

Germany Protests Peace Terms *May 1919*

Mr. President:

I have the honour to transmit to you herewith the observations of the German delegation on the draft treaty of peace.

We came to Versailles in the expectation of receiving a peace proposal based on the agreed principles. We were firmly resolved to do everything in our power with a view of fulfilling the grave obligations which we had undertaken. We hoped for the peace of justice which had been promised to us.

We were aghast when we read in documents the demands made upon us, the victorious violence of our enemies. The more deeply we penetrate into the spirit of this treaty, the more convinced we become of the impossibility of carrying it out. The exactions of this treaty are more than the German people can bear.

With a view to the re-establishment of the Polish State we must renounce indisputably German territory - nearly the whole of the Province of West Prussia, which is preponderantly German; of Pomerania; Danzig, which is German to the core; we must let that ancient Hanse town be transformed into a free State under Polish suzerainty.

We must agree that East Prussia shall be amputated from the body of the State, condemned to a lingering death, and robbed of its northern portion, including Memel, which is purely German.

We must renounce Upper Silesia for the benefit of Poland and Czecho-Slovakia, although it has been in close political connection with Germany for more than 750 years, is instinct with German life, and forms the very foundation of industrial life throughout East Germany.

Preponderantly German circles (*Kreise*) must be ceded to Belgium, without sufficient guarantees that the plebiscite, which is only to take place afterward, will be independent. The purely German district of the Saar must be detached from our empire, and the way must be paved for its subsequent annexation to France, although we owe her debts in coal only, not in men.

For fifteen years Rhenish territory must be occupied, and after those fifteen years the Allies have power to refuse the restoration of the country; in the interval the Allies can take every measure to sever the economic and moral links with the mother country, and finally to misrepresent the wishes of the indigenous population.

Although the exaction of the cost of the war has been expressly renounced, yet Germany, thus cut in pieces and weakened, must declare herself ready in principle to bear all the war expenses of her enemies, which would exceed many times over the total amount of German State and private assets.

Meanwhile her enemies demand, in excess of the agreed conditions, reparation for damage suffered by their civil population, and in this connection Germany must also go bail for her allies. The sum to be paid is to be fixed by our enemies unilaterally, and to admit of subsequent modification and increase. No limit is fixed, save the capacity of the German people for payment, determined not by their standard of life, but solely by their capacity to meet the

demands of their enemies by their labour. The German people would thus be condemned to perpetual slave labour.

In spite of the exorbitant demands, the reconstruction of our economic life is at the same time rendered impossible. We must surrender our merchant fleet. We are to renounce all foreign securities. We are to hand over to our enemies our property in all German enterprises abroad, even in the countries of our allies.

Even after the conclusion of peace the enemy States are to have the right of confiscating all German property. No German trader in their countries will be protected from these war measures. We must completely renounce our colonies, and not even German missionaries shall have the right to follow their calling therein.

We must thus renounce the realization of all our aims in the spheres of politics, economics, and ideas.

Even in internal affairs we are to give up the right to self-determination. The international Reparation Commission receives dictatorial powers over the whole life of our people in economic and cultural matters. Its authority extends far beyond that which the empire, the German Federal Council, and the Reichstag combined ever possessed within the territory of the empire.

This commission has unlimited control over the economic life of the State, of communities, and of individuals. Further, the entire educational and sanitary system depends on it. It can keep the whole German people in mental thralldom. In order to increase the payments due, by the thrall, the commission can hamper measures for the social protection of the German worker.

In other spheres also Germany's sovereignty is abolished. Her chief waterways are subjected to international administration; she must construct in her territory such canals and such railways as her enemies wish; she must agree to treaties the contents of which are unknown to her, to be concluded by her enemies with the new States on the east, even when they concern her own functions. The German people are excluded from the League of Nations, to which is entrusted all work of common interest to the world.

Thus must a whole people sign the decree for its proscription, nay, its own death sentence.

Germany knows that she must make sacrifices in order to attain peace. Germany knows that she has, by agreement, undertaken to make these sacrifices, and will go in this matter to the utmost limits of her capacity.

Counter-proposals

1. Germany offers to proceed with her own disarmament in advance of all other peoples, in order to show that she will help to usher in the new era of the peace of justice. She gives up universal compulsory service and reduces her army to 100,000 men, except as regards temporary measures. She even renounces the warships which her enemies are still willing to leave in her hands. She stipulates, however, that she shall be admitted forthwith as a State with equal rights into the League of Nations. She stipulates that a genuine League of Nations shall come into being, embracing all peoples of goodwill, even her enemies of today. The League must be

inspired by a feeling of responsibility toward mankind and have at its disposal a power to enforce its will sufficiently strong and trusty to protect the frontiers of its members.

2. In territorial questions Germany takes up her position unreservedly on the ground of the Wilson program. She renounces her sovereign right in Alsace-Lorraine, but wishes a free plebiscite to take place there. She gives up the greater part of the province of Posen, the district incontestably Polish in population, together with the capital. She is prepared to grant to Poland, under international guarantees, free and secure access to the sea by ceding free ports at Danzig, Königsberg, and Memel, by an agreement regulating the navigation of the Vistula and by special railway conventions. Germany is prepared to insure the supply of coal for the economic needs of France, especially from the Saar region, until such time as the French mines are once more in working order. The preponderantly Danish districts of Schleswig will be given up to Denmark on the basis of a plebiscite. Germany demands that the right of self-determination shall also be respected where the interests of the Germans in Austria and Bohemia are concerned. She is ready to subject all her colonies to administration by the community of the League of Nations, if she is recognized as its mandatory.

3. Germany is prepared to make payments incumbent on her in accordance with the agreed program of peace up to a maximum sum of 100,000,000,000 gold marks, 20,000,000,000 by May 1, 1926, and the balance (80,000,000,000) in annual payments, without interest. These payments shall in principle be equal to a fixed percentage of the German Imperial and State revenues. The annual payment shall approximate to the former peace budget. For the first ten years the annual payments shall not exceed 1,000,000,000 gold marks a year. The German taxpayer shall not be less heavily burdened than the taxpayer of the most heavily burdened State among those represented on the Reparation Commission. Germany presumes in this connection that she will not have to make any territorial sacrifices beyond those mentioned above and that she will recover her freedom of economic movement at home and abroad.

4. Germany is prepared to devote her entire economic strength to the service of the reconstruction. She wishes to cooperate effectively in the reconstruction of the devastated regions of Belgium and Northern France. To make good the loss in production of the destroyed mines of Northern France, up to 20,000,000 tons of coal will be delivered annually for the first five years, and up to 80,000,000 tons for the next five years. Germany will facilitate further deliveries of coal to France, Belgium, Italy, and Luxemburg. Germany is, moreover, prepared to make considerable deliveries of benzol, coal tar, and sulphate of ammonia, as well as dyestuffs and medicines.

5. Finally, Germany offers to put her entire merchant tonnage into a pool of the world's shipping, to place at the disposal of her enemies a part of her freight space as part payment of reparation and to build for them for a series of years in German yards an amount of tonnage exceeding their demands.

6. In order to replace the river boats destroyed in Belgium and Northern France, Germany offers river craft from her own resources.

7. Germany thinks that she sees an appropriate method for the prompt fulfilment of her obligation to make reparations conceding participation in coal mines to insure deliveries of coal.

8. Germany, in accordance with the desires of the workers of the whole world, wishes to insure to them free and equal rights. She wishes to insure to them in the Treaty of Peace the right to take their own decisive part in the settlement of social policy and social protection.

9. The German delegation again makes its demand for a neutral inquiry into the responsibility for the war and culpable acts in conduct. An impartial commission should have the right to investigate on its own responsibility the archives of all the belligerent countries and all the persons who took an important part in the war. Nothing short of confidence that the question of guilt will be examined dispassionately can leave the peoples lately at war with each other in the proper frame of mind for the formation of the League of Nations.

These are only the most important among the proposals which we have to make. As regards other great sacrifices, and also as regards the details, the delegation refers to the accompanying memorandum and the annex thereto.

The time allowed us for the preparation of this memorandum was so short that it was impossible to treat all the questions exhaustively. A fruitful and illuminating negotiation could only take place by means of oral discussion.

This treaty of peace is to be the greatest achievement of its kind in all history. There is no precedent for the conduct of such comprehensive negotiations by an exchange of written notes only.

The feeling of the peoples who have made such immense sacrifices makes them demand that their fate should be decided by an open, unreserved exchange of ideas on the principle:

"Quite open covenants of peace openly arrived at, after which there shall be no private international understandings of any kind, but diplomacy shall proceed always frankly in the public view."

Germany is to put her signature to the treaty laid before her and to carry it out. Even in her need, justice for her is too sacred a thing to allow her to stoop to achieve conditions which she cannot undertake to carry out.

Treaties of peace signed by the great powers have, it is true, in the history of the last decades, again and again proclaimed the right of the stronger. But each of these treaties of peace has been a factor in originating and prolonging the world war. Whenever in this war the victor has spoken to the vanquished, at Brest-Litovsk and Bucharest, his words were but the seeds of future discord.

The lofty aims which our adversaries first set before themselves in their conduct of the war, the new era of an assured peace of justice, demand a treaty instinct with a different spirit.

Only the cooperation of all nations, a cooperation of hands and spirits, can build up a durable peace. We are under no delusions regarding the strength of the hatred and bitterness which this war has engendered, and yet the forces which are at work for a union of mankind are stronger now than ever they were before.

The historic task of the Peace Conference of Versailles is to bring about this union.

Accept, Mr. President, the expression of my distinguished consideration.

BROCKDORFF-RANTZAU