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The Legacy of the War

FROM THE BEGINNING, the Weimar Republic was burdened by its unexpected and, in many quarters, unwelcome birth in the bitter aftermath of a lost war. When the armistice ending World War I was signed on November 11, 1918, some two million German soldiers were dead—more than those of any other combatant—over four million more were disabled, physically and psychologically, and the German economy was in shambles. The Allied blockade remained in effect until the peace treaty was signed at Versailles on June 28, 1919, and the clamor for punitive reparations continued among the victors for years to come. The harsh legacy of defeat was especially hard to bear for some because the German armies surrendered while still occupying foreign soil. Complete demobilization was hindered by the need to fight internal battles over Germany's political future, as well as by the reluctance of some who had fought to unlearn the brutal lessons they had learned in the trenches. In its short and tumultuous existence, the Weimar Republic never had the opportunity to work through the legacy of the war and come to terms with its defeat. The physical wounds of those who survived may have healed, but their psychological traumas, whose severity was recognized by psychoanalysts like Ernst Simmel as early as 1918, continued to fester for years to come.

The treaty ending the war, signed reluctantly and under pressure, was quickly dubbed the *Diktat* of Versailles. Political figures blamed for accepting the “Carthaginian Peace” it imposed on Germany were discredited or worse, as demonstrated by the assassination of the Catholic Center Party's Matthias Erzberger in 1921. Among the more controversial clauses were those attributing war guilt to Germany and demanding extensive compensation, which had been vigorously, but vainly resisted by the German delegation to the conference. Even more devastating were the significant losses of territory to France, Poland, Denmark, Lithuania, and Belgium, suffered either outright or after plebiscites, and the radical reduction of the armed forces and demilitarization of the Rhineland.

Hostility to the peace treaty was often accompanied by a search for scapegoats for the defeat, leading to the “stab in the back legend” promulgated by unrepentant military leaders like General Paul von Hindenburg in his testimony to the constitutional assembly's investigative committee on the war in November 1919. Even more moderate defenders of the new republic, such as

the philosopher and theologian Ernst Troeltsch, resisted accepting Germany's responsibility for its plight, however much they may have also faulted the aggressive war policies of the general staff. Voices such as that of Willi Wolfradt, who claimed in *Die Weltbühne* in 1922 that the army *should* have been stabbed in the back, were a distinct minority. Indeed, it might be argued that not until the debate unleashed by the revisionist historian Fritz Fischer's *Germany's Aims in the First World War* in 1961 did the Germans attain a more even-handed, if still often contested, assessment of the war's origins.

During the Weimar Republic, feelings about the war ran too deep to allow any such dispassionate analysis. Not only was the justice of the war's goals still widely maintained, but also the devastating experience of trench warfare could be given a romantic gloss in the writings of veterans such as Ernst Jünger. The postwar exploits of the Freikorps, the still-mobilized veterans used by the government to crush leftist revolts, were subject to even greater glorification in the memoirs of participants, such as Ernst von Salomon's *The Outlaws*. Here the celebration of violence, a yearning for charismatic leadership, and communal fantasies of male bonding that were to have so sinister an outcome in post-Weimar German politics can be easily discerned.

Yet at least once the republic was successfully defended against these forces of reaction, as the failure of the Kapp Putsch, a rightist coup attempt led by Wolfgang Kapp, an East Prussian politician, and Hermann Ehrhardt, leader of the most notorious Freikorps brigade, demonstrates. Calling for a general strike on March 13, 1920, the German left, in a rare display of unity, mobilized nearly 100,000 workers and civil servants.

There were, to be sure, some German voices opposed to the glorification of war and the politics of belligerent resentment to which it led. A decade after hostilities began, Kurt Tucholsky, the independent leftist journalist associated with *Die Weltbühne*, mocked the current nostalgia for the chauvinist "spirit of 1914." But as the storm generated in 1929 by Erich Maria Remarque's novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* and the film made from it demonstrates, the wounds of the war festered until they helped bring about the death of the republic itself. As for the prospects of another war, even pacifist intellectuals like Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud could offer little hope that it might be averted, as evinced in the grim letters they exchanged in 1932.

1

ERNST SIMMEL

War Neuroses and "Psychic Trauma"

First published in *Kriegs-Neurosen und "Psychisches Trauma"* (Munich and Leipzig: Otto Nemnich, 1918), 5–6, 82–84.

When I speak about the war as an event, as the cause of illness, I anticipate something which has revealed itself in my experiences—namely that it is not only the bloody war which leaves such devastating traces in those who took part in it. Rather, it is also the difficult conflict in which the individual finds himself in his fight against a world transformed by war. It is a fight in which the victim of war neurosis succumbs in silent, often unrecognized, torment.

He can leave the war without physical illness, his physical wounds, if any, already healed. Nevertheless he departs from the arena of war as one branded with a so-called "functional" illness, namely war neurosis. The damage which the war neurotic suffers as a result of his participation in the war either in the trenches or at home can befall a single organ, or it may encompass the entire person. [. . .]

Wherever the neurosis is the result of a single debilitation of the personality complex that occurred in a particular war experience, we are able, by means of suggestion, temporarily to interpolate our own healthy ego as a catalyst and thereby reestablish the unity of the fractured personality. These are the cases in which a single session is usually enough to bring about a cure.

If, however, we are unable to cure a war neurosis by means of suggestive hypnosis, we must not abandon the patient to his fate and send him home untreated (for instance, permanently paralyzed), because today we know the particular psychic cause. Instead we must tell ourselves that we have not yet touched upon the real reason, the non-physical cause of his suffering. We must do everything that psychoanalytical work offers today to find a cure which reduces any further increase of the already unnecessarily large number of men who were crippled by the war.

However, in my opinion we must be very careful in our application of suggestive hypnosis to those forms of neurosis that manifest themselves in serious motor hypersensitivity—from spasticity to convulsions.

If we keep in mind that this physical sensitivity is merely the external symptom of an internal, strongly repressed affect, it then becomes clear that any forceful attempt to suggest away such a symptom does nothing more than close a safety valve which the organism had created to compensate for any inordinate amount of internal psychic pressure.

If such a cure lasts, which in my experience is frequently not the case, it obviously implies certain dangers for the patient. Namely, the release may violently take a different tack; I have often observed unmotivated outbursts of rage or other forms of "hysterical attacks" as a result of suggestion-cures. Consideration of the possibility of strongly repressed affects is essential as well for assessing the meaning of these patients' disciplinary infractions.

However, as the reader will realize at the end of this discussion, the self-assertion of the organism as it articulates itself in neurosis ultimately signifies self-protection in the face of the threat of psychosis.

Whatever in a person's experience is too powerful or horrible for his conscious mind to grasp and work through, filters down to the unconscious levels of his psyche. There it lies like a mine, waiting to explode the entire psychic structure. And only the self-protective mechanism, with its release of waves of affect, and its attachment to an individual organ, to external symptoms, and to symptomatic actions prevents a permanent disturbance of the psychic balance.

In this way, following the work of Freud and his school, another medical border that seemed fixed has become mutable. We recognize that functional psychoses are merely gradual intensifications of functional neuroses.

We gladly abstain from diagnoses out of desperation, by which we previously accorded a psychosis the status "hysterical" in order to believe it curable; instead, we hope that, through a corresponding elaboration of psychoanalytic-hypnotic methodology, we are on the way to healing all emotional illnesses that are not organic in origin.

Today we may already look forward to the time in which mental institutions become depopulated. Thus we are able to make a contribution to the rebuilding of the human economy—a necessary task for the preservation of all nations because of the waste of human life during the years of war.

2

The Treaty of Versailles: The Reparations Clauses

First published in *The Treaty of Peace Between the Allied and Associated Powers and Germany* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1919).

PART VIII: REPARATION

Section I: General Provisions

Article 231. The Allied and Associated Governments affirm and Germany accepts the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the loss and damage to which the Allied and Associated Governments and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her allies.

Article 232. The Allied and Associated Governments recognize that the resources of Germany are not adequate, after taking into account permanent diminutions of such resources which will result from other provisions of the present Treaty, to make complete reparation for all such loss and damage.

The Allied and Associated Governments, however, require, and Germany undertakes, that she will make compensation for all damage done to the civilian population of the Allied and Associated Powers and to their property during the period of the belligerency of each as an Allied or Associated Power against Germany by such aggression by land, by sea and from the air, and in general all damage as defined in Annex I hereto.

In accordance with Germany's pledges, already given, as to complete restoration for Belgium, Germany undertakes, in addition to the compensation for damage elsewhere in this Part provided for, as a consequence of the violation of the Treaty of 1839,¹ to make reimbursement of all sums which Belgium has borrowed from the Allied and Associated Governments up to November 11, 1918, together with interest at the rate of five percent

1. The general European treaty that guaranteed Belgian independence and neutrality.

(5%) per annum on such sums. This amount shall be determined by the Reparation Commission, and the German Government undertakes thereupon forthwith to make a special issue of bearer bonds to an equivalent amount payable in marks gold, on May 1, 1926, or, at the option of the German Government, on May 1 in any year up to 1926. Subject to the foregoing, the form of such bonds shall be determined by the Reparation Commission. [. . .]

Article 233. The amount of the above damage for which compensation is to be made by Germany shall be determined by an Inter-Allied Commission, to be called the Reparation Commission and constituted in the form and with the powers set forth hereunder and in Annexes 2 to 7 inclusive hereto.

This Commission shall consider the claims and give to the German Government a just opportunity to be heard.

The findings of the Commission as to the amount of damage defined as above shall be concluded and notified to the German Government on or before May 1, 1921, as representing the extent of that Government's obligations. [. . .]

Article 235. In order to enable the Allied and Associated Powers to proceed at once in the restoration of their industrial and economic life, pending the full determination of their claims, Germany shall pay in such installments and in such manner (whether in gold, commodities, ships, securities or otherwise) as the Reparation Commission may fix, during 1919, 1920 and the first four months of 1921, the equivalent of 20,000,000,000 gold marks. Out of this sum the expenses of the armies of occupation subsequent to the Armistice of November 11, 1918, shall first be met, and such supplies of food and raw materials as may be judged by the Governments of the Principal Allied and Associated Powers to be essential to enable Germany to meet her obligations for reparation may also, with the approval of the said Governments, be paid for out of the above sum. The balance shall be reckoned towards liquidation of the amounts due for reparation. [. . .]

Article 236. Germany further agrees to the direct application of her economic resources to reparation as specified in Annexes 3, 4, 5, and 6 relating respectively to merchant shipping, to physical restoration, to coal and derivatives of coal, and to dye-stuffs and other chemical products; provided always that the value of the property transferred and any services rendered by her under these Annexes, assessed in the manner therein prescribed, shall be credited to her towards liquidation of her obligations under the above Articles.

3

COUNT ULRICH VON BROCKDORFF-RANTZAU

Speech of the German Delegation, Versailles, May 7, 1919

First published as "Ansprache des Reichsaußenministers Grafen Brockdorff-Rantzau bei Überreichung des Friedensvertrags-Entwurfs durch die Alliierten und Assoziierten Mächte," in Graf Brockdorff-Rantzau, *Dokumente* (Charlottenburg: Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft für Politik und Geschichte, 1920), 113ff.

Gentlemen, we are deeply impressed with the great mission that has brought us here to give to the world forthwith a lasting peace. We are under no illusions as to the extent of

our defeat and the degree of our powerlessness. We know that the strength of the German arms is broken. We know the intensity of the hatred which meets us, and we have heard the victor's passionate demand that as the vanquished we shall be made to pay, and as the guilty we shall be punished.

The demand is made that we shall acknowledge that we alone are guilty of having caused the war. Such a confession in my mouth would be a lie. We are far from seeking to escape from any responsibility for this world war, and for its having been waged as it has. The attitude of the former German government at the Hague peace conferences, its actions and its omissions in the tragic twelve days of July may have contributed to the catastrophe, but we emphatically deny that the people of Germany, who were convinced that they were waging a war of defense, should be burdened with the sole guilt of that war.

Nobody would wish to contend that the catastrophe goes back merely to the fateful moment when the successor to the throne of Austria-Hungary fell a victim to murderous hands. In the past fifty years the imperialism of all European states has constantly poisoned the international situation. The policy of retaliation, the policy of expansion, and a disregard of the right of national self-determination have played their part in that illness of Europe which came to its crisis in the world war. The Russian mobilization made it impossible for statesmen to find a remedy, and threw the final decision into the hands of military power.

Public opinion in every enemy country is echoing the crimes Germany is said to have committed in the war. Here, too, we are ready to admit that unjust things have been done. We have not come here to diminish the responsibility of the men who have waged the war politically and economically, and to deny that breaches of the law of nations have been committed. We repeat the declaration which was made in the German Reichstag at the beginning of the war: injustice has been done to Belgium and we shall make reparations.

But in the manner of waging war, Germany was not the only one that erred. Every European nation knows of deeds and of individuals which the best of their people remember only with regret. I do not want to respond to reproaches with reproaches, but, if we alone are asked to do penance, one should remember the Armistice. Six weeks went by before we obtained an armistice, and six months before we came to know your conditions of peace. Crimes in war may not be excusable, but they are committed in the struggle for victory, when we think only of maintaining our national existence, and are in such passion as makes the conscience of peoples blunt. The hundreds of thousands of noncombatants who have perished since November 11 because of the blockade were destroyed coolly and deliberately after our opponents had won a certain and assured victory. Remember that, when you speak of guilt and atonement.

The measure of guilt of all those who have taken part can be established only by an impartial inquiry, a neutral commission before which all the principals in the tragedy are allowed to speak, and to which all archives are open. We have asked for such an inquiry and we ask for it once more.

At this conference, where we alone and without our allies are facing our many opponents, we are not without protection. You yourself have brought us an ally: that justice which was guaranteed us in the agreement as to what should be the principles governing the treaty of peace. In the days between October 5 and November 5, 1918, the Allied and Associated governments swore that there would be no peace of violence, and inscribed on their knightly banners a peace of justice. On October 5 the German government proposed that the basis of peace should be the principles set forth by the President of the United

States of America, and on November 5 their Secretary of State, Mr. [Robert] Lansing, declared that the Allied and Associated Powers had accepted this basis with two definite reservations. The principles of President Wilson thus became binding for both parties to the war, for you as well as for us, and also for our former allies.

Certain of the foregoing principles call upon us to make heavy national and economic sacrifices. But by such a treaty, the sacred and fundamental rights of all peoples would be protected. The conscience of the world would be behind it, and no nation that violated it would go unpunished.

Upon that basis you will find us ready to examine the preliminary peace which you have submitted to us, with the firm intention of joining with you in rebuilding that which has been destroyed, in making good whatever wrong has been committed, above all the injustice to Belgium, and in showing mankind new goals of political and social progress. Considering the confusing number of problems which arise, we ought, as soon as possible, to have the principal problems examined by special commissions of experts, on the basis of the treaty which you have submitted to us. Our principal problem will be to restore the broken strength of all the nations which took part in the war, and do it by providing international protection for the welfare, health, and freedom of the working classes.

I believe we should then proceed to restore those parts of Belgium and Northern France which we occupied and which have been destroyed by the war. We have taken upon ourselves the solemn obligation to do so, and we are resolved to execute it to the extent which has been agreed upon between us. In this we are dependent upon the cooperation of our former opponents. We cannot accomplish it without the technical and financial participation of the victor nations, and they could accomplish it only with our cooperation. Impoverished Europe must desire to bring about this reconstruction as successfully, but at the same time at as little cost as possible. Such a project could be carried out only by means of a clear and businesslike understanding as to the best methods to be employed. To continue to have this done by German prisoners of war would be the worst of methods. Unquestionably such work can be done cheaply. But it would cost the world dear if hatred and despair should overcome the German people, forced to think of their sons, brothers, and fathers still held prisoners, and languishing as if in penal servitude. We cannot arrive at a lasting peace without an immediate solution of this problem, a problem which has already been postponed too long.

Experts on both sides will have to give thought as to how the German people can best meet the financial obligations called for by such reparations, without collapsing under the weight of their burden. A financial breakdown would take from those who have a right to reparations the advantages which are theirs by right, and would throw into irreparable disorder the whole European economic system. The victors as well as the vanquished must guard themselves against this menacing danger and its incalculable consequences. There is only one means of removing it: belief without reservation in the economic and social solidarity of all nations, and in a free and all-inclusive League of Nations.

Gentlemen, the sublime idea of deriving from the most terrible catastrophe in history the greatest of forward movements in the development of mankind, by means of the League of Nations, has been put forth and will make its way. But only by opening the gates of the League of Nations to all who are of good will can the goal be attained, and only by doing so will it be that those who have died in this war shall not have died in vain.

In their hearts, the German people will resign themselves to their hard lot if the bases of the peace, as mutually agreed upon, are not destroyed. A peace which cannot be defended before the world as a peace of justice would always evoke new resistance. No one could

sign it with a clear conscience, for it could not be carried out. No one could venture to guarantee its execution, though this obligation is implied in the signing of the treaty.

We shall, with every good intention, study the document submitted to us, in the hope that our meeting may finally result in something that can be signed by us all.

4

ERNST TROELTSCH

The Dogma of Guilt

First published as "Das Schulddogma (June 19, 1919)," *Spektatorbriefe. Aufsätze über die deutsche Revolution und die Weltpolitik 1918–1922*, ed. Hans Baron (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1924), 314–321.

What emerges with considerable clarity from the peace at Versailles is the enormous importance of the question of guilt. This kind of peace was possible because of the formal German declaration of war and its invasion of neutral Belgium, thus making Germany exclusively responsible for the war. This peace, while presenting itself as a court of inquisition, is also an imperialist monstrosity made possible by the deceit of the Fourteen Points and by Germany's voluntary disarmament. It is reminiscent of the way Rome once proceeded against Carthage. The German counterproposals to this peace acknowledged the legitimate demands for reconstruction assistance for severely damaged France and Belgium. But the holy alliance, just about as holy as the one of a hundred years ago and with exactly as much right to moral sloganeering, did not accept these proposals. Instead, the response to them was: the heretic is to be burned. Profound political, sociological, national, psychological, and technical justifications underlie the peace, which themselves suffice to show that this division of the world and the expropriation of land was produced by a court of inquisition.

The belief in German guilt and German responsibility for a war made inevitable by this same guilt fed the world's prejudice, which gained inestimably in its effect on all neutral and small states due to that fateful act of German politics and military conduct, the invasion of Belgium, although the latter, as Bethmann-Hollweg's book [*Reflections on the World War*] details with utter clarity, was demonstrably *not* the reason for the English declaration of war. The invasion made it possible for the governments to draw their respective antiwar citizenries into war hysteria and to maintain their positions even in the face of the most monstrous atrocities. The heretic was neither to be trusted nor to be believed; to show him the slightest consideration was a crime against humanity. In accordance with such sentiments, idealism was whipped into a fury, especially among the Americans; they were persuaded of the intimate relationship of this German crime against culture and the outmoded German autocracy, while every attempt at German self-defense, every German counterplea, was kept from America because England was granted surveillance of the German post. But this was only a part of the series of events we are addressing here. To the extent that Germany's actions were represented as criminal, its entire military undertaking and the ensuing destruction took on the character of wanton brutality and crime, prompted not by participation in a just war, as with the [Triple] Entente, but through rapacious and godless atrocities which served solely to reveal and further confirm the nature of the German enterprise as a whole. It was the fate of

Germany's early successes in Belgium and northern France that they resulted in its undoing: the deplorable suffering that did in fact occur was represented not as the consequence of war but as the consequence of German madness and wantonness; every atrocity and all destruction not absolutely necessary multiplied in significance.

Nor was it different with regard to the submarine war, a German military tactic unforeseen in previous agreements on the rights of peoples. In comparison to the slow and undramatic effects of the blockade, submarine warfare was much more visible and stimulated the imagination through its destruction of goods and people, which, by its nature, struck friend and enemy alike. It was therefore an extremely severe and questionable tool of war. Still, it was not represented as a political mistake and an act of self-defense against the hunger blockade, but as wanton murder, as an insane destruction of goods, as an inevitable product of the German military spirit, and this representation is a strategic decision of world-destroying proportions.

Nor was it any different with regard to zeppelins and long-range artillery. The course of the war only amplified the accusations of guilt. And as these accusations continued they were also applied to the new revolutionary government—which was in no way responsible for the “imperial” administration—as well as to the fully debilitated Germany of the cease-fire period. Thus it was possible to refuse every negotiation, to mistrust, “in principle,” to this day every explanation and every policy, to prepare the peace in complete secrecy, despite all “democratic ideals,” and to impose it upon the Germans without any negotiation. The victors could then demand whatever they wanted, partly as “punishment,” partly as “obligatory reparations,” and partly as “security” against such a horribly dangerous people. This is precisely the reason for their further demand, which, in practical terms was utter nonsense and was otherwise unheard of—the extradition of the “guilty”—because that, along with their condemnation, put the seal on the theory of German guilt, without which the enemies could not have endured the war and could not have designed this peace. At the same time, the theory of German guilt allayed the doubts gradually awakened among the victors' own ranks, where workers and liberals were beginning to sense the monstrosity of this peace. It was just as much the ambition of the enemy to rob German socialism of its dangerous powers of infection, for it was characterized as the spiritual heir and unchanged continuation of the old government which was simultaneously to be fettered or even strangled through the “terms of punishment.”

Finally, the guilt implies a period of atonement and rectification during which Germany remains excluded from “national alliances” and the Entente can go about dividing the world undisturbed. The confusing repercussions on the German people of this whole moralistic polemic, the mutilation of its belief in itself, the exacting of German acknowledgments of guilt (by which weak spirits hope to lighten their fate)—all of this is merely a secondary issue, albeit an important one. Exacting acknowledgments of guilt as a condition of milder punishment was a measure similar to the incentives for voluntary disarmament given in the promise of Wilson's Fourteen Points. [. . .]

But how was the establishment of such a dogma possible? This is not a purely historical question. It was possible through Germany's political mistake of making a formal declaration of war out of fear of falling behind militarily and thus losing important advantages. We might just as well have let the cannons go off by themselves, an inevitability, as we now know from [Russian] General [Pavel von] Rennenkampf's orders to the army. Military authorities certify that such patient waiting would have been possible. The second point is the fateful German invasion of Belgium, which seemed to have become necessary

given the nature of the only elaborated war plan of the years 1913–1914. Earlier there would have been several contingency plans. [. . .]

But that alone would not have won the accusers their dominance. The real precondition was that the whole world was eager to believe the accusations. Germans were already hated to such a degree that the worst appeared plausible and required no authentic proof whatever. Max Scheler supplied the particular reasons for this hatred of the Germans in his well-known book, [*Why the Germans are Hated* (1917)], which suffers only from underestimating the effect of the Kaiser's senseless exhortations in his speeches, of the Pan-German writings, of the Navy League, and of the Bülow-Tirpitz policy in intensifying this hatred. And particular note must be taken of the Anglo-Saxon spirit, which does nothing without moral grounding and never pursues its own interests without being conscious simultaneously of its moral superiority. The habit stems from the heritage of the old Puritan spirit, which applies boundless rigor to the emphasis of its own purported moral right, and which serves to provide it with a good conscience for the sake of profit and the exercise of power. [. . .] Calvinistic self-righteousness is not simply hypocrisy. Among the Anglo-Saxons it is combined—relatively honestly, although subjectively, and, above all, extremely effectively in terms of national psychology—with an astounding sense for business and power, which could be learned from the book by Troeltsch, *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*.¹ But how many among the Germans think, in their enlightenment, to take such spiritual things seriously and even to regard them as important?

The worst and most unfortunate, however, was the German war policy itself. Seduced by its initial successes and later renewed by further successes in critical situations, the policy-makers allowed themselves to surpass the original goals of maintaining the status quo and pure defense. The General Staff policy had existed since [Erich von] Falkenhayn and [Erich] Ludendorff; the economic associations and the masses, misled by journalism, demanded ever greater gains. Weapons now became many times more destructive than would have been necessary. Humanity and justice began to be sentimentalized, and support for a settlement was viewed as defeatism. The political leadership was powerless and ambivalent, ultimately wholly discredited by the General Staff. The Kaiser never kept politics and the military mutually coherent and in balance, and at this critical moment he failed more than ever before. The nation was divided. It became very easy for the Entente through its tireless campaign of innuendo to prove Germany's desire for world conquest, its war guilt, and its violation of accepted military conduct. Nor may one forget that our moral powers, both internal and external, so declined that the experience of German occupation on the eastern and western fronts everywhere awakened hatred for Germany. For the occupation and the treatment of occupied areas, our dominant class had not the slightest talent. All of this allowed the dogma of guilt to take such firm root that the enemy finally could dare to reject with a sneer even the demand for international, nonpartisan confirmation. The dogma of German guilt is as endemic to the modern court of inquisition as it was to the inquisition of the Middle Ages. For what could calling the dogma of the devil's existence into question represent other than an unheard of impudence?

And still a final factor came into play: the techniques of journalism. As surely as the technological delirium of this war killed all sense and understanding, elevating acts of war, comprehensible in and of themselves, to the level of sheer insanity, so have the techniques of belief and opinion-making, as developed by the countries with democratic election

1. This essay was published under the pseudonym "Spectator," which allowed Troeltsch to refer to himself in the third person.

campaigns, celebrated monstrous and unprecedented triumphs. [. . .] The enemies have understood incomparably better the techniques of journalism. And, as no one dare forget, through arrogance, spiritlessness, and incautious and reckless prattling of secret wishes and thoughts, we gave them inexhaustible stores of raw material. We no longer believed in the power of morality, nor in its function as a weapon of war, and thereby played into their hands, whether they themselves were dirty or not.

One must understand such things, if one wants to comprehend the peace conditions.

5

PAUL VON HINDENBURG

The Stab in the Back

First published in *Stenographischer Bericht über die öffentlichen Verhandlungen des 15. Untersuchungsausschusses der verfassungsgebenden Nationalversammlung*, testimony delivered on November 18, 1919, vol. 2 (Berlin, 1920), 700–701.

General Field Marshall v. Hindenburg: History will render the final judgment on that about which I may give no further details here. At the time we still hoped that the *will to victory* would dominate everything else. When we assumed our post we made a series of proposals to the Reich leadership which aimed at combining all forces at the nation's disposal for a quick and favorable conclusion to the war; at the same time, they demonstrated to the government its enormous tasks. What finally became of our proposals, once again partially because of the influence of the parties, is known. I wanted forceful and cheerful cooperation and instead encountered failure and weakness.

Chairman: That, too, is a value judgment, against which I must enter a definite protest.

von Hindenburg: The concern as to whether the homeland would remain resolute until the war was won, from this moment on, never left us. We often raised a warning voice to the Reich government. At this time, the secret *intentional mutilation of the fleet and the army* began as a continuation of similar occurrences in peace time. The effects of these endeavors were not concealed from the supreme army command during the last year of the war. The obedient troops who remained immune to revolutionary attrition suffered greatly from the behavior, in violation of duty, of their revolutionary comrades; they had to carry the battle the whole time.

(Chairman's bell. Commotion and shouting.)

Chairman: Please continue, General Field Marshall.

von Hindenburg: The intentions of the command could no longer be executed. Our repeated proposals for strict discipline and strict legislation were not adopted. Thus did our operations necessarily miscarry; the *collapse* was inevitable; the revolution only provided the keystone.

(Commotion and shouting.)

An English general said with justice: “The German army was stabbed in the back.” No guilt applies to the good core of the army. Its achievements are just as admirable as those of the officer corps. Where the guilt lies has clearly been demonstrated. If it needed more proof, then it would be found in the quoted statement of the English general and in the boundless astonishment of our enemies at their victory.

That is the general trajectory of the tragic development of the war for Germany, after a series of brilliant, unsurpassed successes on many fronts, following an accomplishment by the army and the people for which no praise is high enough. This trajectory had to be established so that the military measures for which we are responsible could be correctly evaluated.

6

SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY (SPD)

Appeal of the Social Democratic Party for a General Strike

First published as “Aufruf der sozialdemokratischen Mitglieder der Reichsregierung und des Parteivorstandes der SPD zum Generalstreik” in Karl Brammer (ed.), *Fünf Tage Militärdiktatur* (Berlin: Verlag für Politik und Wissenschaft, 1920), 65.

The military putsch is here. Ehrhardt’s marine division is marching toward Berlin to force a transformation of the government. The Freikorps members who fear disbandment want to install reactionaries in high government positions. We refuse to buckle under to this military pressure. We did not make the revolution so as once again to legitimize the bloody Freikorps regiment. We will not sign a pact with the Baltic criminals.

Workers, comrades! We would be ashamed before you, if we were to behave otherwise. We say no and no once more! You must confirm our belief that we have acted in your interest. Use every means possible to negate the return of bloody reactionary politics. Go on strike, put down your work, and stop the military dictatorship. Fight with every means for the preservation of the republic. Forget your divisiveness. There is only one way to prevent the return of Wilhelm II: Shut down the economy! No one should work. No proletarian should assist the military dictatorship! A general strike all the way! Proletarians unite!

The Social Democrat Members of the Government:

Ebert, Noske, Schlicke, Schmidt, David, Müller

The Executive Committee of the Social Democratic Party of Germany, Wels

7

WILLI WOLFRADT

The Stab-in-the-Back Legend?

First published as “Dolchstoß-Legende?” *Die Weltbühne* 18, no. 24 (June 15, 1922), 592–594.

A discussion is going on in Germany for and against the “stab in the back.” A stab in the back from the rebellious homeland caused the army to collapse—no, the preponderance

of enemy forces and severe mistakes on the part of the leadership were to blame. Recently the tireless propagators of the stab-in-the-back legend have caused Franz Oppenheimer to reflect that proof that a sharpened dagger was drawn does not suffice to shift the blame, nor even is it proof of a stab aimed at the homeland; perhaps what the dagger struck was already mortally wounded by the enemy. But to resort to such argumentation, as irrefutable as it is, betrays the ideals of the peace and denies the true facts. This betrayal is occurring today generally in regard to this important issue. That a stab in the back was responsible for the collapse of the military forces is contested by many, and it has not in fact been proven. But the blameworthiness of a stab in the back causing the collapse—no one dares dispute that. No one has the courage required to own up to the heroic, saving act of a stab in the back.

When I hear that someone has been stabbed, I want to know: was it murder or self-defense? That is, after all, critical for any evaluation of the act. This stab in the back, if it did occur, was self-defense, the desperate act of a people in mortal danger. Those capable of denying its justification in this way are only those who have either entirely forgotten or never saw the terrible distress, the steady increase in mortal agony, and the torment to which one's conscience was subjected during the war. Capable of denying its sacred right are only those for whom the carnage did not last long enough. By dismissing the stab in the back as a "legend," one abandons one's feelings at the time, abandons our bitter resolve in favor of peace in the present. And one concedes at the same time that sabotaging the war was a crime. One legitimates the war in retrospect and arms the next one by dulling the only real weapon we have against it: the consciousness of people that war must not be—must not be.

The dagger: that is the will of the masses to prevent by all means the formation of an army prepared for war. Because the dagger lies sharpened and ready, it is effective. The duller it becomes, the more imminent becomes the danger of a new war. If the point is broken off, the war is no longer to be stopped. The tactic of renouncing the stab in the back, instead of exalting it as a saving act of desperation, will soon have completely broken off the point. To choose this tactic, instead of showing one's true colors, is hardly clever. And those who argue for other than tactical reasons about who deserves the blame—they are not to be counted on. They have failed to recognize the insanity and transgression of war; they will consent to the next one.

How does it happen that there are so many people currently at pains to dispel the stab-in-the-back legend who at the time, either in their convictions or practically, contributed proudly and courageously to the destruction of the war spirit? It comes today from the success of propaganda claims that an unarmed Germany will be annihilated by the victors. The lie that peace has increased misery, instead of ending it, prevails. If it were generally assumed that peace had decreased misery, then everyone would bless the peace and not ask how it came about. By declaring the stab in the back to have been a crime—whether or not one admits that it took place—one gives up the argument that peace, even achieved in such an extraordinary way, could be more fruitful than war. By denying one's involvement, instead of expressing one's pride in it, one lends credence to the fraud that the peace has increased the German people's misery; one appears to be trying to shift the responsibility for a perpetrated wrong from oneself. Thereby the feeling is nourished that Germany has gone from the frying pan into the fire, which is the cause of our general paralysis and joylessness and renders the completion of the peace impossible. It was quickly forgotten: Things have not only gotten better with the revolution—it marked the return, despite everything, from a thousand deaths into life. How that is so,

how that came to be might be bitterly disillusioning. Nevertheless, it is life and the gift of all its potential!

Who was it who was stabbed? Not the German people, but its most terrible enemy: German military power. How many were destroyed by the catastrophe of the arduous peace? Thousands certainly! That is not many if one remembers that every day of war destroyed as many. A small sacrifice considering what hellish nonsense, what a dreadful misuse of people, has finally been brought to an end.

8

ERNST JÜNGER

Fire

First published as "Feuer" in *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis* (Berlin: Verlag Mittler, 1922), 72–76.

We have known one another for a long time as bold adventurers, have met on many a hot day beneath the smoke-filled sky of a battlefield where it is simply the spirit of the hour that always brings those similar together. We know we are the select embodiments of a powerful masculinity and take pride in this awareness. Just yesterday we sat together following the old tradition of a final drink and felt how the will to battle, that peculiar lust to cross the front again and again, to leap where volunteers are needed, would not have lost its familiar intensity and this time, too, would cast us into danger. Yes, if only it were time; we are a race that rises to the challenge.

Nevertheless, this discontent, this unyielding chill from the inside out, these portentous thoughts tearing across our horizon like vague, tattered traces of clouds, were not to be banished; not even once we had taken a long, slow drink of cognac. It is stronger than we are. A fog that lies within us and, in such hours, spreads its mysterious nature across the troubled waters of the soul. Not fear—fear we can stare sharply, disdainfully, in the eye and frighten into its cave—but an unknown realm in which the boundaries of our capacity to feel melt away. That is where one first notices how little one is at home in oneself. From deep within, something slumbering, drowned out by restless dailiness, rises and, before quite taking form, dissolves into a dull sadness.

Of what help is it that for three long weeks a man has steeled himself for this hour, until he believes himself to be hard and free of weaknesses. Of what help is it that he says to himself, "Death? Ha, what's that? A transition that can't be avoided anyway." All that is of no help whatever, for suddenly, from having been a thinking being, he becomes a feeling one, a plaything of phantoms against which even the sharpest reason is a powerless weapon. Those are factors we take care to deny because they are unreliable. But in the moment of experience all denial is futile; then every unknown is possessed of a higher and more convincing reality than all the familiar phenomena of a midday sun.

We have reached the most advanced line and are seeing to the final preparations. We are eager and precise, for we sense a pressure to be active, to fill the time, to escape from ourselves. Time, which had racked us so in the trenches, a concept that comprehends all conceivable torment, a chain that only death can break. Perhaps in the coming minutes. I know it to be a conscious experience, the quiet flow of an ebbing life into the sea of

eternity; I have already stood at times on the border. It is a slow, deep sinking with a ringing in the ear, peaceful and familiar like the sound of Easter bells at home. One should avoid such ponderings, such a readiness to pounce upon mysteries that will never be explained. Everything comes in its own time. Head high, let the thoughts scatter to the winds. Die with dignity—that we can do; we can stride into the ominous dark with a warrior's cunning and bold vitality. Do not be shaken, smile to the last, even if the smile is only a mask to hide from yourself: that itself is something. A human is incapable of anything greater than mastering oneself in death. Even the immortal gods must envy him that.

We are well armed for our journey, loaded with weapons, explosives, and lighting and signaling instruments, a proper, fighting, shock troop, up to the supreme challenges of modern warfare. Not only up to it through joyful dare-devilry and brutal force. Seeing the people this way in the twilight, slender, haggard, most of them almost children, one has little inclination to trust them. But their faces in the shadow of their steel helmets are sharp, fearless, and smart. I know, they do not waver from the danger for an instant; they pounce on it, fast, sinewy, and smooth. They combine ardent courage with cool intelligence; they are the men who clear a severely jammed shell with a steady hand amidst a maelstrom of annihilation, who fire a smoking grenade back at the enemy, who, locked in a struggle for life and death, read the intentions in the enemy's eyes. They are men forged of steel, whose eagle eyes peer straight over the propeller's whir, studying the clouds ahead, who, captive within the motorized din of the tanks, dare the hellish journey through the roar of shell-pitted fields, who, for days on end, approaching a certain death, crouch in encircled nests heaped with corpses, only half alive beneath glowing machine guns. They are the best of the modern battlefield, suffused with the reckless spirit of the warrior, whose iron will discharges in clenched, well-aimed bursts of energy.

When I observe how they silently cut lanes through the tangles of barbed wire, dig stepped assault trenches, compare their luminescent watches, and orient themselves towards north by the stars, then I am overcome with recognition: this is the new man, the storm pioneer, the elite of Central Europe. A whole new race, smart, strong, and filled with will. What reveals itself here as a vision will tomorrow be the axis around which life revolves still faster and faster. The path will not always, as here, have to be forged through shell craters, fire, and steel; but the double-quick step with which events are prosecuted here, the tempo accustomed to iron, that will remain the same. The glowing twilight of a declining age is at once a dawn in which one arms oneself for new, for harder battles. Far behind, the gigantic cities, the hosts of machines, the empires, whose inner bonds have been rent in the storm, await the new men, the cunning, battle-tested men who are ruthless toward themselves and others. This war is not the end but the prelude to violence. It is the forge in which the new world will be hammered into new borders and new communities. New forms want to be filled with blood, and power will be wielded with a hard fist. The war is a great school, and the new man will bear our stamp.

Yes, it is now in its element, my old shock troop. The deed, the stroke of the fist, has torn away the fog. Already there comes a quiet joke across the shoulder of the trench. It is perhaps not tasteful to ask: "Well, fatso, are you up to your slaughter weight?" Nevertheless—they laugh, and fatso most of all. Just don't be moved. The festival is about to begin, and we are its princes.

It is a pity nonetheless. If the advance troops fail to penetrate, if just *one* machine gun remains intact on the other side, these splendid men will be cut down like a herd of deer. That is war. The best and most worthy, the highest embodiment of life, is just good enough to be cast into its insatiable maw. One machine gun, just a second's gliding of the cartridge

belt, and these twenty-five men—one could cultivate a sizeable island with them—will hang in tattered bundles from the wire, left slowly to decompose. They are students, cadets with proud old names, mechanics, heirs to fertile estates, saucy big city sorts, and high school students, from whose eyes the Sleeping Beauty dream of some kind of ancient nest has not entirely drifted away. Peasant sons, grown up beneath the lonely thatched roofs of Westphalia or the Lüneburger Heide, ringed by the primeval oaks planted by their forebears around the surrounding fence of stone.

In the neighboring regiment on the left there bursts a storm of fire. It is a feinting maneuver, to confuse and split enemy artillery. It is just about time. Now the task is to gather oneself. Yes, it is perhaps a pity. Perhaps as well we are sacrificing ourselves for something inessential. But no one can rob us of *our* value. Essential is not *what* we are fighting for, but *how* we fight. Onward toward the goal, until we triumph or are left behind. The warriors' spirit, the exposure of oneself to risk, even for the tiniest idea, weighs more heavily in the scale than all the brooding about good and evil. That is what gives even the knight of the rueful countenance his awe-inspiring aura. We want to show what we have in us; then, if we fall, we will truly have lived to the full.

9

KURT TUCHOLSKY

The Spirit of 1914

First published as "Der Geist von 1914," *Die Weltbühne* 20, no. 32 (August 7, 1924), 204–209.

The wave of drunkenness which overtook the country ten years ago has left behind many hung-over people who know no other cure for their hangover than to become drunk again. They have learned nothing.

Today the spiritual foundation on which Germany rests is no different from that when it was founded. No spiritual experience has touched the country, for the war was none. It changed bodies into cadavers, but it left the spirit completely untouched. 1879–1914–1924: the years differ only in their terminology. 1914 is the logical consequence of the founding years of the Wilhelmine Reich. Nothing has changed. [. . .]

After the cease-fire, of which the center parties in their endless folly were themselves signatories—over there, [General Ferdinand] Foch, here in Germany [Matthias] Erzberger—came the horrible fear for the purse. And that finished everything.

The all-but-childish dread of a bolshevism that could never have lasted in Germany—that indeed was not intellectually prepared in the slightest here, and could not ever have won a place for itself in a country with such a high level of civilization—this fear was ultimately the most profound expression of the unalterability of the old way of thinking. It was the old spirit of 1914. And it had its firm principles, which were valid in 1875, were valid during the war, and remain just as valid today. These principles are, among others:

One need not be anything—one must become something. Superiors are always right. If you earn money, look around at the same time for a suitable philosophy that makes you "right." You never have to wonder how anyone else is feeling; act as if you were the only one in the world. It's all not so bad. Authority conveys rights, not duties.