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Who Broke the Disarmament Treaty of Versailles?

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In November of 1918, when the German people - trusting in the assurances given in Wilson's Fourteen Points - surrendered after 4½ years of heroic resistance in a war whose outbreak they had never desired, they believed that in doing so they had done a service not only to tormented humanity but also to a great Idea *per se*. While they themselves were suffering the most under the consequences of this insane struggle, the millions of Germans trustingly reached out to the idea of a reconfiguration of international relations which was to be ennobled by the elimination of secret diplomacy as well as of the terrible means of war.

Perhaps no other nation has welcomed the idea of a *League of Nations* as eagerly as the German one, deserted by all earthly happiness. Only in this context is it understandable that the at times downright senseless conditions of destruction of each and every means of defense was not only accepted but also carried out by the German people. The German people and particularly their government at that time were convinced that meeting the disarmament stipulations set out by the Treaty of Versailles *would initiate and guarantee the beginning of international, general disarmament, as promised by the Treaty.* For only such a bilateral fulfilment of this obligation imposed by the Treaty could justify a demand which, if imposed and carried out one-sidedly, could not but have turned into an eternal disparagement and thus a declaration of inferiority of a great nation. In light of this, however, such a peace treaty could never be the prerequisite for a true inner reconciliation of nations and thus a herald of global peace; it could only be the prerequisite for an eternally festering hatred.

According to the assessment of the inter-Allied Control Commission, Germany has met the disarmament obligations imposed on her.

The following are the works of destruction of the German defense forces and their means, as confirmed by this Commission:

A. Army weapons that were destroyed:

59,897 artillery guns and barrels,
130,558 machine guns,
31,470 mortars and barrels,
6,007,000 rifles and carbines,
243,937 machine gun barrels,
28,001 gun carriages,
4,390 mortar carriages,
38,750,000 larger caliber shells,
16,550,000 hand and rifle grenades,
60,400,000 live fuses,
491,000,000 hand weapon munitions,
335,000 tons of cartridges,
23,515 tons of cartridge cases,
37,600 tons of gunpowder,
79,500 ammunitions dismantlers,
212,000 telephones,
1,072 flame throwers,
31 armored trains,
59 tanks,
1,762 surveillance vehicles,
8,982 wireless stations,
1,240 field bakeries,
2,199 pontoons,
981.7 tons of equipment for soldiers,
8,230,350 sets of equipment for soldiers,
7,300 pistols and revolvers,
180 machine gun sleds,
21 mobile workshops,
12 anti-aircraft gun carriers,
11 heavy-duty gun carriers,
64,000 steel helmets,
174,000 gas masks,
2,500 machines of the former war industry,
8,000 rifle barrels.

B. Air force weapons that were destroyed:

15,714 fighter and bomber planes,
27,757 airplane engines.

C. Naval weapons that were destroyed:

26 capital ships,
4 armored coastal patrol boats,
4 armored cruisers,
19 small cruisers,
21 training and special ships,
83 torpedo boats,
315 submarines.

Further, the following had to be destroyed:

Vehicles of all kinds, means for gas warfare and some for protection from gas, propellants and explosives, floodlights, sighting devices, distance and sound range finders, optical instruments of all kinds, horse harnesses, narrow gauge railway equipment, field printing presses, field kitchens, workshops, cutting and stabbing weapons, steel helmets, materials for the transport of ammunition, standard and special machines of the war industry, as well as jigs, blueprints of the same, ship and airplane hangars, etc.

After this historically unparalleled fulfilment of a contract, the German people were entitled to expect the discharge of the obligations agreed upon by the other side as well. For:

1. Germany had disarmed.

2. The peace treaty had expressly demanded that Germany was to be disarmed as a prerequisite for a general disarmament, that is, it was thereby claimed that Germany being armed was the sole reason why the other nations were also armed.

3. In their governments as well as in their political parties, the German people were at that time of a mind-set which completely lived up to the pacifist-democratic ideals of the League of Nations.

But while Germany had fulfilled her obligations, the other parties to the contract neglected to fulfil their own.

That is, the high contracting officials of the former victor nations unilaterally broke away from the obligations of the Treaty of Versailles.

It was not enough, however, that any disarmament comparable in any way to the

German destruction of arms was dispensed with; no:

the arming process was not even halted. Quite the contrary, further escalation became evident in a whole number of nations.

In terms of new machinery of destruction, what had been invented during wartime was now being perfected with methodical, scientific work during peacetime. Continual improvements were being made in the creation of powerful land tanks as well as new fighting and bombing machines. New and gigantic artillery was being built, new explosive, incendiary and gas bombs were being manufactured.

Since then, the world has resounded with war-cries just as though there had never been a world war and as though a Treaty of Versailles had never been signed.

In the midst of these nations heavily armed for war and availing themselves increasingly of the newest motorized forces, Germany was a defenseless power void and at the mercy of any threat. The German people remember the misfortune and tragedy of 15 years of economic impoverishment and political humiliation.

It was thus understandable that Germany began to urge that the other nations should keep their own promise of disarmament. For this much is clear:

A hundred years' peace would have to be an immeasurable blessing for the world. A hundred years' split into victors and vanquished, however, is something the world cannot bear.

The urging of the people resulted in attempts to achieve, through conferences, a general decrease in the level of armament.

In this way, the first proposals for international armament agreements developed, of which the **Macdonald Plan** was most significant.

Germany was prepared to accept this plan and to make it the foundation for agreements.

The Macdonald Plan failed because it was rejected by other nations. Since the equality that had been solemnly guaranteed the German people in the declaration of December 1932 did not come about under these circumstances, the new German government, in its role as the guardian of the German people's honor and natural rights, saw itself no longer able to participate in such conferences or to remain in the League of Nations.

But even after leaving Geneva, the German government was still willing to not only consider proposals by other nations, but also to advance suggestions of its own. In doing so, it espoused the view coined by the other nations themselves, that the creation of *short-term* armies is unsuitable for attack purposes and is thus to be recommended for peaceful defense.

Therefore the German government was prepared to change the long-term

Reichswehr into a **short-term army** in accordance with the other nations' wishes. Its proposals of winter 1933/34 were feasible. However, their rejection, and the rejection of similar Italian and British outlines, showed

that there was no longer any inclination among the other parties to the Treaty of Versailles towards even a belated fulfilment of the spirit of the disarmament stipulations of Versailles.

Under these circumstances, the German government saw itself compelled to take the initiative towards those necessary measures that could ensure an end to the no less degrading than dangerous condition of a great people's and nation's impotent defenselessness.

It based this action on the same consideration that **Minister Baldwin** had expressed so aptly:

"A nation that is not willing to take the necessary precautionary measures for its own defense will never have any power in the world, neither of the moral nor of the material kind."

But the government of today's German Reich desires only one moral and material power, namely *to be able to safeguard the peace for the Reich and thereby probably also for all of Europe.*

Thus, the German government has continued to do whatever was in its power and could serve to promote peace.

1. A long time ago already, the German government offered to conclude non-aggression pacts with its neighboring countries.
2. With its eastern neighbor, Poland, the German government has sought and reached a contractual settlement which, thanks to great accommodation and understanding, will hopefully have defused the menacing situation which the government was faced with at the time it took power, and which it hopes will lead to a lasting understanding and friendship between the two peoples.
3. Finally, the German government has given **France** the solemn assurance that after the question of the Saarland has been settled, it will make no further territorial demands or requests of France. The government believes that through this great political and material sacrifice of a historically uncommon kind, it has created the prerequisite for ending a centuries-old quarrel between two great nations.

To its regret, however, the German government has seen *that a continued escalation of the arms process is taking place in the rest of the world.* In the creation of a Soviet-Russian army of 101 divisions, i.e. an admitted peacetime strength of 960,000 men, it discerns a danger that could not be anticipated at the time the Treaty of Versailles was drawn up.

In the heightening of similar measures by the other nations, the German government sees further proof that these nations have rejected the once solemnly proclaimed disarmament contract. The German government does not wish to bring accusations against any one nation; but it must point out that

by deciding to introduce a two-year period of military service, France has given up on the principle of *short-term* armies in favor of a long-term army.

This principle, however, was one of the reasons for the earlier demand that Germany should relinquish her army.

Under these circumstances, the German government feels that it is impossible to continue to suspend the measures necessary for the security of the Reich, much less to keep the rest of the world from knowing of these measures.

If, therefore, it complies with the British Minister *Baldwin's* wish and clarifies German intentions, this is done

- 1.** in order to give the German people the conviction, and the other nations the understanding, that the preservation of the German Reich's honor and security is now again *entrusted to the German nation's own power*;
- 2.** in order to refute, by declaring the extent of these measures, those assertions with which the German people are accused of striving for military supremacy in Europe.

The German government as guardian of the honor and interests of the German nation desires to secure the necessary extent of those instruments of power that are required to preserve the intactness of the German Reich and to ensure the international regard for and consideration of Germany as fellow guarantor of general peace.

At this time the German government reaffirms, both to the German people and to the world, its determination that its rearming shall not be for military aggression, but a pledge for its defense and thus for the preservation of peace.

The German government hereby expresses the confident hope that as the German people find their way back to their honor, they will - in the spirit of independent equality - be granted the chance to make their contribution to the pacification of the world in free and open co-operation with the other nations and their governments.

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