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Germany's War Guilt

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IN countries outside Germany one continually meets with articles, many of them by eminent journalists, expressing the opinion that the pacification of Europe is being thwarted by the continuance of the controversy over the war-guilt question. Some of these journalists think that the time has not yet come for any final judgment on this vexed question and that the eternal discussion of opposing views with regard to it merely hampers the policy of peace which is so essential for Europe's welfare. On the other hand they grant that in spite of all attempts that have been made to smooth over the difficulties that divide Europe the protests against the Versailles view of Germany's responsibility are being urged with the same emphasis and stubbornness as ever.

Attempts to bring about a Franco-German understanding make so little headway mainly because the great bulk of the French nation still imagines that the Germans systematically planned and prepared the World War and that in 1914 they would have fallen upon France without any action whatever on the part of Poincaré and Isvolski. This belief alone renders it possible for the French Government of today to cling to Poincaré's policy of keeping the French garrisons in the Rhenish occupied provinces despite the Treaty of Locarno and the meeting at Thoiry. At the same time France's own war equipment, which is such a constant menace to Germany, is kept almost undiminished. An understanding between the Germans and the French, however, is impossible as long as French soldiers are stationed on the Rhine and the German civilian population is again and again irritated by the verdicts of French military tribunals. Only by getting rid of the prevailing French ideas concerning the outbreak of the war can a new mood be created in that country. Some such change of mood is essential as a preliminary for a withdrawal of the Rhenish garrisons.

A second consideration which makes the revision of the war-guilt dogma necessary is the fact that among the Germans it is now increasingly recognized that the burden laid upon the German nation by the Dawes Plan and the tribute that has to be raised for the most part by the self-sacrifice and hard work of the German laboring classes represent a demand unjustly made upon Germany, a demand moreover which the Germans themselves will eventually not be able to tolerate. There is a very strong sense of right and wrong among the Germans, and when once the masses of the workmen and peasants, as well as the army of unemployed and the lower grades of the proletariat, have really come to understand that the payment of two and a half milliard marks (\$500,500,000) which Germany has to raise every year is based upon an unjust award, the consequences may be serious.

In German and foreign intellectual circles there is now a conviction that the Versailles dogma of Germany's sole responsibility for the war is without scientific foundation. In saying this we must remember that the mistaken verdict of Versailles was itself the result of a scientific investigation undertaken by authorized persons belonging to the

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Peace Delegation appointed by the Entente. This delegation pronounced its judgment, however, on the basis of material that was incomplete and in part even falsified. The procedure was, in short, as follows:

In 1919 the so-called Preliminary Peace Conference sat in Paris and at a full session on January 25 resolved to appoint a committee of fifteen members who among other things had the task of drawing up for the conference a report on the responsibility of those who began the war. On this committee there were representatives of the United States, Great Britain, France, Italy, Japan, Belgium, Greece, Poland, Rumania, and Serbia. The whole world in fact was represented. Among the Americans Lansing and Scott were conspicuous, while among the English Sir Gordon Hewart and Sir Ernest Pollock may be mentioned; M. Tardieu was one of the French delegates, while Signor Scialoja represented Italy and M. Politis Greece. The committee presented its report to the Peace Conference on March 29, 1919. In the report itself the committee arrived at the following conclusion:

The war was premeditated by the Central Powers as well as by their allies, Turkey and Bulgaria, and was the result of acts deliberately committed with the intention of making it inevitable.

Germany in accord with Austria-Hungary deliberately worked to set aside the numerous conciliatory proposals put forward by the Entente Powers and to bring to naught their repeated efforts to avoid war.

For the conclusions stated in this report the delegates used chiefly the so-called Color Books, published by the European governments in 1914 and containing the diplomatic correspondence that had taken place between the European cabinets before the outbreak of the war. From the Russian documents published since the war by the Soviet Republic it is clear that the Russian Orange Book of 1914 was not only incomplete in every respect but that a great number of its documents were forged. That the documents published by France in 1914 contained considerable gaps and were in part forged is also sufficiently notorious. Another proof of the insufficiency of the Color Books of 1914 is afforded by the recently issued British Documents on the Origins of the War. This collection of documents shows that the Blue Book of 1914 contained only a fragment, a mere quarter of the documents actually available, and that through its omissions and alterations of sequence it could not but lead to conclusions which were in no way in keeping with the actual state of affairs at the outbreak of the war.

The new British documents demonstrate moreover various falsifications of the French Yellow Book that had hitherto remained unnoticed. By means of these falsifications the French aimed at creating the impression that Germany's military preparations shortly before the outbreak of the war were far in advance of the corresponding French measures. In reality the exact contrary was the case. In order to attain their end the publishers of the French Yellow Book did not hesitate to employ the crudest form of falsification by altering certain dates in their own favor.

From this brief statement of the facts it will be clear that the committee appointed in 1919 by the Entente to

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examine the question of war responsibility drew up its report on the basis of an insufficient, incomplete, and falsified mass of material.

It goes without saying that no reproach is to be made against the members of the committee for this state of affairs. At the time the members could not doubt the official material placed at their disposal for the purpose of their investigation. The members of the committee themselves had no opportunity of checking the genuineness and completeness of the documents by consulting the archives of the various governments. The blame therefore rests not upon the members of the committee but upon the governments concerned.

The practical question now arises: What is to be done in order to make good this glaring injustice? In our opinion there are two alternatives.

As it is impossible to doubt the good faith of the members of the committee, it is to be expected that as soon as they are informed of the facts as cited above they will notify their governments that they can no longer identify themselves with the report in question.

Should, however, the members of the committee not take this view, a strong appeal should be made to the public in the countries in question with the object of getting the governments concerned to recognize the necessity of revising the verdict as to Germany's war guilt and of annulling the report as early as possible. This argument gains added weight when we consider that Germany up to the present loyally fulfilled all the obligations forced upon it by the Treaty of Versailles.