of Foreign Secretary von Kuhlmann. The Bund opposed “the plaintive lamentations for peace,” and instead demanded a strong settlement. Though “what good would the most glorious victories, the most favorable peace settlement do us, if the proud structure of the German Reich should be shaken in its foundations by democratization?” one of its propagandists asked.42 Conservative and annexationist organizations like the Pan-German and the Agrarian Leagues joined in this anti-reform campaign.43 At a meeting of the latter, in February 1918, the Conservative Wildgrube revealed most clearly the true cause for the concern of his class and party over the question of reform. “We wish for the maintenance of the German and Prussian monarchy,” he said, “not for the sake of the dynasty, but for our own sake. Germany will be monarchical, or she will not be at all.” 44 Here we have, stripped of all its patriotic verbiage, the naked fear of Germany’s ruling classes, to whom democracy meant the loss of their traditional powers and privileges.

In their domestic concerns, as in the field of war aims, the annexationists enjoyed the support of the Supreme Command. “I have never been for the Prussian franchise,” Ludendorff wrote on December 16, “I think it is a great mistake. . . . The reconstruction of Germany is really more important than questions of franchise.” 45 And again on January 1, 1918, he wrote:

I always hope that the Prussian franchise falls through. If I didn’t have that hope, I would advise the conclusion of any peace. With this franchise

41 U. A., 4. Reihe, XII(1), 146.
44 Berliner Tageblatt, Feb. 19, 1918.
45 Knesebeck, p. 163.
we cannot live. . . . Let the disturbances come. I would rather endure a terrible end than endless terror. Are there no more fighters left? Can the best among us be frightened by the bogie of "internal unrest?" To look the danger straight in the eye and then at it! Only thus can we win; and if we should lose it would be better than acting against one's conviction.\(^{46}\)

Of all Ludendorff's statements, this is the most revealing. It shows that to him as to any Conservative and annexationist, the war was lost if concessions along democratic lines had to be made to the German people. The constant stress on the strategic necessity as the only argument for western annexations is belied by his statement that once the Prussian franchise had been conceded, any peace would suit him. To prefer a terrible end to endless terror may serve as a suitable maxim for the ruthless policy the Supreme Command pursued during the last six months of the war. To avoid endless terror, Ludendorff put everything on one card, an all-out offensive against the west. The loss of this offensive left as the only alternative the terrible end, the collapse of the German Empire.

**Political or Military Offensive?**

There were a number of Germans in early 1918 who realized that a military offensive against the west was not the only way to achieve peace. Instead they suggested that Germany precede this military offensive with a political offensive to arrive at a negotiated settlement. It was in this connection that the problem of Belgium once more emerged as the basic issue between Germany and the west. This fact was made clear both in a speech by Lloyd George on January 5, which placed particular emphasis on the future of Belgium,\(^{47}\) and in President Wilson's message to Congress of January 8, citing the famous Fourteen Points as basis for a post-war settlement. Hertling dealt with Wilson's program in an address before the Reichstag Main Committee on January 24, 1918:

As far as the question of Belgium is concerned, my predecessors have repeatedly declared that at no time during the war the annexation of Belgium by force has been part of Germany's program. The Belgian question belongs to the whole group of questions whose details will have to be settled at the peace negotiations. As long as our adversaries do not openly accept the idea that the territorial integrity of the allied nations [i.e. the Central Powers] forms the only possible basis for peace negoti-

\(^{47}\) Max von Baden, pp. 195 ff.
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ations, I must insist on the position taken thus far and refuse to take the matter of Belgium out of the discussion of the whole peace problem.48

These are vague and careful words which do not exclude the possibility of Belgian restoration. But we must remember that they were primarily directed at President Wilson and were therefore intended to be moderate. Hertling's real views on the subject, as shown in his letter to the Emperor the day before, were by no means as conciliatory. Nor did he fool his listeners. The majority parties, despite some earlier indications of disagreement, once more united in their criticisms of the Chancellor's speech, pointing directly at its chief weakness. "A definite statement of the German government on Belgium," Erzberger said, "would be most effective. The Chancellor, to be sure, treated the question negatively; but it should be treated positively."49 Then came Scheidemann: "The complete and honest restoration of Belgium, including her political independence, is our duty of honor. . . . I should have greatly hoped that the Chancellor, in regard to Belgium, had said clearly and openly: we are ready to relinquish her, on the condition, of course, that our opponents for their part give up their plans for the infringement of Germany's integrity." Scheidemann concluded with the ominous words: "We Social Democrats shall do all we can for our country and people. But we shall never think of risking our lives for a government that does not fulfill its duties towards the people." Finally Friedrich Naumann expressed his own and his party's agreement with what his colleagues had said before him. "A positive word," he said, "should be spoken about Belgium. We must not put everything on the card of victory."50

The problem of political vs. military offensive was summed up and put before General Ludendorff in an extensive memorandum, dated February 11, and signed, among others, by Friedrich Naumann, Alfred Weber, and Robert Bosch.51 Its authors pointed out that the increasing unrest at home and the economic weakness of the Central Powers made the conclusion of an early peace an imperative necessity. If the impending offensive was the only method to gain such a peace, the German people would willingly endure its hardships. The task, therefore, was to make the people see that the offensive, if it did come, was unavoidable. To do this, the military offensive should be preceded by a political offensive.

which will compel Lloyd George to declare openly that he wishes to continue the war for the sake of Alsace-Lorraine. This aim can be achieved by an unequivocal declaration regarding the future restoration of the sovereignty and integrity of Belgium. That is the postulate of the British and American peace parties. . . . This declaration with regard to Belgium would break down the unbroken determination behind the lines in the enemy countries and build it up anew in Germany. The declaration should be made as soon and as clearly as possible and also quite publicly. . . . The fruitful soil for war propaganda in enemy countries and for the anti-war agitation in Germany has been entirely created by the obscurity of the statements made by the German government.

The memorandum summed up the possible results of the political action it proposed, which would either be the fall of the British war cabinet and its substitution by a moderate ministry, or the formation of a new chauvinistic government under Lloyd George and against the will of the British people. With the former, Germany could easily conclude a satisfactory peace, while the latter would present a decisive obstacle to Great Britain's conduct of the war and thus facilitate German victory. The document closed with the prophetic statement:

A terrible responsibility rests at present on the leaders of the government; it is still possible to retain the good will of the masses. All healthy forces among the German workmen tend to reject the forces making for disorganization. But the government must assist them. It has in its power to allow the disintegrating forces to become a great destructive power in Germany or to condemn them to lasting impotency. 52

General Ludendorff was sufficiently impressed with the memorandum to reply at length on February 22. But he restricted himself entirely to the military aspects of the contemplated offensive, pointing out that for the first time since the early days of the war, the withdrawal of Russia gave Germany a choice on the western front between offensive and defensive, and that he had to make use of this chance to attack before American assistance to the Allies would turn the scales against Germany. The central idea of the memorandum, to precede the military by a political offensive, using a declaration on Belgium as an entering wedge to weaken the enemies' power of resistance, was completely ignored by the General. 53

The idea of a propaganda offensive against England had been suggested by other people ever since the major spring campaign

had been decided upon.\textsuperscript{54} In January, Colonel von Haeften presented Ludendorff with an elaborate proposal for such a move. Its purpose should be to make clear to the British people that the only obstacle to peace was Lloyd George's imperialistic policy.

The right words are victorious battles, and the wrong words are lost battles. If we desire to gain a victory behind the English front to prepare our victory on the battlefield, we must choose such words as will enable the patriotic peace party in England to step before their people and say: If you follow us, the road to negotiations will be clear, and the honor and security of England will be assured.\textsuperscript{55}

Ludendorff "urgently recommended" Haeften's memorandum to the Chancellor, a fact which has been taken as proof of the Supreme Command's consent to a political offensive.\textsuperscript{56} This would be true if the most essential part of Haeften's memorandum, the demand for a clear statement on Belgium, had not been omitted before the document was handed to the government.\textsuperscript{57} In view of the Supreme Command's aims in regard to Belgium, a promise of its restitution was, of course, out of the question. On February 5, at a meeting between German and Austrian political and military leaders, Ludendorff once more made clear his attitude on this point:

A peace which only guarantees the territorial \textit{status quo} would mean that we lost the war. . . . Matters are still uncertain as far as the west is concerned. But if we keep our old frontiers there, we shall be in a less favorable position after the war than before. . . . We must improve the protection of our western coal regions through rectifications of the frontier. To a peace which offers less, we of the Supreme Command cannot agree. It can only be ordered from above.\textsuperscript{58}

To make matters complete, the Chief of the High Seas Fleet, Admiral Scheer, supported by Admiral von Holtzendorff, once more brought the navy's claims for the coast of Flanders to the attention of the Supreme Command.\textsuperscript{59} Yet a statement on Belgium was the \textit{conditio sine qua non} of a peace settlement with

\textsuperscript{54} Rupprecht, II, 330, 332, 336.
\textsuperscript{55} Ludendorff, \textit{Urkunden}, pp. 473-78.
\textsuperscript{57} Max von Baden, p. 201, note 2.
\textsuperscript{58} \textit{U. A.}, 4. Reihe, XII (1), 920; Max von Baden, pp. 236-37.
\textsuperscript{59} "Rudiger," p. 92.
England. Without the reference to Belgium, Haeften's proposal was as meaningless as all of Germany's earlier official statements on war aims. The Colonel himself had said in the section that was later omitted: "We have always offered the English peace party weapons which were of no use to it, while they were of considerable use to the English war party."  

The question of a political offensive was further broached by the famous armchair strategist and historian, Hermann Stegemann. Viewing the situation from neutral Switzerland, he addressed his important observations to Conrad Haussmann. Stegemann agreed that Germany's military situation was more favorable than ever before. Yet he doubted that an offensive in the west, even though successful, would knock one of the Allies out of the war. Quite the contrary, he held, it might only serve to unite Germany's adversaries still more closely. On the other hand, the very fact of Germany's military superiority, which was universally recognized, might be used as effectively as an actual offensive to terminate the war.

Only if an understanding—made easier through a clarification of the Belgian question (my ceterum censeo)—cannot be achieved in the course of a few weeks, only then the two-edged weapon of an offensive must be used. Its qualification as a surgical instrument remains doubtful, but its use could then be considered necessary. Today that is not yet the case.  

Conrad Haussmann related Stegemann's views to Ludendorff, but failed to receive a clear reply. One of the chief advocates of a peace offensive against England, the later Chancellor, Prince Max of Baden, finally put the matter directly before Hertling. The Chancellor was most skeptical of England's willingness to discuss peace and was afraid that a German declaration on Belgium would only cause Allied jeers. Most important, however, was Hertling's unwillingness to oppose the Supreme Command. He had the firm belief that the two military leaders would gain peace, and a better peace, by military means. The Vice-Chancellor, von Payer, was more amenable to Prince Max's suggestion, but he also had all his hopes set on the impend-

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60 Max von Baden, p. 201, note 2.
63 Max von Baden, pp. 231 ff.
ing offensive. The Foreign Secretary, on the other hand, was extremely pessimistic, believing neither in the success of a military or peace offensive, nor that the Supreme Command could be made to agree to the latter. Only Dr. Solf saw eye-to-eye with the Prince, but his influence was insufficient to bring about a statement on Belgium. Ex-Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg, likewise convinced of the necessity to clarify publicly Germany's stand on Belgium before going into the spring offensive, went to see Hertling, but had no more luck than Prince Max. Nor was a visit which the latter paid to Ludendorff any more successful. The unequivocal declaration on the future of Belgium, not in itself perhaps a sufficient inducement for the British government to enter into peace negotiations, but surely a necessary prerequisite of such negotiations, had once again failed to materialize.

In addition to these various suggestions for a peace offensive, there were again several peace moves and feelers between the Central and Allied Powers during the spring of 1918. Aside from the fact that in almost every case the question of Belgium soon emerged as the central issue, these secret negotiations had little effect upon the main course of events. Most outstanding were the conversations at the Hague, in early March, between Colonel von Haeften and the German-American Jacob Noeggerath, and the series of meetings in Switzerland between President Wilson's friend, Professor Herron, and notable German liberals, such as Conrad Haussmann, Professor Quidde, and Professor Jaffé, which lasted from December 1917 into November 1918. Other peace attempts never actually reached the stage of negotiation.

On February 25, Count Hertling appeared before the Reichstag, which had resumed its sessions on February 19, to deliver his second address before a plenary session. Again he referred to Belgium in the customary terms:

It has been repeatedly said from this place that we do not think of retaining Belgium or of making the Belgian state a component part of the German Empire, but that we must, as was also set forth in the Papal Note of August 1, be safeguarded from the danger that a country with which after the war we desire to live again in peace and friendship should become an object or jumping-off ground of enemy machinations. The means

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of reaching this end and thus serving the general world peace would be the subject of discussion at such a meeting. If, therefore, a proposal in this direction came from the opposite side, let us say from the government at Le Havre [i.e. the Belgian government in exile], we should not adopt an antagonistic attitude, even though the discussion, as a matter of course, could at first not be binding.66

As usual there was enough vagueness in the Chancellor's words to permit almost any interpretation. "We should like to live in peace and friendship with Belgium," Scheidemann said on February 26, "as the Chancellor remarked yesterday. That can only be done, of course, with a people whose independence is really safeguarded." Von Heydebrand, on the other hand, interpreted Hertling's speech as a demand for Germany's political, military, and economic domination over Belgium. Stresemann likewise was confident that the Chancellor's statement on Belgium permitted the guarantee of Germany's interests. The Progressive Wiemer understood the speech as a promise not to keep Belgium, as did Erzberger, the latter adding the warning not to underestimate the effect on neutral nations if Germany should insist on pursuing power-politics in Belgium, the "darling of the world." 67

The last chance for a clear official statement on Belgium came on March 18, 1918, when Count Hertling presented the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, signed on March 3, to the Reichstag. There were some indications that England might be willing to talk peace if such a statement were made.68 Yet despite several requests, the Chancellor made no reference to Belgium. "We are ready," he concluded his brief speech, "to make further heavy sacrifices. . . . The responsibility for all this bloodshed will fall upon the heads of those who in frivolous obduracy refuse to listen to the voice of peace." 69 Three days later, on the afternoon of March 12, Germany's artillery along the whole sector between Arras and La Fère opened fire, sounding the beginning of the great spring offensive and the end for a peace by negotiation.

In the light of subsequent events, it seems strange that the German government did not avail itself of the opportunity presented by the proposed peace offensive. There was so little to be lost by a declaration on Belgium, and perhaps everything to be

67 Ibid., pp. 4163, 4176, 4182, 4191, 4220-21.
68 Max von Baden, pp. 246-47.
69 Reichstag, vol. 311, p. 4426.
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gained. Disregarding the unanswerable question whether such an offensive, if attempted, would have succeeded, how can we explain the almost suicidal manner in which Germany's statesmen led their country to its destruction?

If we look at the situation as it presented itself to these men in the spring of 1918, we must realize that on the whole events could not have happened very differently from the way they actually did. One basic idea should be clear after reviewing the events of the preceding months: Germany's governing forces refused to proclaim the unconditional renunciation of Belgium not so much because they doubted Great Britain's willingness to talk peace, but because they did not really want to see the complete independence of Belgium re-established. We have traced the relentless insistence of the Supreme Command on far-reaching strategic improvements of Germany's western frontier, which included the annexation of parts of France and the "veiled annexation" of most of Belgium. To Hindenburg and Ludendorff, a war which failed to secure these aims, was a lost war. This attitude may be wrong or narrow-minded, but it was none the less real, backed by a stubborn determination which found its only parallel in the simultaneous demands of France's military authorities for the strategic frontier of the Rhine. To the German army, therefore, there really existed no alternative. It was Belgium or nothing.

The civil branch of the government, though not so insistent on strong western aims as the army, nevertheless favored such western expansion and was willing to hold out for whatever gains might be made in that region. But even if there had been sentiment in favor of a status quo ante settlement in the west, as in fact there was on the part of Baron von Kühlmann, it could not have asserted itself against the dominating influence of the Supreme Command. The old Chancellor willingly submitted to the army's decisions, which converted the question of Belgium, primarily a territorial and political problem, into a strategic and military one. The Foreign Secretary had discovered at Brest-Litovsk that it was difficult to oppose the will of Ludendorff. And the Kaiser, though usually on the side of moderation, could always be swayed to an opposite point of view.

The fact of intrinsic unwillingness or at best great reluctance to give up Germany's western conquests received additional support

70 Valentini, p. 190.
from events in the east. The feeling of achievement and the optimism that went with the successful conclusion of a treaty which fulfilled a large share of Germany's expansionist dreams, helped to keep alive the desire for the western counterpart of the Drang nach Osten. Why should a premature declaration jeopardize the chance of establishing once and for all Germany's security on the European continent, especially when the impending offensive on the western front had all likelihood of success? This last fact we must always keep in mind. It was only after the failure of this military venture that the lost opportunity of making a declaration on Belgium assumed such great importance. As things stood in March of 1918, with a powerful army ready to finish the war within a few months, a statement on Belgium, in the opinion of the Supreme Command, might have weakened the German people's power of resistance at a time when it was needed more than ever before.

The German People and Brest-Litovsk

In our analysis of Germany's policy prior to the 1918 spring offensive we have thus far dealt only with the attitude of the German government and have omitted dealing with the German people. While the former was most reluctant to give up any of its strategic war aims, the chief concern of the latter was to gain peace at the earliest possible opportunity. This longing of the German masses for peace had little chance of expressing itself, except in direct revolutionary action, mass protests and strikes. On January 28, 1918, the largest event of this kind prior to the November Revolution occurred, when 400,000 workers in Berlin alone quit work. The close interrelationship between this act and the question of war aims is made clear in the demands of these strikers, the first point of which reads: "Speedy conclusion of peace without annexations and indemnities, on the basis of the self-determination of peoples." Nor was this longing for peace restricted to the lower classes. Around the middle of February 1918, the Frankfurter Zeitung addressed a memorandum to the Supreme Command, which emphasized the whole country's hope for peace. "The course of events," it said, "might be such that considerable sections of the people will prefer any peace, peace at any price, to the continuation of the war."

71 Rosenberg, pp. 196-97, 201.
72 U. A., 4. Reihe, XII(1), 152; VI, 184.
73 Ibid., II, 114-15.
Although the German people's desire for peace was beyond question, and they were willing to conclude such a peace without making any territorial gains, this does not mean that they objected to a peace settlement which managed to realize some of Germany's war aims. Only the lower classes behind the Socialist Parties truly believed in "no annexations and indemnities" as a matter of principle. The attitude of most middle class moderates, averse to strong war aims, was the result not so much of deep-felt opposition to German expansionism, but of a common-sense realization that such expansionism was dangerous, if not impossible, since it would arouse the permanent opposition of Germany's adversaries. We have seen that it took three years to form a moderate majority within the German Reichstag. As long as there was no really vital and controversial issue, this majority had held together pretty well. But when it was confronted with the \textit{fait accompli} of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which violated all possible principles of moderation, the parties did not rise to fight but acquiesced.

The peace settlement with Russia was an illustration of the way in which the Supreme Command could make the wildest annexationist dreams come true. It deprived Russia of the most valuable parts of her European possessions—Poland, the Baltic States, and the Ukraine—placing the areas, if not under the direct sovereignty, at least under the influence of the Central Powers. There were certain mitigating circumstances that help to explain Germany's eastern policy; but there can be no doubt that this treaty was one of the most blatant manifestations of German expansionism and as such was a tremendous boon to Allied propaganda. It now was evident what Germany meant when she spoke of "real guarantees and securities" and refused to be more specific. Looked at in the light of Brest-Litovsk, the future of Western Europe, in case of a German victory, was a dismal one indeed.

If only the representatives of the German people had shown that they were not in accord with their government's annexationist policy! But quite the opposite happened. Only the Social Democrats launched a slight protest against the treaty and refused to vote on it. Erzberger, on the other hand, went so far as to state that "the peace which we have concluded in the East stays entirely within the bounds of the July 19th Resolution. Wherever it deviates from those principles it represents only temporary police
measures." The German Reichstag had proved to the world that it might talk peace when the going was tough—as was the case in the summer of 1917—but that it was unwilling to stand up for its convictions when the situation improved. Some doubts remained with the delegates, to be sure. On March 21, the majority parties, with the collaboration of the National Liberals, published a resolution expressing their hope that the government would help the peoples liberated from the Russians to set up their own governments, according to the principle of self-determination. Germany's actual policy in the east, which assumed all the aspects of veiled annexation, soon aroused further opposition and criticism from German moderates. But the harm had been done and these belated protests, while weakening the German home-front, did nothing to remedy the situation east of the Vistula.

To explain the attitude of the majority parties we must remember that there had always been considerable anti-Russian feeling among German moderates and socialists. To those among them who could convince themselves that the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk primarily intended the liberation of Russia's western provinces, its acceptance was made easy. Others, especially the Social Democrats, argued that the treaty at least put an end to the war in the east and was thus an important milestone on the road to a general peace settlement. To oppose it would only prolong the war and perhaps lead to an equally hard peace imposed upon Germany by the Allies. As far as the bourgeois parties were concerned, we must not underestimate the prestige which the Supreme Command enjoyed in the eyes of most Germans. While their own attempts at a policy of moderation and negotiation had found little response in the Allied camp, Ludendorff's policy of the sword seemed once again to have lived up to its reputation of infallibility. Since the chief aim of most Germans was to end the war, why, they felt, should they object if this could be done with some territorial or economic gains into the bargain? Why—and here we see the connection with the west—should the Supreme Command not be given an opportunity to try against the Allies what had been accomplished with such evident success in the east? We have noticed that, up to the beginning of the spring offensive, the majority parties insisted on the restoration of Belgium. Yet to go one step further and insist on a public declaration of such a

74 Ibid., XII (1), 142-43. 75 Ibid., p. 143. 76 Dahlin, pp. 324-26.
policy required more determination, unity of purpose, and courage than the Reichstag majority possessed. As in other periods of history, the sin of the majority of Germans was one of omission rather than commission, the willingness to acquiesce in the decisions made by men who had the courage of translating their convictions and ambitions into reality.

**Annexationism during the Spring Offensive**

Germany's offensive in the west started with a series of brilliant successes which seemed to fulfill the Supreme Command's most hopeful expectations. Somewhat prematurely, as it turned out, the Emperor awarded the Iron Cross with gold rays (a decoration given only once before to Blücher after the battle of Belle-Alliance) to Hindenburg, four days after fighting began. Germany's forces achieved several outstanding victories and were able to maintain their initiative against the Allies into the summer; yet they failed to deliver the one decisive blow which might force the other side to sue for peace. The danger of "winning herself to death" became increasingly more real for Germany as the campaign dragged on.

The German people, of course, were unaware of all this. As usual victories on the military front strengthened the position of the annexationists at home, and as a result we find the last major outburst of expansionist propaganda during the spring of 1918. In the light of later events, these manifestations are difficult to understand. Yet at the time they seemed entirely justified. The period of comparative moderation, ushered in by the July Peace Resolution, had come to an end. The day once more belonged to the annexationists, and they made the most of it.

At a meeting on April 14, the Pan-German League re-defined its position on war aims. Only a month before, the League had suffered a major setback when six of its more prominent members, all of them National Liberal Reichstag deputies, under the leadership of Stresemann, had resigned their membership "in view of the inner political attitude and the unprecedented method of fighting against the National Liberal Party indulged in by the Deutsche Zeitung, founded by the Pan-German League." The fight for strong war aims, however, was not much affected by the secession, since the former members specifically declared that their step would not involve any change in their "work for a strong guarantee of
the German future." 77 At the April meeting, after the main speech by Count Reventlow, that never-tiring apostle of German westward expansion, a resolution was adopted professing once again the League's "adherence to its war aims drawn up at the beginning of the war." "Before all things Belgium must remain firmly in German hands, from a military, political, and economic point of view. . . . The German people must demand from the sense of duty of the Reichstag that it give up the decision of July 19, 1917, and following the historical events, stand for the war aim which arises out of the military situation." 78 Other organizations of the Kriegszielbewegung likewise came out for strong war aims. On April 9, General Keim, addressing the Army League, demanded the annexation of Belgium as proposed in the late General von Bissing's famous testament. 79 Ten days later, the Vaterlandspartei held its second general meeting which brought forth a manifesto similar to the Pan-German one of April 14. 80 The activities of the Independent Committee became still more closely affiliated with the Fatherland Party when Dietrich Schäfer became the latter's Vice-President in March of 1918. 81

A word should be said, perhaps, about the widespread demand for an indemnity, found in most annexationist writings of this period. It was not a new war aim, but had always formed a kind of appendix to most war-aims programs. As the war continued, and financial burdens increased, this financial aim had assumed growing significance. Especially in connection with Germany's war loans, the hope for substantial indemnities supplied an important incentive for investment. 82 On various occasions during late 1917 and early 1918, the matter had been the subject of debates in the Prussian, Bavarian and Saxon Diets and substantial indemnities had been demanded in both places. 83 Various industrial and commercial organizations constantly reiterated these financial de-

77 Werner, p. 249; Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, March 13, 1918.
78 Vossische Zeitung, April 15, 1918 (ev. ed.).
79 Kreuzzzeitung, April 10, 1918.
80 Great Britain, Enemy Supplement, III, May 2, 1918, 1081; Wortmann, p. 52.
81 Schäfer, Leben, p. 221. For additional annexationist statements see K. Jünger, ed., Vom kommenden Weltfrieden (Siegen, 1918), passim.
mands.  

Some writers on the subject went one step further and tried to figure out the amount Germany required to pay her war debts and losses. They arrived at figures anywhere between 120 and 190 billion marks, which they hoped to collect from the Allies after the war.

The great industrialists likewise welcomed Germany's initial military successes. In April, the *Vossische Zeitung* circulated a questionnaire among the leaders of German industry, asking for their aims in regard to France. Ernst von Borsig, partner in one of Germany's leading machine manufacturing concerns, wanted Briey-Longwy, since the Allied threat of economic reprisals after the war would limit Germany’s foreign sources of iron-ore. August Thyssen stressed the strategic necessity of the same region for the protection of Germany's steel production. Stinnes' director Albert Vögl went so far as to call “the acquisition of the iron district of Briey and Longwy . . . a question of life and death for the German iron industry.”

Also at this time, Jacob Reichert, secretary of the *Verein Deutscher Eisen-und Stahlindustrieller*, wrote two pamphlets pointing out the advantages to be gained from the annexation of France’s iron regions. The Christian labor unions shared these views. “If we are able to conclude a powerful peace,” their leader Stegerwald said in April 1918, “we want such a peace under all circumstances”; and the *Deutsche Metallarbeiter*, organ of the Christian metal and foundry workers’ union, in an article on April 6, 1918, specifically demanded the Briey-Longwy basin.

As was to be expected, the Supreme Command shared the optimism of its annexationist friends, though its better insight into the country's real military situation should have advised greater caution in the discussion of war aims. “The events of the past months,” Hindenburg wrote to Hugenberg on March 31, 1918, “prove that the kind of victory we need for Germany’s political

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84 Dehn, pp. 32-33; *Weserzeitung*, May 2, 1918.
86 Hugenberg, pp. 190-91.
87 *Vossische Zeitung*, April 7, 1918.
and economic future can no longer be wrested from us." On April 16, the Field Marshal joined the annexationists in urging the Reichstag to declare itself "for a strong German peace, which alone can preserve us from a future war." General Ludendorff likewise maintained his plans for some kind of German hold over Belgium. On May 25, a discussion took place at Brussels between the Supreme Command and members of the Belgian administration, on the post-war settlement. All present, particularly Governor General von Falkenhauzen, Hindenburg, and Ludendorff, agreed that Germany's occupation of Belgium ought to last at least ten years, and longer, if necessary. Certain sections, Hindenburg pointed out, should be annexed permanently. This applied particularly to Liège, to protect the industrial region of Aix-la-Chapelle and to keep an eye on Brussels. "To those in Berlin," he said, "we must use as a threat that we have to annex Liège no matter what, if we cannot chain Belgium solidly to Germany." During the period of occupation, the Belgians would, of course, only be permitted to have a police force. Later on, perhaps, if Germany's community of interest with Flanders was definitely assured, a Flemish army might be organized. The central government would have to be kept as weak as possible, von Falkenhauzen held. And finally, about the Flanders coast, Ludendorff pointed out that it would "decide the next war. Time will show if it is possible to replace the German marines by Flemish ones. The coast must be protected against a land encirclement from the direction of the French frontier." Here we have one of the frankest expositions of the Supreme Command's plans for Belgium. Reduced to essentials it foresaw one of two alternatives: either Belgium became completely subservient to German influence, or else Germany would continue her occupation of the country indefinitely. The former would mean "veiled annexation"; the latter open annexation, though it might not be called that. Of special interest is Ludendorff's statement on the Flemish coast, about which the army had thus far been hesitant to commit itself. In early April, under the influence of the German successes on the western front, Admiral von Holtzendorff had produced another memorandum on this question, so close to the heart of German naval authorities and annexationists. The main points of the Admiral's memorandum

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90 Kriegk, p. 40.  
91 Reichstag, vol. 311, p. 4574.  
92 Rupprecht, II, 399-400.  
dealt with the creation of a Duchy of Flanders under German protection and the cession of Wallonia to a "royalist" France.\textsuperscript{94} Nothing shows better the narrow and unrealistic outlook under which some annexationists drew up their war aims, guided exclusively by the particular requirements of their own department. Politically, geographically, and most of all economically, the permanent separation of the Flemish and Walloon sections was an unwise if not impossible scheme. Whoever held the coast would by necessity also dominate its hinterland, a fact which many annexationists realized only too well, though for tactical reasons they preferred to keep quiet about it.

\textit{The Future of Belgium}

Before examining the attitude of the government and parties during this Indian Summer of annexationism, we must consider briefly developments in occupied Belgium, to discover what bearing they might have upon the situation in Germany. We need not discuss in any great detail the economic exploitation of the occupied areas, which was largely dictated by the demands of a German economy restricted by Great Britain's blockade. There was also an element of interference by German industrialists who saw in destruction the most effective way of throttling their inconvenient Belgian competitors.\textsuperscript{95} The real and most willful damage was not done until the retreat of the German troops after the failure of the 1918 offensive. Yet already on October 16, 1917, Director Middendorf of the Section for Commerce and Industry of the German administration of Belgium pointed out that, if the war would last another year and a half, Belgium's resources, except for coal and phosphates, would be completely exhausted, a warning which he repeated in June of 1918.\textsuperscript{96} Besides the destruction of industries through confiscation of vital materials, the liquidation of industrial enterprises and their transfer into German hands went on apace. The purpose behind these measures, as Ludendorff pointed out once more in a letter to the Secretary of the Interior, Helfferich, on October 20, 1917, was to create \textit{faits accomplis} for the post-war period.\textsuperscript{97} The rule that only predominantly French and British

\textsuperscript{94} Hertling, pp. 92-93.  
\textsuperscript{95} A. Erkelenz, "Die geschichtliche Schuld der deutschen Schwerindustrie," \textit{Hilfe}, Jan. 1, 1924, pp. 3-6.  
\textsuperscript{96} Kerchove, p. 152.  
\textsuperscript{97} \textit{Wer hat den Krieg verlängert?}, pp. 4-5.
enterprises in Belgium could thus be liquidated was soon evaded by special provisions. Alongside these more destructive aspects of Germany's industrial activity should be mentioned her attempts to open up the rich coal deposits of the Campine region. If German war-time economy required the thorough exploitation of all possible sources of raw materials, we should not conclude from the resulting destruction that Germany had no intention of keeping Belgium after the war. In a meeting of the Section of Commerce and Industry, the eventual affiliation of Belgian and German industries was discussed in detail. It was agreed to make the revival of each Belgian industry dependent on its utility to Germany, and to distinguish between Belgian industries which were harmful to their German competitors and those which were not.

Still more interesting than these economic questions was the simultaneous growth of administrative separation between Flemings and Walloons. We have already traced developments up to the death of General von Bissing and the formation of a culturally independent Flemish region under the leadership of a Council of Flanders. The new Governor General, Baron von Falkenhausen, like his two predecessors a retired General and well-preserved septuagenarian, lacked von Bissing's political foresight and talent for organization. So it is not surprising that he became a willing tool in the hands of the Supreme Command, whose views on the future of Belgium predominated from then on. On September 11-12, 1917, for instance, the Governor General, in an exchange of views with Helfferich, advocated economic collaboration between Germany and Belgium (railroads, tariff union, monetary union, Campine), close relations between Germans and Flemings, and substantial military guarantees, in short the kind of program Hindenburg and Ludendorff were suggesting at this same time.

On May 19, 1917, Falkenhausen received the delegates of the Council of Flanders, who expressed their loyalty to Germany and their hope that the existing administrative separation between Flanders and Wallonia would eventually develop into a political separation, with a special government for Flanders. Falkenhausen's answer carefully avoided the word "independence" when referring to the future of the Flemings and did not conceal the fact that he

98 Germany, *Nationale Versammlung*, VII, 16.
100 Kerchove, pp. 158-59.
101 Dahlin, pp. 95-96.
On August 29, 1917, the new Chancellor, Michaelis, received a similar delegation of the Council and promised to adhere to Bethmann Hollweg’s promises of March 3, 1917, to the effect that Germany would secure the free development of the Flemings at the peace conference. Other minor concessions were made by the German government, such as the introduction of Flemish as official language of Flanders and the formation of a Flemish guard, the *Rijkswacht*. At the same time the German government studied the administrative division of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, as a possible guide for the handling of the Belgian problem. Despite this activity, Ludendorff, on November 28, 1917, complained about the absence of a clear and determined line in the dealings between the Political Section of the Government General and the Flemings. The Chief of the Political Section, Baron von der Lancken, pointed out in his answer, that the Flemings, as a people, had too strong a sense of independence ever to become entirely the object of German policy and that Germany would be successful only if a certain amount of freedom were left to the Flemings in shaping their own destiny. Similar warnings against the opposition of many Flemings to any close collaboration with Germany had been frequent since the early days of the war. Nor did the Flemish policy of the German government meet with the undivided approval of all members of the Government General. The head of the civil administration, von Sandt, and many of his associates, did not share the usual predilection for the Flemings, and many officers of the occupation force looked down upon the pro-German “activists” as traitors. The economic importance of the Walloons, finally, made many people hesitate to alienate that important section of the Belgian population.

The main desire of the Flemings, as they had pointed out to Falkenhausen on May 19, 1917, was to transform the already existing administrative separation into political independence. On December 22, 1917, therefore, the Council of Flanders, in a surprise

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102 Raad van Vlaanderen, p. xxix.
103 Clough, pp. 211-12.
104 Lutz, *German Empire*, I, 361.
105 U. A., 4. Reihe, XII (1), 105-06.
106 *Frankfurter Zeitung*, Aug. 9, 1917; *Berliner Tageblatt*, June 26, 1918; Rauscher, p. 42.
move, proclaimed the independence of the province of Flanders. This came as a decided shock to the German government, and the Council did not get permission to publish its proclamation until the word "autonomy" had been substituted for "independence." Even so, Germany's civil and military authorities differed on the desirability of announcing the proclamation. Both Falkenhausen and Ludendorff desired that it be made public, and it was chiefly due to their pressure that Count Hertling finally acquiesced. Ludendorff's chief argument was that the declaration of Flemish autonomy would strengthen the Flemish movement inside the Belgian army and thus weaken that army's power of resistance. In a letter to one of his army friends, on February 15, 1918, the General gave additional and more plausible reasons: "I consider the division of Belgium into Flanders and Wallonia," he wrote, "one of the surest means of realizing our chief war aim in Belgium, the destruction of Anglo-French influence by economic conquest and eventually by political conquest of the country." This statement was made at the same time that some people in Germany suggested the opening of a political offensive through a declaration on the unconditional restoration of Belgium.

As a result of Ludendorff's intervention, the Flemings, on January 20, 1918, proclaimed their autonomy. The same day a new Council of Flanders was "elected" by acclamation. It adopted a six-point program, which included the complete political independence of Flanders and her freedom to deal directly with foreign powers. The publication of this program was promptly forbidden by the Germans, who preferred to leave to the future any final decision on Flanders. On March 7, 1918, the Governor General received a delegation of the new Council and declared once again that he intended to keep Bethmann Hollweg's promises of March 3, 1917. The Proclamation of December 22, 1917, he interpreted as an indication of Flemish desire to be liberated from the Walloons. The conditions of their autonomy, however, would have to be determined at the future peace conference. At the request of General Ludendorff, Hertling likewise received some members of the Coun-

109 Becker, pp. 332-33; Clough, p. 204.
110 Ibid., p. 82.
cil on July 26, 1918, and told them that he shared Bethmann Hollweg’s views on the Flemish question.\textsuperscript{113}

These rather nebulous promises, postponing the settlement of the problem until a future date, did not satisfy the Council of Flanders. On June 20, therefore, it published another manifesto demanding the political, cultural, and economic independence of Flanders.\textsuperscript{114} While the industrial \textit{Kölnische Zeitung} applauded this declaration for a “Flanders free and Flemish, in close economic relations to its natural hinterland, Germany,” the German government remained noncommittal.\textsuperscript{115} The reason for this attitude is interesting. It seems that the administrative separation which Germany herself had introduced, had turned out to be a doubtful blessing and had resulted in considerable difficulties and confusion. Events had proved that the complete political separation of Flanders and Wallonia was undesirable from an economic point of view.\textsuperscript{116} This was taken into account when the Government General drew up its own program for the future of Belgium in early April of 1918. Economically, far-reaching collaboration with Germany was suggested, with such details as the establishment of a customs and monetary union and German influence over rail and waterways. Of particular interest, however, are the proposals for Belgium’s future political organization. The separation between Flemings and Walloons was to be carried through as planned, yet for economic reasons a certain amount of unity was to be maintained by means of a common ruler and common ministries for both sections of the country.\textsuperscript{117}

The question is—why did the Germans bother to maintain the division of Belgium, if it caused them such difficulties and was economically harmful? The answer, given on several occasions by Ludendorff, was that the principle of “divide and rule” presented many advantages to Germany.\textsuperscript{118} “It matters very little to the Central Powers whether or not Belgium is divided into the two states of Flanders and Wallonia,” a confidential memorandum of the Government General read. “What does matter is that we shall profit from this linguistic dualism which so divides and breaks

\textsuperscript{113}“Rudiger,” pp. 286-87; Raad van Vlanderen, pp. 434-35.
\textsuperscript{115}Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, June 26, 1918.
\textsuperscript{116}C. von Delbrück, \textit{Mobilmachung}, p. 254; Winnig, pp. 413-14.
\textsuperscript{117}U. A., 4. Reihe, XII (1), 106; VII (1), 32.
\textsuperscript{118}“Rudiger,” pp. 82, 286-87.
up the Belgian people that German public opinion will see the necessity of our occupying Belgium." 119 The duration of such an occupation, it was decided on May 25 by the Supreme Command and the Government General, was to be at least ten years. 120 It was to be discontinued only on condition that Germany's influence over the country in general and Flanders in particular had been securely established. The general agreement registered again on this occasion, as well as the general developments in Belgium during 1917 and early 1918, shows that the annexationism current in Germany had the full support of the Belgian administration. There was considerable difference of opinion about the details of Belgium's future among the leading members of the Government General. But there is no indication that the latter ever advocated the unconditional restitution of Belgium, necessary prerequisite for a negotiated peace.

The Fall of Kühlmann

The German government, during the spring of 1918, left the field of war aims pretty much to the Supreme Command and its annexationist friends. The negotiations at Brest-Litovsk having been concluded, the peace settlement with Rumania was now being discussed at Bucharest. It was in connection with the German Foreign Secretary's presence at the Rumanian capital, that the annexationists tried to play one of their less savory tricks, trying to bring about Kühlmann's fall. The Secretary's moderation had long been a matter of concern to the proponents of far-reaching war aims. Already in March of 1918 Kühlmann had been warned against the constant agitation for his dismissal, carried on by the great industrialists, notably Stinnes. 121 In April, the Secretary was again involved in some of his efforts to open direct and secret negotiations with the British government. 122 On April 23, the Deutsche Zeitung published an article accusing von Kühlmann of damaging the reputation of the German Empire by his nightly excursions into the Bucharest demi-monde during his negotiations with Rumania. 123 As was to be expected, the article caused a considerable stir, though in a way quite different from what its authors had

119 Raad van Vlaanderen, p. 499.
120 Ibid.
122 Haussmann, pp. 187, 190-91; Max von Baden, p. 266.
123 Haussmann, p. 189; Werner, p. 270.
expected. The German press was unanimous in its denunciation of the methods used in attacking one of the Reich’s chief political figures. Vice-Chancellor von Payer, for the government, sued the editor of the Alldeutsche Blätter, chief source of the mud-slinging against Kühlmann. The affair, in itself of little consequence, shows to what depths of bad taste the annexationists were willing to stoop to realize their aims. If they were concerned over the dignity of their country, this was one way how not to maintain it, because the impression this incident left abroad was anything but favorable.

In view of the wave of annexationism that swept over Germany in the spring of 1918, the moderate Reichstag majority found it difficult to withstand the many requests for repudiating publicly its Peace Resolution of July 19, 1917. Only the Socialists maintained unwaveringly, or almost unwaveringly, their anti-annexationist stand. Speakers of both the Center and Progressive Parties, on the other hand, pointed out that because the enemy had refused to accept their peace offer Germany’s hands were now free to make whatever settlement she desired. At a meeting of the Center Party’s Rhineland branch, the Reichstag deputy Trimborn asserted that his party would approve any peace settlement in the west as it had done in the east. Erzberger, on the other hand, published a declaration in May upholding the validity of the Reichstag Resolution; but in view of the elastic interpretation that Resolution had received, particularly by Erzberger himself, such a statement had only limited value. The Progressives, likewise, had their share of members who desired that the party dissociate itself from the Peace Resolution. The Progressive deputy Fischbeck had published an article to that effect in April and was supported by several of his colleagues, notably Müller-Meiningen and Schulze-Gaevernitz. The majority of the party, however, under the leadership of Friedrich Naumann, declared its continued adherence to the July Resolution.

124 Great Britain, Enemy Supplement, III, May 9, 1918, 1124.
125 A French punster referred to the German Foreign Secretary as Ridi culmann, embrasseur d’Allemagne. Kühlmann claims that the attack against him was inspired by persons “close to the Supreme Command.” Kühlmann, pp. 564-65.
126 Winnig, p. 416.
127 Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, April 6, 1918.
128 Ibid., April 7, 1918; Reichstag, vol. 511, p. 4155.
129 Germania, May 23, 1918.
130 Haussmann, p. 187; Ostfeld, p. 54.
These various manifestations show that we must not overestimate the continued vitality of the Resolution as the chief binding force on the Reichstag majority. It was with some justification that Gustav Stresemann, at a meeting of his National Liberals, could say: "Practically we have brought it to this, that a conclusion of peace, in opposition to the policy of July 19, has been agreed to by all the bourgeois parties." What kept the majority together was not so much its common moderation in the field of foreign policy as its united demand for the reform of Prussia's franchise. On April 30, the franchise bill came up for its second reading in the Prussian House of Deputies. Its key provisions, in favor of equal franchise, had been replaced by a complicated system of plural suffrage, which robbed the bill of its most essential features. Count Hertling gave a serious warning to the deputies among whom the anti-reform parties of the Right predominated. "Equal franchise," he said, "will come, if not today, then within a measurable length of time. It must come either without disturbances or after serious internal conflicts." Yet extensive discussions of the bill failed to bring any substantial change, and on July 4, after its fourth reading, the bill was passed in its adulterated form and equal franchise had been defeated. Not only in external policy, therefore, but in the much more important domestic field, the forces of annexationism and reaction had their last great success. Coming so shortly before the final catastrophe, such narrow-minded insistence on obsolete privileges seems difficult to comprehend. But we must remember that to most of the beneficiaries of the Hohenzollern regime, the loss of these privileges was at least as vital a threat as the military defeat of their country.

The optimism of the annexationists, however, was hardly justified by events on the western front. By the end of March, one week after the start of the offensive, Germany's first thrust against the Anglo-French lines between the Scarpe and Oise rivers had spent its force. Its objective, the break through the Allied front, the separation of the French and British armies, and the defeat of the latter, had failed. A second offensive, this time on the Armenières sector, beginning on April 9, and culminating on April 25 in the successful attack upon the key position of Kemmel, likewise

131 Berliner Tageblatt, March 11, 1918.
132 Lutz, German Empire, II, 485.
brought the Germans outstanding successes, but failed to effect the decisive break which alone could re-direct the struggle in the west into a war of movement. It took another month before the German armies had sufficiently recovered so that another major attack could be undertaken. It was during this period of waiting that some doubts began to appear among the German people about the success of the great military venture. “The public doesn’t read the army communiqués any more,” Conrad Haussmann wrote to Haeften in May. “It is uncertain about the offensive, whether it is still going on or whether it is to start all over again. Public opinion in villages and cities is very quiet.”

From this atmosphere of doubt grew another series of plans for a peace offensive, such as we witnessed during the first months of 1918. Hermann Stegemann, in early May, summed up Germany’s position as “excellent—but hopeless,” hopeless because she had missed her chance of making a special declaration on Belgium before the military offensive began. Such a declaration, he held, “would either have made the offensive superfluous or else would have increased its effectiveness one hundred-fold.” Yet other people believed that a political offensive was still possible at this point. On June 1, Crown Prince Rupprecht wrote to Hertling, whom he knew intimately from the latter’s days as Bavaria’s first minister: “At one time I myself supported the idea of joining Belgium with the German Reich in some form. But I have now changed my mind, aside from other reasons, because I am convinced that the only way which can lead us to peace is a declaration to the effect that we intend to maintain Belgium’s independence untouched.” Count Hertling’s answer on June 5 expressed agreement. “As far as Belgium is concerned,” he wrote, “I agree with Your Royal Highness that the Angliederung of the country to the German Reich is not to be desired; some difficulty will be created by the administrative separation, introduced during the occupation.” This view was certainly more moderate than Hertling’s public utterances. But even so, it did not touch upon Prince Rupprecht’s main suggestion for an open declaration of Germany’s disinterestedness in Belgium.

Of further interest in this connection is a lengthy memorandum which the German Crown Prince handed to his father in July. Since the military situation was such as to make a victorious conclusion of the war most unlikely, at least in the near future, the

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Crown Prince suggested that Germany try once again to reach a negotiated peace through neutral channels. For that purpose a clear definition and statement of her war aims was a prime necessity. "Of course we want to keep Alsace-Lorraine," the Crown Prince wrote, "and we also want back our colonies. Perhaps we may also demand the Briey basin. But on the other hand we should agree to renounce a war indemnity and to restore Belgium...." Germany already had enough unreliable foreign minorities within her boundaries, he held, without increasing their number by extending her hold over Belgium. To keep the Flanders coast would be unacceptable to England and of little use to Germany, since its ports were not very well suited as naval bases.

In addition [the Prince concluded] the coast would force us to maintain a fleet at least equal to that of England, which we would hardly be able to do. We therefore better agree that Belgium will remain independent, neither pay nor receive an indemnity, may not keep an army, and recognize Germany's economic equality with the states of the Entente.137

How widespread the idea for a political offensive had become is shown by the fact that some German newspapers now began writing about it. On May 22, in a widely discussed article, the Neue Preussische Zeitung suggested that Germany open such an offensive by declaring her specific official war aims, especially towards England. The Vorwärts (on June 1) and the Kölnische Zeitung (on June 3) supported this proposal, while annexationist papers like the Deutsche Zeitung, the Deutsche Tageszeitung, and the Kölnische Volkszeitung came out in sharp opposition.138 Most remarkable, however, was a series of articles in favor of a negotiated peace published in the Kreuzzeitung during the first days of June 1918.139 Even though its editors insisted that they did not agree with their contents and that the idea behind them differed widely from that of the July Peace Resolution, the fact that they were published in a paper notorious for its annexationism created a considerable stir.140 The same paper, on June 6, advocated the annexation of the Briey-Longwy region, but admitted, as had been pointed out before, that Germany might secure her necessary supplies of iron ore by means of a treaty with France on the model of her petroleum convention with Rumania.141

137 Bauer, p. 219.  
138 Seeberg, pp. 55-57.  
139 Helfferich, p. 625.  
140 Kreuzzeitung, June 5, 1918.  
141 For a similar suggestion see Europäische Staats-und Wirtschaftszeitung, May 11, 1918.
More important still was a second memorandum of Colonel von Haeften, dated June 3, 1918, and repeating the ideas first expressed by him on January 14. Already on May 19, Prince Max von Baden, during a visit to the front, had asked Ludendorff to attempt another peace settlement before Germany spent her last bit of offensive strength. The General had agreed, but a new German offensive against the French between Noyon and Rheims required his immediate and undivided attention. Starting on May 27, along the slopes of the Chemin des Dames, this renewed attack again did not go beyond its initial successes and had to be broken off on June 13. It was at the height of Germany's successful advance that von Haeften handed his memorandum to Ludendorff. The document made specific suggestions for a political offensive, to be carried out by a number of prominent unofficial persons, just before Germany launched the final thrust of her military offensive. It differed in one essential respect from the original draft of Haeften's proposal of January 14, as well as from most of the other suggestions of its kind: it was quite noncommittal on the key problem of Belgium. "Though it would be wrong, at this time, to make official declarations on the question of Belgium," it said, "it would . . . be most effective if some more or less private personalities would open the question . . . in the manner of the public declarations made thus far by the present and former Chancellors." Despite his current military successes, Ludendorff read Haeften's memorandum with great care and asked that it be sent immediately to Hertling. In a covering note Ludendorff warmly supported the Colonel's proposed peace offensive. On his return to Berlin, therefore, von Haeften was called in to discuss his document with Hertling and Kühlmann. Both of them immediately put their finger upon its chief weakness when they questioned the success of a peace offensive as long as the government and Supreme Command disagreed on the fundamental question of Belgium. After Haeften assured them that an agreement on this crucial point could be achieved, since Ludendorff had expressed quite moderate views on the subject, Hertling and Kühlmann gave their approval and asked the Colonel to take over the direction of the project.

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142 Haussmann, p. 200.
143 Ibid., pp. 195-96.
144 Ibid., p. 197.
After the suggestions for a political offensive from Prince Rupprecht as well as the Supreme Command, the matter was brought to Count Hertling's attention for a third time by Secretary of State Helfferich. But despite these repeated warnings, the Chancellor failed to pursue Haeften's suggestion, a fact which has brought him much unjustified criticism. The main reason for Hertling's hesitation was a memorandum from his Press Chief, Deutelmoser, which pointed to the most startling aspect of the Haeften memorandum, namely, that Germany's military leaders seemed to doubt the chance of ending the war by mere military means. Before Haeften's suggestion could be carried out, Deutelmoser said, agreement had to be established between the government and the Supreme Command, not only on questions of foreign but of domestic policy as well. In addition, the Reichstag would have to be taken into confidence and its co-operation secured.

The most essential point on which agreement had to be reached between civil and military authorities was the question of Belgium; and here, as should be clear from developments thus far, agreement was impossible. Haeften's confidence in Ludendorff's moderation was mostly wishful thinking and the result, probably, of his own moderation. It was contradicted not only by Haeften's statement in late 1918, citing as Ludendorff's aim the maintenance of Germany's military, political, and economic influence over Belgium, but also by the General's own views expressed at the Brussels meeting on May 25 and on other occasions. In the light of all earlier and subsequent developments, it seems most unlikely that the Supreme Command should have agreed to the unconditional restitution of Belgium in June of 1918. The only criticism one can justifiably direct against Germany's political leaders is that they did not call von Haeften's bluff and ask the army for its views on Belgium. Yet since the answer was sure to be unsatisfactory, their failure to ask for it should not cause any great surprise.

If collaboration on a peace offensive between civil and military authorities was thus difficult, the Haeften memorandum had made a sufficiently strong impression to bring about an independent move by Germany's Foreign Secretary. On June 24, Kuhlmann was suddenly asked to substitute for Count Hertling and to address the Reichstag. Coming at the end of a strenuous day, the Secretary's improvised speech, delivered in a tone of weary resignation,
was definitely one of his less successful performances. He made some general and meaningless statements on Germany's war aims and explained once again that the question of Belgium would have to be treated together with all other problems at the future peace conference, and that Germany could not restrict her freedom of action by a unilateral declaration. This, in reality, was the most significant part of Kühlmann's address, since it closed the door on any opportunity for peace negotiations by means of a clear statement on Belgium. But the real sensation of the day was caused when the Secretary of State hinted at the information he had gained from Haeften's memorandum. "Without some exchange of views," he said, "considering the tremendous extent of this war of coalitions and the number of powers . . . involved in it, an absolute end can hardly be expected from military decisions alone, without recourse, to diplomatic negotiations." This pessimistic confession, that the war could no longer be won by mere military measures, might have been overlooked, had it not been for the vigilance of Count Westarp, who immediately rose to attack Kühlmann's speech as a threat to Germany's morale at home and at the front. Nor did the Supreme Command hide its indignation at the Secretary's speech. Though it was primarily due to the memorandum of one of its own officers, among the chief points of that same memorandum had been the suggestion to keep the government itself from engaging in any peace move and to leave the matter up to unofficial figures of public life. Kühlmann's speech, therefore, though justified, was most unwise. Its immediate result was that Ludendorff told Haeften to give up his efforts for a political offensive. Both Hertling and Kühlmann tried to remedy the situation by explanations before the Reichstag on June 25. The annexationists, especially the Vaterlandspartei,

149 Stegemann, Erinnerungen, pp. 460-61.
150 Reichstag, vol. 312, pp. 5611-12. Kühlmann himself explains his speech as only partly motivated by the Haeften memorandum. Its main purpose was to support another one of his peace feelers towards England by stating openly the need for a "peace of understanding." Kühlmann, pp. 569 ff., esp. pp. 573-74, 576.
151 Reichstag, pp. 5634-35. Westarp reportedly phoned the Supreme Command immediately after Kühlmann's speech to point out that some of its statements could be used as basis for an attack against the Foreign Secretary. Kühlmann, p. 575.
joined the Conservatives and National Liberals in condemning a statement which merely told the unpleasant truth. Kühlmann was able to remain in office for another two weeks, and in view of the impression his dismissal would make both abroad and at home, it was by no means an easy decision to let him go. If the Kaiser finally had to tell the Secretary that they had to sever their relations, it was due almost entirely to pressure from Hindenburg and Ludendorff, who refused to have any more dealings with him. To the annexationists, the dismissal of this relatively liberal and moderate official was a major victory. The Supreme Command, against the wishes of Emperor and Chancellor, achieved on July 8 what the Deutsche Zeitung had tried without success on April 23, using, as in the case of Bethmann Hollweg’s dismissal, their unassailable position in the military sphere to enforce their will in the political field.

Events surrounding the Kühlmann crisis had shown a dangerous lack of collaboration between Germany’s political and military authorities. In late June, therefore, Count Hertling decided to move to Supreme Headquarters at Spa, so as to be able to maintain closer personal contact with Hindenburg and Ludendorff. Discussions of vital issues began immediately, and on July 2-3, during von Kühlmann’s absence, they turned to a re-definition of Germany’s Belgian war aims. The results were embodied in the following statement:

Belgium must remain under German influence, so that she cannot again fall under Anglo-French domination, and thus offer our enemies bases for their armies. For that purpose we must demand the separation of Flanders and Wallonia into two separate states, united only by personal union and economic arrangements. Belgium must, through customs union, community of railways, etc., be brought into closest relation with Germany. For the time being there must be no Belgian army. Germany must secure for herself a long period of occupation with gradual withdrawal in such a way that the Flanders coast and Liège will be evacuated last. The complete evacuation depends on Belgium’s attaching herself to us as closely as possible. In particular we must have complete and absolute certainty about Belgian measures for the protection of the Flanders coast.

154 Wortmann, p. 53; Westarp, II, 609.
155 Payer, Bethmann Hollweg, pp. 69-70.
Here we have additional proof of the Supreme Command's continued optimism and its unwillingness to give up any of its western aims. The old Chancellor, already subservient to the wishes of the military before the spring offensive, now gave in completely to the two men who better than anyone else knew the true state of Germany's military strength. On July 11 he travelled to Berlin to report the Foreign Secretary's dismissal to the Reichstag, and to assure the deputies that the change in personnel—the former Admiral von Hintze had been selected as Kühlmann's successor—did not mean any change in policy. On the same occasion, Hertling referred to the question of Belgium, repeating in sufficiently ambiguous terms the results of the July 2-3 meeting. Germany did not intend keeping Belgium permanently, he held.

Belgium is a pledge (Faustpfand) in our hand, to be used at future negotiations. . . . We must protect ourselves in the conditions of peace against the danger of Belgium's turning into a base for the advance of our enemies; we must protect ourselves not only in the military, but also in the economic sense. . . . If we succeed, in addition, in agreeing with Belgium on the political questions which touch Germany's vital interests, we have the definite prospect of finding the best safeguard against future dangers which may threaten us from Belgium or from England and France via Belgium.

In many ways these words remind one of Bethmann Hollweg's vague utterances on the same subject during the first three years of war, and they permitted the same variety of interpretation. While the Berliner Tageblatt stressed the moderation of Hertling's speech, the Kölnische Volkszeitung welcomed the demand for Germany's economic, political, and military control over Belgium. The annexationist Deutsche Tageszeitung was against the declaration, however ambiguous, of Germany's Belgian aims; and the Vaterlandspartei published a protest on July 14, refusing to participate in the attempts to read this or that meaning into the statements [of the Chancellor]. For us Belgium is not merely a pledge. For the security of a lasting peace, real German power in Belgium must defend the economy of the country from Anglo-American exploitation, the Flemings from Gallicisation, German land and German industry from the devastations of a future war, and not least, the seas from English tyranny.

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158 Ibid., p. 207.
159 Ibid., XII (1), 156-57.
160 Ibid., VII (1), 34; Berliner Tageblatt, July 12, 1918 (ev. ed.).
161 Deutsche Tageszeitung, July 13, 1918.
162 Wortmann, p. 54.
If they had only known how closely their aims really agreed with those of the government, the annexationists could have saved much of their verbal thunder.

The Final Months

On July 15, the Supreme Command launched its last major offensive on the Rheims-Soissons front. In a conversation with the new Foreign Secretary, Ludendorff was confident that this time the enemy's defeat would be decisive. For once, however, even the usual initial successes failed to materialize, since the French were not taken by surprise and were able to withdraw into prepared positions beyond the range of German artillery. On July 16, therefore, the Supreme Command had to break off operations and on the following day withdrew to the northern bank of the Marne. On July 18, a French countermove, making effective use of tanks, laid a deep breach into the German positions southwest of Soissons. At last the tide had turned; the initiative had shifted from the Germans to the Allies. The attempt to reach a military decision before the arrival of American reinforcements had failed. General Ludendorff realized that the situation was most serious, but still hoped to withstand Allied attacks, which now had to be expected with increasing force and frequency. The orderly withdrawal of German troops into new positions seemed to uphold this view, and a letter of Under-Secretary of State von Radowitz on August 1 testifies to the continued confidence of the Supreme Command. "Five times thus far during the war," Ludendorff remarked to Count Hertling, "I had to withdraw my troops, and still was able, in the end, to beat the enemy. Why shouldn't I succeed a sixth time?"

This last vestige of hope was destroyed, or better, should have been destroyed, when on August 8, 1918, large masses of Allied tanks broke the German lines on the Albert-Moreuil sector. This "darkest day" in the history of the German army, as Ludendorff called it, at first convinced the Supreme Command that the game was up. "We have reached the limit of our endurance," the Emperor summed up the situation. "The war must be ended.

164 Ludendorff, Kriegserinnerungen, pp. 543, 545-46.
166 Hertling, p. 146.
167 Ludendorff, Kriegserinnerungen, pp. 547 ff.; Scheidemann, Memoiren, II, 175.
A meeting was called at Spa on August 13-14, to discuss the situation which had been so profoundly changed a few days earlier. The conviction of the Supreme Command that Germany, by an effective defensive, was still able to exhaust the enemies’ military strength and force them to sue for peace, made Ludendorff continue to insist on the far-reaching Belgian war aims drawn up on July 3. Again the political leaders bowed to the judgment of those most qualified to render it. Attempts at a negotiated peace were to be considered at a future date, when the right moment offered itself, “after the next success on the western front.” The idea that such a time might never come, that it was already too late for such attempts, since Germany’s position in the west had been so severely shaken, seems not to have occurred to anyone at the Spa conference.

Despite the army’s continued optimism, the civilian authorities thought it advisable to make some further attempts at a negotiated peace settlement. On August 14, von Hintze told the Bavarian Count Töring, who had been carrying on secret negotiations with the Belgian government since March, that Germany would agree to discuss the complete political and economic independence of Belgium. While going far beyond any concessions the Supreme Command was willing to make, the proposal, as submitted by Count Töring to the Belgian ambassador at Bern, still insisted on the solution of the Flemish question, failed to mention a German indemnity to Belgium, and made its restitution dependent on the return of Germany’s colonies. Under the circumstances, the Belgian government, in an official communiqué of September 19, refused to consider such a conditional offer. On August 15, von Hintze, with equally small success, had also informed the government of the United States of his Belgian war aims: “No annexation, no vassal or similar relationship of dependence, good economic relations, guarantees of political and economic independence, also from our adversaries.” At an earlier date, such peace offers might have been successful. After August 8, Germany’s opponents could afford to wait until Germany was willing to make peace on their own terms.

These last minute attempts at a negotiated peace, moreover, were still over-shadowed by expressions of expansionist war aims. In its refusal to give in, to recognize its own failure, German annexationism revealed once again all those qualities which had made it such a powerful force during four years of war—its patriotism, its greed, and its fear of having to give up some of its cherished privileges. As war aims capable of realization, the pronouncements after the middle of August can no longer be taken seriously; as indications of the deep hold which annexationism had over its victims, these belated expressions are of considerable significance.

On August 19, von Hintze tried once more to have Ludendorff make a concession on Belgium. Two days later, the General replied that he could not approve of the status quo ante, and von Hintze the same day told a meeting of party leaders about the Supreme Command’s confidence in Germany’s ability to hold out until she could reach a satisfactory peace settlement. On August 20, Solf, speaking before the Deutsche Gesellschaft 1914 on German and British war aims, intended to make a clear statement on Belgium. He was prevented by the Foreign Office, which feared opposition from the Supreme Command. Four days later, Vice-Chancellor von Payer and Count Hertling drafted another statement on Belgium, for which they asked the approval of Hindenburg and Ludendorff. This was given only after several qualifying clauses had been inserted, reserving the Flemish question for future discussions with Belgium and making the restoration in general dependent on the return of Germany’s colonies. Finally the declaration was not to be used as such, but was to be carefully concealed in a speech which Payer delivered on September 10, and which even then caused Ludendorff’s disapproval. Nothing shows better the stubborn blindness of Germany’s military authorities towards the real danger than this wrangling over the details of a statement which, even in its original form, had by no means advocated the unconditional restoration of Belgium. The Payer-Ludendorff negotiations, it has been said, remind one of two men playing a leisurely game of chess aboard a rapidly sinking ship.

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172 Ibid., pp. 236-37; Westarp, II, 563.
175 Rosenberg, p. 225.
The course of events leading up to the final crisis now became ever more complicated. Austria's desire to get out of the war as soon as possible necessitated von Hintze's visit to Vienna in early September, where he discussed the question of war aims with Austria's new Foreign Secretary, Count Burian. Germany's aims, as presented on September 5, were held in most general terms. In regard to Belgium they simply advocated "no appropriation (Besitznahme) of Belgium, but no privileges for other powers either." 176

In the meantime, events on the western front had gone from bad to worse and on September 3 Count Hertling asked Hindenburg's views on the military situation. When no answer had been received by September 9, von Hintze went to Headquarters, where he found continued confidence. The Foreign Secretary on this occasion also reported Austria's contemplated peace proclamation to the Supreme Command. Hindenburg opposed such a move, but at least he agreed to submit to the immediate mediation of a neutral power, which led to an unsuccessful last minute attempt at a negotiated peace through the Queen of the Netherlands. 177

Despite Germany's efforts to prevent such a step, Austria's peace note was published on September 15, with very serious effects on German public opinion. The leaders of the various parties immediately asked to see the Chancellor, who once again assured them that all was well and that there was no cause for alarm. 178 In general it can be said that, while the Supreme Command, not always very successfully, was keeping the government in the dark as to the real gravity of the military situation, the latter handed the same note of optimism on to the people's representatives. The explanation for such a policy was partly lack of courage to face reality, partly the fear that full knowledge of the seriousness of Germany's position would undermine public morale. As things turned out, a terrible shock was inflicted on the German people when suddenly, a few weeks later, they were confronted by defeat.

It is only through ignorance of the true military situation that we can explain the final outbursts of German annexationism during September of 1918. This ignorance, however, was not so complete as some of the annexationists themselves try to make us believe. On August 12, for instance, the Kaiser's new political

adviser, von Berg, asked Westarp to use his influence in moderating the discussion of war aims in the annexationist press. This the Count refused to do. Instead the Conservatives clung to their large war aims to the very last minute. On September 26, Westarp declared before the Reichstag Main Committee that his party continued to adhere to its Belgian demands and to a large indemnity. "The renunciation of Belgium and of indemnities," he wrote in the Kreuzzzeitung on September 29, "will not bring us one step closer to peace." On September 30, the Count repeated the same ideas in his last address on war aims, and he would have continued to do so had not political events—the resignation of Count Hertling and Germany's request for an armistice—advised greater moderation.  

Much of the responsibility for the stubborn adherence of the Conservative leader to strong war aims was due directly to the influence of the Supreme Command. Rumor had it in September that the National Liberals were about to come out in favor of a moderate program, such as laid down in Payer's speech of September 10, on the understanding that the Supreme Command agreed to it. Westarp asked Ludendorff if the Supreme Command had made a statement to that effect and whether the General would object if the Conservatives continued to adhere to their western aims. Ludendorff replied: "The Conservative Party shall stick to its war aims. . . . I should deplore the declaration of the National Liberal Party."  

The Kriegsszielbewegung likewise kept up its agitation to the very last minute. "We have no use for a peace of understanding," General von Liebert said in early September, "because it would mean our ruin"; and he went on to make the usual demands for annexations in Western Europe and overseas. On September 2, the Vaterlandspartei celebrated its first anniversary with a meeting advocating a strong peace. Three weeks later, on September 24, it came out with another one of its rousing manifestoes. Despite the government's continued assurance to the contrary, however, some of the annexationists began to suspect that perhaps their dreams might not come true after all. The Frankfurter Zeitung recognized "in the present tone of the Pan-Germans a

180 Westarp, II, 563-64.
181 Berliner Tageblatt, Sept. 2, 1918.
182 Frankfurter Zeitung, Sept. 3, 1918.
183 Wortmann, pp. 57-58.
new and unwonted quietude, even sadness. Their time, they feel, has gone by.\textsuperscript{184}

It is unnecessary to go into the events directly leading up to Germany's request for an armistice on October 3, 1918. The decision to take this momentous step was reached by the Supreme Command on the afternoon of September 28, largely under the influence of Bulgaría's collapse. It came as a complete surprise and shock to the government and the people, especially in view of the army's constant assurance that Germany could hold out until a successful peace was won. It had been due chiefly to the army's confident attitude that the government hesitated to renounce publicly its hopes for some measure of German influence over Western Europe. On September 24, Count Hertling delivered his last important address before the Reichstag Main Committee. When he came to the subject of Belgium, the Chancellor repeated almost exactly the explanations which Bethmann Hollweg had given in 1914 for Germany's violation of Belgian neutrality. His speech expressed moderation, to be sure, but not in specific enough terms to indicate that the government was aware of the fact that the \textit{Drang nach Westen} had lost all chance of realization.\textsuperscript{185}

Even after the Supreme Command requested the government to enter into negotiations for an armistice, expansionist hopes were still expressed by German political and military figures. On September 27, Hindenburg wanted the annexation of Briey and Longwy as one of the armistice conditions, but Ludendorff had sense enough to realize that the time for such demands had gone by.\textsuperscript{186} The next day, Solf spoke at the University of Munich, in the presence of King Ludwig of Bavaria, and expected not only the return of Germany's colonies, but also a redistribution of African holdings, in which Belgium, France, and Portugal had to give up some of their disproportionate colonial wealth.\textsuperscript{187} After the government, on October 4-5, had officially asked President Wilson for an armistice on the basis of his Fourteen Points, all justification for such continued hopes of gain disappeared once and for all. But even so there are instances of the army's \textit{Vaterländischer Unterricht} insisting, as late as the middle of October, that Germany had won

\textsuperscript{184} \textit{Frankfurter Zeitung}, Aug. 29, 1918 (ev. ed.).
\textsuperscript{186} \textit{Ibid.}, II, 405.
\textsuperscript{187} \textit{Kölnerische Zeitung}, Oct. 1, 1918.
the war and all she had to do now was to secure the fruits of victory.\textsuperscript{188} The Independent Committee and its president, on October 10 and 16, came out against a peace based on Wilson’s program.\textsuperscript{189} On October 17, Dietrich Schäfer wrote that the Committee “believes to serve the Fatherland by continuing to represent the views which form the basis of its endeavors; for the future belongs to them.”\textsuperscript{190} On October 23, in a speech before the Reichstag, the former Secretary of the Interior, Count von Posadowsky-Wehner, once more brought up the question of Belgium and implied that Germany should try to maintain a certain amount of influence in that region.\textsuperscript{191} And finally, on October 30, following a similar proposal of Hindenburg’s six days earlier, the Vaterlandspartei suggested that Germany refuse the Allied demands and continue the war as the only means of winning a tolerable peace.\textsuperscript{192}

We need not extend the discussion of these death-struggles of annexationism any further. If they seem prolonged and painful, we must remember how much there was at stake for the men whose plans for German expansion had exerted such profound influence on the policy of their country. There were already many indications that the defeat of annexationism was not to be limited to the territorial sphere. On October 4, when Germany’s military collapse had become unavoidable, the Supreme Command had finally used its influence to settle the question of Prussian reforms. The result of its intercession was the acceptance, on October 24, of equal franchise for Prussia. The annexationists had suffered a second, at least equally serious defeat in the domestic sphere. The close relationship between a strong peace and the continued enjoyment of the privileged position of Germany’s ruling classes, here found its final confirmation. It was to be a matter of weeks before the decisive defeat at the front was followed by the complete and utter collapse of the German political order.

\textsuperscript{188} Thimme, \textit{Weltkrieg}, p. 204.
\textsuperscript{190} Jagow, p. 124.
\textsuperscript{191} Reichstag, vol. 314, p. 6903.
\textsuperscript{192} Wortmann, p. 62.