

WAR AND POLITICS IN GERMANY

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WHAT Germany has suffered in Russia is more than a military defeat. Something very close to a catastrophe has befallen her. Comparison of that winter retreat with the Battle of the Marne in the previous war indicates how grave are the results that must ensue for Germany.

I

The German Command must in these months have been pondering the question "Is it still possible to win?" That General Staff, which keeps an accurate register of everything learned from the previous war—especially of German mistakes and causes of German defeat—has not neglected to draw the principal lesson. Timely end should be put to a war by the side which has no longer any reasonable chance of winning. But *when* may we conclude that no chance is left in a war? A good military maxim supplies an answer: *No war is a paying enterprize when it has lasted more than six months.* The great mistake in Germany's conduct of the war of 1914-1918 lay in this, that after the losses in the Battle of the Marne she failed to recognize the frustration of her original military plan. This destroyed all likelihood of a complete victory. A bler political leadership of Germany would have drawn thence the logical conclusion—to bring the war to an end, and to play for a compromise peace. But this was not done.

Can those with such instructive experience think it still probable that Germany will win in the present Russian campaign? By comparison with last year, the tactical position for launching a second offensive seems indeed more favorable. Strong advanced positions are still being held. The Russian offensive has entangled itself in the wiry German defence system of "hedgehog or mollusc." On the other hand, what renders improbable a collapse of the German resistance renders also more difficult a new offensive by the German armies. They would lack the essential opportunity of a surprise. The deeper a defence system goes, and the deeper the whole battle-zone,

though in a second spring or summer offensive the German armies should push on beyond Moscow and Leningrad to the Volga, Russia would remain still unconquered so long as her armies could maintain an orderly resistance. There would be repetition of what happened last year—the much feared frontal “squeeze” by enemy forces, without decisive military result. Care for those long communications backward, and for the “occupied” territory, would absorb the vital strength needed for the German attack.

The most serious change for the worse in Germany's strategic situation lies in the threat from England to her rear. She must this year apprehend strenuous and dangerous offensive action in the West. No longer is there the immunity for her rear which she had in 1941. It seems plain that the British fighting forces are ready for action over a considerable stretch of the continent of Europe. The British Command has all the factors of surprise in its favor, and has the opportunity of choice. Germany has to fear such movements simultaneously in Norway, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, Northern and Southern France. Such attacks at different points could become specially formidable because the population in the occupied districts, relying on the British army of invasion, would deploy their own forces of resistance. Hence the German Command must keep powerful garrisons in the West, and have ready a strong strategic reserve. No longer can that guardianship be left to troops of slight battle value. German troops of the quality competent for attack, already weakened by heavy losses, must in this way be weakened still further.

The Russian enemy has become expert in war. An astonishing versatility in tactics has been acquired by that High Command, an almost unsurpassable strength of will, and notable dexterity in the upper and middle ranks. Undoubtedly the Russian administration has managed its business, too, with great competence. It has large reserves at its disposal, not merely in man-power, but also in valuable equipment. One cannot assume that the proportion of strength has altered in Germany's favor.

II

Under such circumstances, is it sound policy to continue the war with Russia? Does not experience of the previous war compel the German leaders to discard the project with which

such unfavorable auspices? Here is a question which must have been raised of late in Germany with the utmost earnestness. But is there any alternative to taking up the offensive again against Russia? What other enterprizes could promise any better result, without a still greater risk? German military experts would no doubt advise that, before a further attack is made on Russia, the danger of being attacked in the rear through England should be cleared away. This would suggest that Germany continue in the present year, by action against England, the policy she pursued in 1941 when she secured the safety of her flank by a precautionary action in the Balkans. What is meant is a short forceful drive, with the purpose of paralysing England for an offensive war.

It would be expensive. It would also be very difficult to commend such a plan to the German people. Since it could lead to no decisive result, it must seem to the masses just a second failure. The expectations of the German people have been raised by many earlier addresses to far too high a pitch. Seizure of England and liquidation of Russia have been kept too prominent in German reckoning of what is ahead to leave a chance (in the political sense) for any partial measure such as this. From a military point of view, many reasons can be urged against it. Most convincing of all is the consideration that Germany must plan the conditions of sound management not only for man-power and for material, but also for that essential of the war business—*petroleum*. German directors must draw the inference from the defeat of the winter 1941-42, as the directors in 1914 did not draw the inference from the Battle of the Marne. What has happened indicates not only the need for a different decision on military push forward or a preparatory partial action: it likewise called for a thoroughly new joint military and political scheme. This would be a scheme with essentially reduced aims. It would be, perhaps, change to a great strategic defensive. Only the absolute essential is its military policy to bend energies for securing. Germany will then limit herself to the defence of what has been gained. At the same time, this would be very difficult for the enemy to attack.

In terms of the concrete: Germany and Italy need the Mediterranean Sea, North Africa, Asia Minor with its strategic and economic key positions, Syria, Iran, Irak: also the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. Such is the minimum Axis programme.

if they have oil from Iran and Iraq. Neither do they need to march on India and to make connection with Japan.

Destruction of the centralized, militarized, most highly armed Great Power called Russia was and remains truly an essential problem of German statecraft. Yet Germany might in this—the second world war, content herself with an intermediate solution. Such solution would be the establishment of big federations of States, with unity of economic system: Continental Europe and North Africa under German direction; likewise Russia and Siberia; China and India; Japan and Malaya; the British Commonwealth; North America with Central America; South America. In such a system of equilibrium, Russia might for a time serve as an advantageous counterweight for Germany.

III

Plainly only a sober-minded conduct of the war this year, limiting effort to what is most vitally needed, would give Hitler what may well be his last chance for a successful ending. But will he be able thus to deny himself a clutching after new and vast spectacular achievement? If he were indeed only the hysterical fool that many believe him to be, the "artist of mass-suggestion", the theatrical agitator, we might be sure that he would follow still further the lure of intoxicating victories. But he has given signs of a cautious and temperate mood, a power of reckoning out likely results in cold-blooded composure. For example, that disregard for all recollection of his own past, with which he summoned back again to their posts of command the very generals he had dismissed, was evidence that he was looking realistically at events, and was prepared to do whatever held promise of advantage, no matter how the change might reflect upon his own previous judgment. His last speech too, which was widely interpreted as a sign of dwindling confidence in victory, is on the contrary marked by strokes which were recognized in the past as tokens of his strength.

Undoubtedly grave conflicts of judgment appeared between Hitler and some of his most important generals. They disagreed about the fight in Russia. Hitler wanted to avoid what was then vitally necessary—retreat, after the example of the Battle of the Marne. To follow his reasons, it is needful to recall the controversies about the Battle of the Marne in the previous war. One school of criticism held that the loss of the war was due

which was then in progress. It blamed this abandonment upon a failure of nerve in the General Staff at that moment. Complete victory, it declared, would have been secure if the fight of that date in 1914 had been fought through to the end. The opposing school was of the opinion that the Battle of the Marne would have proved Germany's ruin if the war enterprise then in progress had not at that very point been dropped.

Hitler belongs to the devotees of the former theory. There is no doubt that he regarded victory in Russia as immediately within grasp. This time he was resolved that no prospect should be lost by any "failure of nerve". Hitler had openly, in conflict with the advice of the military experts, insisted that the fight in Russia must be prosecuted to a finish. The victory was postponed: but so was the catastrophe—widely feared—of something like the fate of Napoleon's Grand Army. One can well understand that the convulsion of these last months, during which the fate of the German armies seemed to hang on a thread, made at least a great difference to Hitler's way of thinking. The immense losses which the German forces of national defence sustained, probably not exaggerated at the figure of 1,500,000 dead, cannot be judged simply by number: the loss was qualitative as well as quantitative. It fell, in the main, on picked troops that it was impossible to duplicate. In Germany, on receipt of the news, the popular mood was one of deepest depression. It is idle to speculate about the rise of "a revolutionary impulse". But the war-weariness, the widespread damping of energy, must for the time have become intense. Recoil was all the greater because of the propaganda which had preceded, promising the German people immediate victory in Russia, and through Russia in the general war.

Victory over Russia in 1941 would indeed have made prosecution of the war through the British Commonwealth well nigh irresistible. The help from the United States would, as the National Socialists boasted, have been in that case too late to be effective. Hitler would have been in a position to make a first bid for peace. He would have begun to organize Europe anew. Probably he would have been able, after closing up the Mediterranean Sea, after taking possession of Iceland and other strategic points, and with the help of the French fleet which then might well have been handed over, to bring the Battle of the Atlantic to a decision. He would have endeavored, by increasing losses inflicted on British shipping,

peace would, no doubt, have been accompanied with the threat, that if this should be refused, Germany would take up war in company with Japan against the British Empire, a war which could have no other end than the total destruction of Britain. On the other side, the bid would include a promise to share in protecting England's position in the Pacific, in India, in Australia, in New Zealand against Japan, if England showed herself ready for peace. Such projects must, from Germany's point of view, have seemed altogether practicable. The situation was in her favor. Her total victory looked secure.

In the spring of 1941, the German directing class had just the situation towards which they had labored in vain in the previous war. Political leadership had achieved this result—to divide the war into isolated actions on different fronts, and to approach these different actions separately. 1941 was the year of the isolated war against Russia. It could be waged with the assembled strength of Germany, Italy, and their minor associate countries. A threat from the West through England was scarcely at that time, in view of the British equipment, seriously to be feared. The liquidation of the military strength of Soviet Russia seemed, in the jargon of military forecast, like a case of "sure death".

IV

Looking back, one can recall the year 1941 as a single chain of contradictory programs. Outwardly, the spring offensive was a succession of great military achievement. But the military successes did not bring the desired strategic and political fruit. Not a single one of the designed actions followed at the appointed time. In every single transaction, factors revealed themselves which had been misconceived by the German leaders. The basic error of German calculations, namely misinterpretation of Great Britain, worked out results. A second set of miscalculations, on which vast consequences depended, was in the false estimate of Russia. But that Russia was able to bring successfully into action the great military forces which she had prepared in secret, and was not compelled at the very outset to fight from a strategically hopeless position, she owed beyond doubt to the leadership of Britain. Through the actions in North Africa, in the Balkans, in Asia Minor, Britain had ensured that Germany in the spring of 1941 should not be able to drive through Turkey or—making a circuit round Turkey—through

from which she might threaten not India alone, but the Caucasus and the Russian defence front by taking it in flank and rear.

One may now assume that Germany in the previous year had in view the attack on Russia and the Caucasus oil district not only from the West, but—by a gigantic pincers movement—also from the South, that is from Asia Minor. Pushing West and East from the Caspian Sea to the East Russian steppes with tank divisions, she would have been able to destroy Russia's communications backward, and to make impossible an organized military resistance. To the English actions in the spring, although in a military sense these were defeats, Russia is indebted for compulsion of the Germans to abandon this plan, and to limit themselves to frontal attack from the West. An action with any prospect of success against Russia starting from Asia Minor would have required several months to prepare. Such time was not available, unless the season favorable for such military move—the opening of summer—was to be let slip.

The English action is a conspicuous example of the manner in which in this war political and military plans constitute—or should constitute—a unity. What from the standpoint of the professional soldier must be judged dangerous or wrong may, when one takes account also of the political direction of war, become necessary. The military support to Greece and Yugoslavia, which lengthened and indeed rendered possible the resistance of both countries, was doubtful as military action: this withdrawal of indispensable forces from Libya had a rapid sequel in loss of the area which had been conquered. Britain's move there ended in defeats and substantial sacrifices. Strategically, and in the political conduct of war, it was a clear, perhaps a decisive, British success. Thus, too, the British entry into Syria, with frustration of the pro-Axis groups in Iran and Irak, prevented the isolation and capitulation of Turkey. The action in the Balkans and in Crete cost Germany so much time that her whole plan was changed, and probably in one of its most significant features must—through want of time—be abandoned.

It is thus not merely the heroic resistance of Russia that has brought Germany into her present difficult military and political situation. It is also the superior political and military leadership of the small English forces. Plainly "the initiative" can yield fruit even when its tactical aims are not accomplished. The British initiative most probably brought in 1941 a decisive turning in the campaign.

still more: it may mean the turning point of the whole war. Germany certainly cannot take up again in 1942 the plan which in the previous year, despite exceptionally favorable circumstances, she was unable to execute. She will always aim, however, to secure for herself the advantages of the initiative. In the first part of both wars, Germany almost monopolized this. Now that she has been challenged, first by Britain, then (last winter) by Russia, she must try either to anticipate the hostile use of initiative or to paralyse that weapon in the enemy's hands. This complicates her plan.

V

In this plan, moreover, it is important to keep in mind that Germany dare not again risk a move backwards. An acknowledged defeat, or a further offensive action which remained clearly unsuccessful, would have the direst consequences for the temper of the German people. Though there is very little ground to think the public "morale" broken, it is true that the German strength is so over-taxed that little further strain would be needed to shatter nerves and composure. One must not let oneself be deceived by that superficial calm under which surge transformations in the spiritual situation of a people. Sooner or later, in the heavily over-strained German forces, there can be a repetition of the day so fixed in German history as eighth of August, 1918—the day which first brought home to the German Government that German troops are capable of a "strike"! After various warning symptoms, which the military commanders of middle rank overlook or by design refrain from emphasizing, memories of this sort suddenly break in with elemental strength. They take root fast, and are not to be shut out. A military force afflicted with such distracting thoughts is no longer serviceable.

Discords, too, in the High Command are a few warning indications that Germany has reached the limit of her capacity. But a *coup d'état* on the part of dissenting generals is in all respects less likely than ever. Cessation of military operations, under the leadership of relatively moderate elements of the German military command, and offer of peace from a régime other than National Socialist, has no longer any likelihood of acceptance by the United Nations before there is clearance of the occupied territories and a laying down of arms—that is to say, a repetition of the scene of 1918. There was more chance of such develop-

German leadership, out of accord with the sweeping designs of Hitler, were perhaps more ready to end the war with a compromise peace and to overthrow the Hitler régime. But this possibility is now quite excluded. Leaders and masses of the people are convinced that with them lies now collective responsibility for the future, and that no one can take it from them. This, beyond doubt, means a strengthening of German "morale" and unity. Nor is there doubt that the great upheaval of the Russian campaign, while it produced unfavorable effect on the composure of the people, had another outcome—in overcoming the tendencies to opposition and a self-complacency hostile to discipline.

How one should balance against each other the negative and the positive interpretations in the present German temperament, and how to assess the final resultant, is not to be fixed by an outsider. All the so-called disclosures from "inside-Germany" are unreliable. Such findings are a task extremely difficult for a German Institute of Psychology, working with scientific, subtle apparatus. They would be interpretations of the "subconscious", which works by intermittent thrusts. One may say, with reasonable confidence, "Germany has reached the extreme limit of her endurance capacity. She cannot sustain another retreat. But she has still in the present year great material and moral reserves at her disposal."

The decision which German leaders must make is essentially on this—whether to devote these reserves to a last external attack on the enemy, with a risk of using them up and achieving no decisive result, or to store these reserves and remain thus safeguarded against a foreign challenge. It is essentially a problem in psychology and state management which German leaders, as the plan of the present year unfolds itself, must encounter. Will they risk vast, costly and far-reaching measures of attack? Or will they limit themselves to the strengthening of strategic and political deficiencies, so as to continue from a military point of view on the defensive, and to work out a scheme of diplomatic initiative? There are several possibilities in choice of the former. A continued Russian offensive may be of somewhat less ambitious character: it may be carried out all by itself, or it may be included in resumption of last year's plan, namely, occupation of Asia Minor. It may proceed by general attack on Russia from Leningrad, Murmansk, the Black Sea, eastward from the Caspian, combined with a Japanese onslaught in summer upon the Siberian coast. Or again, there may be a

total reversal of direction, making the attack westwards the principal one. A point in its favor is that important English forces would be so shut up in Asia Minor as to be useless for an offensive. Also that Russia, although certainly great in self-defence, has never developed any conspicuous offensive capacities, and that owing to reasons of domestic politics she is unlikely to trespass across the boundary into Germany. It is recommended, too, by the reflection that a drive against England, an operation in narrow space, would require but a relatively small highly specialized body of troops, thus retaining the chief strength of German and Italian armies—men of but ordinary battle fitness—on the defence lines in the East. In theory one must reckon with the possibility of a huge invasion of the British Isles, not merely with a "War of Nerves". Perhaps only after the experiment of British offensives on the continent of Europe has been tried. It may be the German plan to let England wear herself out in such expeditions, and then—having trapped her forces on the continent—to make a counter-drive at the right psychological moment of shattered nervous system in the enemy.

VI

That there is to-day a great German plan of invasion, admits of no doubt. But it involves the biggest risk that an Army Command has yet accepted. Whether the German spirit is still equal to composed endurance of the vast sacrifice of life it must entail, may well be questioned. But yet another factor, different from "morale", may be decisive in the matter—I mean *petroleum*. Is Germany in a position to raise the enormous quantities of petroleum which a big offensive in either East or West would demand, without first filling up new oil reserves? Analysis of the war situation last year led to a similar enquiry, and made the demand of the German military management for assurance of adequate oil sources appear imperative. Germany has not been able to secure these new oil sources by her warfare in Russia. Nevertheless, she has not lost her winter campaign. Her existing stores turned out ampler than had been supposed. They have sufficed to meet the estimated consumption of about 1½ million barrels of oil each month during the main attack. But what is the supply situation now, on the eve of a new offensive? Is not the German need so much more stringent as to compel the drawing of a quite new war plan?

Undoubtedly invasion of England would demand less

would lead, if successful, straight to the rich oil resources of Europe. An offensive in England, even if partially successful, could come to a standstill through a drying up of the petrol reserves. Opening new sources for oil, by special military action against Iran at such a time, would have no real prospect. The situation of Germany regarding raw materials, although it appears so much better than in the previous war, may again decide this fight, and she may be forced—as in the time of General Ludendorff—to draw her plan with consideration of the indispensable petroleum, though it involve disregard of other important military factors. This handicap on free initiative may prove of vast significance for the decision of the war. This time again, as last year, all will depend on whether—and how far—the Allies in turn can adopt and keep their own initiative.

Their offensive can be fruitful in results only if it is conducted with correct appreciation of the German attitude of mind. The Nazi Command think in terms of power politics, and only secondarily in economic terms. Hitler's attack on Russia has been branded in foreign criticism as the Fuehrer's capital mistake. Foreign criticism is wrong there. Germany had, as already shown, the most favorable chance to put out of her way the one serious peril from a great power by which she was threatened. Not England, but Russia, is *the* danger for Germany. Here is the only power which by its steadily increasing population, its growing industries, its blend of centralized control with national spirit, besides being second only to the United States in wealth of raw material, is able to destroy Germany as a nation. Germany finds herself as related to Russia in a position of constant threat, like that of the European West as related to Germany. Destruction of the centralized Soviet power—the mixture of Slav with Northern Asiatic peoples—seems from the German point of view as urgent as it seemed to the leaders of France, ever since Cardinal Richelieu, to stop the creation of a vast unified system of German States.

Here, then, is the essence of the German political situation. That situation determines also the continuance of the war. One may take it as highly probable that Germany will feel obliged either to push on to victory the war she has begun against Russia or to go down in Russia to acknowledged defeat. If she conquers Russia, there is an end to her danger of "catastrophe". In that event, however the war may develop elsewhere,

been created. But if she cannot conquer Russia, and split the Soviet Union into its diverse racial elements, she has still a remaining chance on which the thought of certain radical groups—young officers, officials, intellectuals—turned for years: namely, close cooperation with Russia, old utopian dreams, doctrines and prejudices being thrown aside. Such radical solution, such “technocratic” combination for a huge continental Empire, might conceivably be brought about, if not through Hitler, then through certain other German groups in capitulating to Russia. Whether Russia would be ready for any such arrangement, is another question. Several million dead constitute, for a realistically thinking political leader, a serious obstacle.
