"World Dominion or Downfall"

By Louis C. Fraina

THE issues of the Great War are being defined by the decision of events. The complex causes of the war, its swift precipitation and multiplicity of issues involved, combined to obscure the central issue at stake. As events moved this issue emerged and clarified itself; the initial intentions of either side were not the determinant factor.

Whatever Germany may claim to be fighting for, it is now clear in the light of recent events that Germany's stake in the war is *world dominion or downfall.*

It was within the choice of Germany, as the aggressor nation and the most powerful military group, to decide what the central issue was to be. At the outset of the war, the military superiority of Germany determined the scope of the military operations; and its subsequent actions determined the central issue at stake.

Not that the decision of Germany was necessarily conscious or pre-determined. The defensive France of the Revolution developed into the aggressive France of Napoleon solely through the action of events. The Napoleonic wars started as a defensive offensive, as a colossal effort to defend France by crushing its enemies on their own soil. Events transformed the defensive offensive into an aggressive offensive, and Napoleon and France were soon fighting for the hegemony of Europe.

It may be perfectly true that Germany assumed the offensive as the best means of defending itself; so did revolutionary France. But the situation created thereby has developed forces and a momentum of its own, becoming the controlling factor. Whatever the motives of Germany, the logic of events demonstrates that in determining the general strategy of the war it determined the immediate issue for itself—*the hegemony of Europe.*

In German parlance, "military necessity" has an ultimate as well as an immediate meaning. In a nation in which militarism is the supreme arbiter and war a conscious instrument of imperial policy, "military necessity" is generally identical with "political necessity." There was probably a well-defined though latent purpose to conquer Belgium, a purpose that asserted itself at the psychological moment and combined with immediate "military necessity" to dictate the unprovoked and brutal invasion of Belgium.[1]

Assuming the offensive against France is another fact which proves the aggressive purposes of the German government. Germany defending itself on the Rhine frontier would have been impregnable, inexpugnable, particularly in view of the enormous power of the defensive in modern warfare. Its offensive against France was dictated by other than purely military considerations—by considerations of a general policy to crush France as a prelude to the domination of Europe.

General Bernhardi, in *Germany and the Next War,* shows clearly that the "military necessity" for assuming the offensive against France lay in the German desire to dispose of France as a competing power in Europe:

"In one way or another we must square our account with France if we wish for a free hand in our international policy. This is the first and foremost condition of a sound German policy, and since the hostility of France once for all cannot be removed by peaceful overtures, the matter must be settled by force of arms. France must be so completely crushed that she can never again come across our path."

And Bernhardi emphasizes his conclusion that Germany must "annihilate once for all the French position as a Great Power."

It is perfectly clear that the campaign Germany decided upon at the outset of the war implied the conquest of Belgium and the permanent crushing of France, that is to say, the hegemony of Europe. An early victory would not have meant world-dominion. Bernhardi's famous diagnosis of the stake involved in Germany's next war, "World dominion or downfall," was not true during the early stages of the war. But it has become true since; and whatever Germany's conscious aims may be, *recent events demonstrate that Germany is now fighting for world stakes, and that a German victory would mean German world dominion.*

The significance of the torpedoing of the Lusitania

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[1] Paul Vergnet, in *France in Danger,* quotes the following words of Daniel Frymann:

"It is impossible to abandon the mouth of the Rhine to Anglo-French domination or influence, for it is contrary to nature that Germany should not possess the outlet to the sea of her most important way of communication. It is impossible to leave the coast of the North Sea in the hands of these States (France and England). It is impossible to tolerate little States on our north-west frontiers, which give no guarantee against violations of neutrality on the part of England and France, and which, on the contrary, would gladly afford supporting points to our enemies. Hence we must insist that as soon as opposition between Germany and France or England leads to warlike complications, Belgium and Holland must be called upon to choose between those States and the German Empire."

This may be the opinion of a minority, but it is a minority that becomes dominant in times of war. (There was no immediate "military necessity" for the invasion of Holland; but it is indisputable that, Belgium conquered and retained, Holland would not long remain an independent nation. It is now openly being stated in Germany that at the end of the war Holland must be compelled to join the *Zollverein*).

The economic need for the conquest of Belgium was recently expressed by the *Kölnische Zeitung,* which counts so confidently on a permanent occupation of Belgium by Germany that it suggests the building of a canal from the Rhine at Düsseldorf to Antwerp and Zeebrugge:

"Only a German opening to the Rhine can rectify the mischances of nature and history which have placed the seacoast so far from our coal mines and frontiers. From the German Rhine through German territory to the German Sea, that is what we have to aim at in building a canal from the Rhine to the sea.

"It is this direct communication with the interior of Germany which would save so much expense, time, and labor in the transport of our coal and goods, and which would free our import trade from being handled in English and other seaports, and thus save us all that intermediate trade and the expense of loading and harbor dues."

is obscured by humanitarian cant, German metaphysical dishonesty and callous sentimentalism, and the emphasis on rules of war and international law. All these are minor considerations. It is perfectly true that the torpedoing of the Lusitania was a crime against civilization, a brutal expression of a systematic campaign of terrorism, a violation of international law. But the significance of an event historically cannot be measured legally or ethically. *The torpedoing of the Lusitania was a poignant emphasis, a final proof of what Germany's campaign against neutral ships had already made clear: Germany has declared war upon the world.*

It is true that the German may justly interject: "Not at all; it is the world that has been fighting Germany."

But discussion of priority and justification does not at all impair the fact that Germany *is* fighting the world and that the stake for Germany is now world dominion or downfall.[2]

Germany stands condemned at the bar of international opinion. It stands condemned because of its invasion of neutral rights, its violations of international law, its cynical philosophy of the omnipotence of the sword. It stands condemned—and this is the greatest count in the indictment against Germany—because the world feels itself menaced by a victory of the German sword.

This is a war of economics. The economic resources of the world are at the service of the Allies. The military superiority of Germany has been demonstrated, its defeat must be consummated by the economic superiority of the Allies, and all the world is contributing to that end. In this sense, the neutral nations are fighting Germany as much as the Allies, and ultimately perhaps just as effectively. It *is* a world war.

The whole world, accordingly, is morally and economically arrayed against Germany; and should victory perch upon its banners Germany may justly claim having beaten the world. Under these circumstances victory would mean world dominion for Germany and make the German sword the arbiter of world events.

The consequences of German victory would have incalculable and calamitous consequences. German world dominion must necessarily be aggressive, and not essentially pacific as that of Great Britain. The Empire of Great Britain has been consummated, and it is now solely a question of conserving the Empire. Germany, on the contrary, would have to carve out its empire, which would obviously imply aggression. The threat to the peace of the world is clear, and menacing.

[2] There is no claim here that the German nation desired world dominion or would have invited war to secure it. This aspiration, articulate and aggressive as it was, was the aspiration of a small group. It was a latent aspiration tht could assert itself and control events only in a favorable situation. The ultimate purposes of belligerents are seldom conscious at the outset; they depend upon events, become conscious and well-defined by the action of events. And there is no denying that the situation Germany is now in favors the elements aspiring after the feudal dream of universal empire.

The impossibility of permanent German world dominion—the fact that in this age economics are ultimately more powerful than the sword—does not alter the fact that the temporary dominion of Germany would threaten the peace and security of the world. German victory would be a prelude to another world war.

An international situation dominated by the threat of war would retard the normal development of international economics. It would emphasize the national phase of Capitalism, modify and soften class divisions, and produce a new series of international military antagonisms. In spite of Capitalism's use of militarism as an instrument, militarism is not an indispensable and normal phase of Capitalism. Germany's victory would impose a new and mightier militarism upon the world, drain its economic and political resources and crush its libertarian aspirations. The economic consequences alone would be enormously disastrous. Germany would levy economic tribute upon other nations, retard their economic growth in order to aggrandize its own national Capitalism.

The cultural dangers are just as acute as the economic. German militarism, unlike the militarism of other nations (Japan possibly excepted) is not alone an instrument of war: it is a philosophy, a method of government, a system of civilization. It means the crushing of the individual, the military regimentation of man, the apotheosis of the material and the mass. Culturally, the Great War may be said to be the contest of two conceptions of civilization—the human and the psysical, the spiritual and the material, the individualist and the militarist. The Allies are the unconscious and imperfect representatives of the one, Germany the conscious and perfect representative of the other.

The neutral nations cannot allow, must not allow Germany to win. Germany must be beaten if it takes the whole world to do it. The internal system of Germany became an international problem as soon as "Germanism" crossed its own frontiers and threatened other nations. The war became a concern of the whole world as soon as the situation showed that Germany's stake was world dominion. Accordingly, the neutral nations must "be in" on the terms of peace; they must organize to demand a hearing at the congress that will settle the issues of the war. The Allies, the rancor and hatred of battle still strong within them, may subordinate the larger international issues to aggrandizement and the humiliation of Germany. This would be a calamity, which the neutral nations can avert. The democratic interests of the world must dictate the terms of peace, not the interests of the Allies alone,—terms of peace, that must carry guarantees of future peace and security.

Germany's foreign policy is part and parcel of her home policy—as was the foreign policy of the third

Napoleon. In a letter to Marx during the early part of Franco-Prussian War, Engels gives the reasons for desiring the defeat of France:

"If Germany is defeated by Napoleon, Bonapartism is then established for many years to come, and Germany may be bankrupt for a generation. It will then be useless to talk about an independent German labor movement, for the struggle for national existence will then consume all energy, and at best the German workers will drag on behind the French. On the other hand, if Germany wins, then Bonapartism is, at any rate, finished, and the everlasting talk about the union of Germany will come to an end, as it will be accomplished.

"The German workers can then organize themselves on a much more rational basis than they could before; and no matter what kind of government France gets, the French workers will, at any rate, get more freedom than under Bonapartism. . . . Napoleon could not have made this war except for the chauvinism that rules the great mass of the French people, including the workers, especially those occupied in the building trades in the great cities that have come under the influence of Bonaparte. Until this chauvinism gets a sound ducking, peace between Germany and France is impossible. We could have expected that a proletarian revolution would have undertaken this work; but now that we have the war, the Germans will have to do it, and that as quickly as possible."[3]

The Napoleon the Third of contemporary Europe is Wilhelm the Second of Germany. The reasons Engels urged for the defeat of Bonapartism may be urged in greater measure for the defeat of Kaiserism. ,"Downfall" does not mean the downfall of Germany as a nation or a people. It means the downfall of Kaiserism, militarism and Junkerism—the downfall of German Empire but not of German nationality. "Germany could not have made this war except for the chauvinism that rules the great mass of the German people, including the workers. Until this chauvinism gets a sound ducking peace between Germany and France, and peace in the world, is impossible. We could have expected that a proletarian revolution would have undertaken this work; but now that we have war, the Allies will have to it, and that as quickly as possible."

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[3] Quoted by Gustav Bang, in "Marx' and Engels' Forty Years' Correspondence." *International Socialist Review*, February, 1915.