



The German Reply

Brockdorff-Rantzau reply memorandum

15 May 1919

AMERICAN COMMISSION TO NEGOTIATE PEACE

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Communication from Count Brockdorff-Rantzau, relative to the report of the Economic Commission.

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German Peace Delegation

Translation

Versailles, May 13, 1919

To His Excellency Mr. Clemenceau:

In accordance with my communication of May 9h of this year, I have the honor to present to your Excellency the report of the Economic Commission charged with the study of the effect of the Peace Terms on the situation of the German population.

"During the last two generations, Germany has been transformed from an agricultural state to an industrial state. While an agricultural state, Germany could nourish forty million inhabitants.

As an industrial State, it can assure the nourishment of a population of sixty-seven million. In 1913, the importation of goods amounted in round figures to twelve million tons. Before the war, a total of fifteen million persons found an existence in Germany by means of foreign commerce and navigation, either directly, or indirectly, by using our foreign raw materials.

Under the terms of the peace treaty, Germany is to give up her Merchant Marine and vessels now under construction suitable for foreign commerce. Likewise, for five years, German shipyards are to construct primarily a tonnage destined for the Allied and Associated Governments.

Moreover, Germany must renounce her Colonies; all her foreign possessions, all her rights and interests in the Allied and Associated countries, in their Colonies, Dominions or Protectorates are to be liquidated and credited to the payment of reparations, and are to be submitted to any other step of economic warfare that the Allied and Associated Powers may see fit to maintain or to take during the years of peace.

When the territorial clauses of the Peace Treaty go into effect Germany will lose in the East the most important regions for the production of wheat and potatoes, and this would be equivalent to a loss of twenty-one percent of the total harvest of these foodstuffs.

Moreover the intensiveness of our agricultural production would be greatly decreased. On the one hand, the importation of certain raw materials indispensable for the production of fertilizer, such as phosphates, would be hampered; on the other hand, this industry would like all other industries suffer from the shortage of coal.

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For the Peace Treaty provides for the loss of almost a third of the production of our coal fields; in addition to that loss, enormous deliveries of coal to various Allied countries are imposed on us for ten years.

In addition, in conformity to the Treaty, Germany will cede to her neighbors almost three-quarters of her ore production and three-fifths of her production of zinc.

After this privation of her produce, after the economic repression caused by the loss of her Colonies, of her Merchant Fleet and her foreign possession, Germany will no longer be in a position to import raw materials in sufficient quantities from abroad. As a matter of course an enormous part of German industry would thus be condemned to extinction. At the same time the need to import commodities would considerably increase, while the possibility of meeting this need would diminish to the same extent.

After a very short time Germany would therefore no longer be in a position to furnish bread and work to her many millions of persons forced to earn their daily bread by navigation and commerce. These people would have to emigrate; but this is materially impossible; all the more so, in that many countries, and the most important ones will oppose German immigration. In addition hundreds of thousands of Germans expelled from the territories of the Powers now at war with Germany, and from the Colonies and Territories which Germany must give up will come back to their native country.

The enforcement of the Peace Conditions would therefore logically entail the loss of several million persons in Germany. This catastrophe would not be long in occurring, since the health of the population has been broken during the war by the blockade and during the armistice by the increased vigor of the starvation blockade.

No assistance, however great and of however long duration could prevent these wholesale deaths. The Peace would impose upon Germany many times the number of human lives cost her by this war of four years and a half, (1,750,000 killed by the enemy; almost a million as a result of the blockade.)

We do not think and we do not believe that the delegates of the Allied and Associated Powers are aware of the consequences that will

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inevitably follow, if Germany, an industrial nation with a very dense population, closely bound up with the economic system of the world, and obliged to import enormous quantities of food and raw materials, finds herself suddenly thrown into a phase of her development corresponding to the period of her economic construction and the period when her population was the size it was a half century ago.

Those who sign this treaty, will sign the death sentence of many millions of German men, women and children.

I believe that my duty before beginning the discussion of other details of the treaty, lay in bringing to the attention of the Allied, and Associated Delegations, this summary of the problem facing the German people. At your request I hold ready for your excellency the statistical proof.

Kindly accept, etc.

Signed: **BROCKDORFF-RANTZAU.**