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A “WEAPON OF STARVATION”:
THE POLITICS, PROPAGANDA, AND MORALITY OF
BRITAIN’S HUNGER BLOCKADE OF GERMANY, 1914-1919

By

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DISSERTATION

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the requirements for

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the British naval blockade imposed on Imperial Germany between the outbreak of war in August 1914 and the ratification of the Treaty of Versailles in July 1919. The blockade has received modest attention in the historiography of the First World War, despite the assertion in the British official history that extreme privation and hunger resulted in more than 750,000 German civilian deaths. This revelation of a humanitarian disaster may be the main reason why the British government delayed public release of the history for nearly thirty years after its completion in the 1930s. Yet scholarship has focused on the initial establishment of the blockade, and the complex legal, economic, and diplomatic issues that made it ineffective during the first part of the war. Much less has been written about its subsequent evolution into a powerful weapon, and less still on the Allies' continuation of the blockade after the Armistice to compel German acceptance of the Treaty of Versailles.

Britain first implemented the naval blockade of Germany not as a merciless hunger blockade, but rather as a time-honoured maritime strategy intended to weaken the enemy's military resources and thereby assist the Allied land war on the Continent. However, its function changed over the course of the war, as Britain broadened the classes of goods subject to interdiction, from a traditional naval strategy focused on military supplies, into a much broader "weapon of starvation," in the words of Winston Churchill, the British Secretary of State for War, by 1918-1919. The aim of this dissertation is to illuminate how and why this military transformation occurred and detail some of the political and moral consequences of the blockade's expansion and its prolongation in full force through the whole of the treaty negotiations at Versailles.

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CHAPTER 1

FOOD AS A WEAPON, 1914-1919

Introduction

“All is fair,” remarked Admiral John Fisher in an April 1904 naval document on the tactics and strategies that Britain’s Royal Navy would employ in the event of war. The soon-to-be-appointed First Sea Lord qualified his remarks by asserting rather matter-of-factly “[that] moderation in war is imbecility.”¹ This statement was certainly indicative of the Admiralty’s blockade policy of Imperial Germany throughout the First World War. Indeed, Great Britain, France and, later, the United States maintained a rigorous naval blockade of Germany from August 1914 to July 1919 when the Treaty of Versailles was eventually ratified. The blockade has received relatively little attention in the historiography of the First World War, despite the assertion in the British official history that extreme privation and hunger resulted in more than 750,000 German civilian deaths² – a third of which occurred after 11 November 1918.³ While past scholarship has emphasized the blockade’s early imposition and its complex legal and economic framework, it has yet to sufficiently detail its use as an instrument of war and, equally, potent bargaining chip at the Paris peace table.

This doctoral dissertation has three primary objectives. Firstly, it will assess the political and military considerations that resulted in Britain’s tightening and prolongation of the blockade. It will seek to answer to what degree anti-German propaganda

¹ Admiral John Fisher, ‘Submarines,’ 20 April 1904, National Archives, ADM 116/942.

² Archibald C. Bell, *A History of the Blockade of Germany and the Countries Associated with Her in the Great War, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and Turkey, 1914-1918* (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1937), 672-674.

³ N. P. Howard, “The Social and Political Consequences of the Allied Food Blockade of Germany, 1918-1919,” *German History* 11, no. 2 (1993): 166.

influenced the British public and American official support for the denial of foodstuffs to Germany. Secondly, it will consider the impact of the blockade's prolongation after 11 November and the Allies' ability to ratify the Treaty of Versailles on 12 July 1919. Lastly, it will briefly explore the postwar legacy of the naval blockade in Britain and Germany. How did the British government and press, for example, reconcile the blockade as a "weapon of starvation"⁴ with the need to rebuild relations with Germany in the peace process? Does the "retention of the hunger blockade symbolize the great lost opportunity for postwar Europe... [where] the new reality was founded not upon Wilson's high principle but upon unnecessary starvation," as one historian has suggested?⁵

The majority of First World War blockade studies have approached the topic from a strictly economic perspective, on the one hand, or as operational military history, on the other.⁶ It is my intention to redress the historiographical imbalance by focusing on British civil-military relations in the latter war years and immediate post-Armistice period. These "politics of hunger"⁷ not only governed the British decision to employ a commercial blockade of the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Turkey, and, after October 1915, Bulgaria), it also informed Allied and German naval policy throughout the conflict and conditioned the uneasy peace settlement that was to follow.⁸ Thus, by limiting the study of British economic warfare to the early war years, the history

⁴ This phrase was first employed by Winston Churchill as British Secretary of State for War in March 1919 and it is from here that I derived the title of the dissertation. See, Suda Lorena Bane and Ralph Haswell Lutz, *The Blockade of Germany After the Armistice, 1918-1919* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1942), 744.

⁵ C. Paul Vincent, *The Politics of Hunger: The Allied Blockade of Germany, 1915-1919* (Ohio: University of Ohio Press, 1985), 164.

⁶ The works of S. N. Broadberry and Mark Harrison, *The Economics of World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) and Eric W. Osborne, *Britain's Economic Blockade of Germany, 1914-1919* (New York: Frank Cass, 2004) are an example of this economic approach, whereas Bell's official history is indicative of more traditional military history.

⁷ Vincent.

⁸ Bane and Lutz, esp. 430-495.

of the naval blockade has been written in a piecemeal fashion.

This thesis ultimately addresses the post-1915 period of the blockade's imposition and offers new insights on the Anglo-American and German war effort and peace negotiations in 1918-1919, as well as the morality of democratic states targeting civilians in war. I anticipate this work with its interdisciplinary focus and politically relevant discussions on propaganda and morality will be of interest to scholars in security studies and international relations, and, more significantly, to military and naval historians given the centenary of the First World War.

Historiography

Much of the early scholarship prior to the Second World War focused on the blockade's limited effectiveness from August 1914 until early 1916. The British government's two-decade-long suppression of its official histories only served to prolong the interwar assertion of inefficacy, which fitted the period's focus on the Treaty of Versailles as a failed and unjust peace.⁹ But the question as to whether Germany faced starvation in the latter war years has occupied much of the post-1945 scholarship. These works were influenced by the broader *Sonderweg* or "special path" trend in German historiography, which viewed 1914-1918 through the lens of the Second World War and the Third Reich. For example, Fritz Fischer's *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (1961) refuted the National Socialist charge that the *Kaiserreich* was defeated on the home front in 1918.¹⁰ A similar consensus prevailed among German economic historians in the late 1960s and 1970s, who rejected the notion that Imperial Germany experienced mass food shortages

⁹ Michael Graham Fry, "British Revisionism," in *The Treaty of Versailles: A Reassessment after 75 Years*, edited by Manfred F. Boemeke, Gerald D. Feldman, and Elisabeth Gläser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 565-602.

¹⁰ Fritz Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1967), 27-30.

and chronic malnourishment. More recently, historians and political scientists have again extended the discussion to Germany's home front. These works shed light on the political and economic dislocation that accompanied the Allied naval blockade. This recent scholarship has shown that to minimize the blockade's effectiveness would be to bypass a vital chapter of the First World War and postwar peace negotiations.

Three British official histories on the blockade were commissioned immediately following the Armistice; each was written by different historians and treated not as separate volumes but as companion pieces to James E. Edmonds' official history of the British Expeditionary Force, *Military Operations: France and Belgium*.¹¹ Lieutenant Commander William Arnold-Forster's *The Economic Blockade, 1914-1919: Before the Armistice and After* and H. W. C. Davis' *History of the Blockade* both appeared in 1920. Neither discussed the peace negotiations and instead concerned their analyses with the functioning of the blockade on a day-to-day basis throughout the First World War. Success was measured in stark economic terms; detailed charts and graphs recounted the weight and breakdown of enemy goods seized each month.¹² It was even estimated that the blockade resulted in German casualties equal to the 772,736 war dead of the British Expeditionary Force.¹³ One is left to wonder whether the prospect of having these statistics released was deemed too great a risk to British postwar credibility. It certainly would have added more grist to the mill of those, like British economist John Maynard Keynes, who regarded the peace settlement with Germany as overly harsh.

¹¹ Marion C. Siney, "British Official Histories of the Blockade of the Central Powers during the First World War," *American Historical Review* 68, no. 2 (January 1963): 392.

¹² These statistics even determined that Germany's gross domestic product declined over four years by 75 percent of its prewar level. See, William E. Arnold-Forster, *The Economic Blockade, 1914-1919: Before the Armistice and After* (London: Clarendon Press, 1939), 34-35.

¹³ Bell, 672-674.

Even after the release of Arnold-Forster's work in 1942, the book was not widely available in circulation and rarely was it cited as a primary source in subsequent blockade literature. Moreover, although a copy of Davis' *History of the Blockade* was given to the British Museum in August 1921, it was not released for public distribution nor was it entered into the government's Suppressed Book Catalogue. These attempts to stall further inquiry have led one prolific scholar on the blockade to conclude that "apparently the Foreign Office forgot (conveniently or genuinely) that a copy had been deposited...."¹⁴ But the most telling piece of British postwar concealment was in relation to the third and final official history completed by Archibald C. Bell with the Historical Section of the Committee on Imperial Defence (C.I.D.) in 1937. Initially, it was promised to Bell that his *A History of the Blockade of Germany* would be showcased in the same manner (i.e. for public distribution) as Archibald Hurd's *The Merchant Navy* (1921-1929) and C. Ernest Fayle's *Seaborne Trade* (1924-1929). He was sorely disappointed to learn, however, that both the British government and military still deemed any research on the naval blockade suitable for official eyes only. Stuck on a shelf in the library of the C.I.D. until 1961, the blockade began to fade from academic interest and popular memory.¹⁵ This was an unfortunate end for an extremely well documented and thought-provoking work.

In place of Bell's official history, the most widely cited text became Rear Admiral Montagu W. W. P. Consett's *Triumph of Unarmed Forces* (1923). This book placed a great deal of emphasis on the occasions where goods en route to Germany passed

¹⁴ Siney, 392-3.

¹⁵ The book was only discovered in the late 1950s, at which time scholarship had turned its attention to the foreign and domestic policy of totalitarian governments and the waging of the Second World War. Ibid., 394

undetected by the Royal Navy. Consett served as a British naval attaché in Stockholm during the war, but his knowledge of the blockade's wider impact on the German war effort and home front was very limited. He did not, for example, have access to the classified documents from the British Foreign Office and Robert Cecil's Ministry of the Blockade.¹⁶ Thus the socio-economic and military effects of the blockade would remain uncharted waters for later historians to navigate.

The political climate in which these post-1945 accounts were produced was no more conducive for an objective reading of the blockade's impact. In fact, several German historians in the 1960s and 1970s sought to dismiss its effectiveness altogether.¹⁷ This scholarship unquestioningly accepted Admiral Consett's view that the *Kaiserreich* was able to circumvent Allied measures by trading with the neutral Scandinavian countries. Gerald Feldman's *Army, Industry, and Labour in Germany, 1914-1918* (1966) maintained that German food shortages had far more to do with inept food provisioning and an over-ambitious War Ministry than the Allied imposition of a naval blockade.¹⁸

Feldman's work became a benchmark study in First World War civil-military relations. His decision to forego even a brief mention of the blockade's impact effectively laid the groundwork for subsequent economic interpretations in the 1970s and 1980s. Both Gerd Hardach's *The First World War, 1914-1918* (1977) and Avner Offer's *The First World War: An Agrarian Interpretation* (1989) were quick to discount the possibility that Imperial Germany had been defeated on the home front. Accordingly,

¹⁶ Marion C. Siney, *The Allied Blockade of Germany, 1914-1916* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1957), 249.

¹⁷ The latent power of German "illiberalism" preoccupied much of the post-1945 German scholarship on the First World War.

¹⁸ Gerald Feldman, *Army, Industry, and Labour in Germany, 1914-1918* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 95.

Hardach and Offer argued that a compromised diet of *ersatz* goods would not lead to malnourishment. Both historians acknowledged the issue of hunger, but remained unconvinced that Germany experienced famine as a result of the naval blockade.¹⁹

Conversely, there emerged from the mid-1980s a noticeable shift in the tone and focus of First World War blockade studies advanced by Anglo-American historians. These groundbreaking works include C. Paul Vincent's *The Politics of Hunger: The Allied Blockade of Germany, 1915-1919* (1985) and Belinda J. Davis' *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin* (2000). This newer scholarship scarcely lingered on the issue of whether the *Kaiserreich* had faced starvation. Most post-1980s works on the blockade accepted that Imperial Germany had become a "beleaguered fortress" in the last years of its existence.²⁰

Influenced by the writings of Peter Loewenberg and S. William Halperin's *Germany Tried Democracy: A Political History of the Reich from 1918 to 1933* (1963), Vincent concerned himself less with the illegality of the blockade or the day-to-day mechanics of how it functioned. He focused instead on the effects of the blockade in both a physiological and political sense. Vincent's work succeeds admirably in providing a closer look at how the Kaiser's army coped with the challenges of economic warfare. His work has increased scholarly awareness on the blockade to the point where many newer monographs on the First World War provide the reader with a brief overview of the Allies' trade restrictions.²¹

¹⁹ Gerd Hardach, *The First World War, 1914-1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 31. See also, Avner Offer, *The First World War: An Agrarian Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 53.

²⁰ This phrase was employed disparagingly by Gerd Hardach and like-minded Cold Warriors to refute the earlier claim of starvation. See Hardach, 31-32.

²¹ This cursory treatment of the blockade is a vast improvement on the interwar "amnesia" that plagued the three British official histories upon their release. These post-Vincent scholarly works include:

So too, Belinda Davis' *Home Fires Burning* functions as a valuable companion piece to Vincent's work on the cumulative impact of the blockade. Her narrative focuses on the day-to-day struggle of "women of lesser means" (*minderbemittelte Frauen*), specifically their resorting to theft and symbolic acts of violence in the latter war years. Davis consulted Berlin police and court records from 1913-1920 and noted the correlation between the number of crimes²² committed by women and the severity of food shortages on the home front. Theft convictions in Berlin, for example, increased from 40,000 in 1917 to 50,000 by the war's end.²³ Malnutrition forced many women of lesser means to steal, beg, and borrow in order to survive the "Turnip Winter" of 1916-1917 and nationwide food riots of January 1918.²⁴ But does it logically follow that these women entered the political arena in the process? This claim underpins much of Davis' work, although she fails to establish how theft convictions in 1918 were associated with the desire for greater political participation.²⁵

Davis is therefore at her best when she concentrates on the little-known stories of the *minderbemittelte Frauen*. This is not to suggest that the average *Hausfrau* remained apolitical during the German revolution of 1918-1919. Rather, Davis' failure to directly link the struggle for food with women's receptivity to political extremism sadly undercuts her thesis. This is one methodological reservation in what is otherwise a perceptive and

Holger H. Herwig, *The First World War: Germany and Austria-Hungary, 1914-1918* (London: Arnold, 1997); John Keegan, *The First World War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999); Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory: The First World War – Myths and Realities*; and David Stevenson, *Cataclysm: The First World War as a Political Tragedy* (New York: Basic Books, 2004); idem, *With Our Backs to the Wall: Victory and Defeat in 1918* (London: Allen Lane, 2011).

²² Namely, fraud, embezzlement, theft, forgery, and receipt of stolen goods.

²³ Belinda J. Davis, *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 223.

²⁴ Mass food riots in January 1918 were spurred by the public's frustration regarding the exorbitant price of food. By 1918, the power of the black market prevented the average German family from purchasing what few goods there were left in market stalls and storefronts.

²⁵ Davis, 238-239.

engaging book. Davis skillfully demonstrates how food shortages on the home front exacerbated tensions between the haves and the have-nots, even if her discussion of women's apathy towards the war effort is often unsatisfying. Her case study of women in wartime Berlin is proof that scholarship on the blockade is still relevant in the era of micro-histories and postmodern works. Davis' and Vincent's research has influenced my thesis in that both reject the increasingly anachronistic 1960s and '70s notion that Imperial Germany was not adversely affected by the blockade.

A more recent but controversial trend in the historiography of the naval blockade has been the counter-factual approach taken by a number of historians and non-historians alike. For instance, naval scholar Paul G. Halpern suggests in a recent book chapter "... [that] if one of the many German offensives [in the spring of 1918] had succeeded, and the tide of the battle shifted in their [Germany's] favour, then the naval blockade might not be studied today."²⁶ For Halpern, this is a purely rhetorical exercise. He does not provide any evidence to support the claim that a reversal of fortune was even possible for German troops beyond the opening salvo of Operation Michael (21 March 1918). Ultimately, counter-factual what-ifs are of little help in assessing the blockade's wider significance and, in the case of Patrick J. Buchanan's *Churchill, Hitler, and the Unnecessary War* (2008), they can lead to unfounded generalizations on the origins of the Second World War.

A journalist by trade, "Pat" Buchanan is known more for his staunch neo-conservative politics than historical inquiry. He nevertheless wrote a *New York Times* bestseller criticizing Winston Churchill and other British statesmen for needlessly

²⁶ Paul G. Halpern, "World War I: The Blockade," in *Naval Blockades and Seapower: Strategies and Counter-strategies, 1805-2005*, edited by Bruce A. Elleman and S. C. M. Paine, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 91.

entering the First World War against Germany. Buchanan attributes German grievances and political radicalism in the 1920s and 1930s to the “Carthaginian Peace” imposed by the Allies at Versailles.²⁷ Here Buchanan is influenced by the fiery writings of John Maynard Keynes, principally, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1920) and Niall Ferguson’s “defiantly revisionist work,”²⁸ *The Pity of War: Explaining World War I* (1999). Unlike Keynes, however, Buchanan argues that “the success of Churchill’s starvation blockade” contributed foremost to the postwar chaos that bred “a poisonous spirit of revenge.”²⁹ It is true that Churchill as First Lord of the Admiralty initiated the blockade at the onset of hostilities. But he did not oversee its imposition after early 1915, occupying, instead, various other posts unrelated to economic warfare. Furthermore, as one will see, Churchill was a proponent of lifting the post-Armistice blockade.³⁰

Still more tenuous is Buchanan’s underlying claim that the Second World War was an unnecessary conflict wrought by British capriciousness:

Had Britain not declared war on Germany in 1914...Germany would have been victorious, perhaps, in months. There would have been no Lenin, no Stalin, no Versailles, no Hitler, no Holocaust. Had Britain not given a war guarantee to Poland in March 1939, then declared war on September 3... a German-Polish war might never have become a six-year world war in which

²⁷ Patrick J. Buchanan, *Churchill, Hitler, and the Unnecessary War: How Britain Lost its Empire and the West Lost the World* (New York: Random House, 2008), 75, 98.

²⁸ R. J. Q. Adams, “Review of Niall Ferguson’s *The Pity of War*,” *American History Review* 105, no. 3 (June 2000): 881. This is certainly an apt description of *The Pity of War*. Each section of Ferguson’s book is devoted to answering one of ten rhetorical questions posed in the introduction. Questions include: “why did British leaders decide to intervene when war broke out on the Continent?,” “why did men stop fighting [in 1918]?,” and “who won the peace?” Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War: Explaining World War I* (New York: Basic Books, 1999) xxv-xxvi.

²⁹ Buchanan, 78.

³⁰ Bane and Lutz, 721.

fifty million would perish.³¹

Buchanan's work is both provocative and revisionist but it remains speculative "history" at best. One is likely to agree more with naval expert Peter Padfield's assessment that "it is neither possible nor useful to speculate in what different ways the century might have unraveled had the first war not started when and how it did."³² *Churchill, Hitler, and the Unnecessary War* overstates Britain's culpability in both conflicts and, as a consequence, demonstrates firsthand the methodological pitfalls of interpreting history *post facto*.

The most recent book-length study on the blockade was undertaken by a young American political scientist at the Virginia Military Institute in Lexington, Virginia. Eric W. Osborne's *Britain's Economic Blockade of Germany, 1914-1919* (2004) is an economic history of the blockade with the aim to offer "a more complete view" by demonstrating how it became "one of the greatest weapon's in the Entente's arsenal against Germany...."³³ He openly criticizes earlier works for their failure to consider the blockade after America's intervention in the war. Yet Osborne's book devotes 152 of its 194 pages to the first two and a half years of the war. Furthermore, the last year of combat and continuation of the blockade after 11 November 1918 are discussed in a brief twenty-page chapter.³⁴ Thus, far from providing a more complete view of the blockade, Osborne's monograph has taken a step back in terms of focus and periodization.

Methods and Themes

My research differs considerably from these earlier accounts both in terms of methodology and scope. I argue that the naval blockade of Germany was conceived not

³¹ Buchanan, xvii-xviii.

³² Peter Padfield, *The Great Naval Race: The Anglo-German Naval Rivalry, 1900-1914* (Edinburgh: Birlinn Ltd., 2005), xiii.

³³ Osborne, 3-4.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 173-193.

as a merciless starvation or hunger blockade, but rather a time-honoured maritime strategy intended to weaken the enemy's military resources and assist the Allied land war on the Continent. However, its nature and function changed over the course of the war from an accepted naval strategy in 1914 into a weapon of starvation by 1918-1919. The aim of this study is to illuminate how and why this military transformation occurred and, finally, detail some of the political and moral consequences of the blockade's protracted imposition. In structuring this dissertation, I introduce three interrelated themes or explanations to account for the blockade's efficacy after 1915. Broadly, they are:

1. The Streamlining of Civil-Military Bureaucracy, 1916-1917
2. The Role of Lord Northcliffe and British Propaganda, 1917-1918
3. The Blockade as Political Leverage, 1918-1919

I have deliberately eschewed the familiar – 1914-1918 – chronological narrative, weighed heavily in favour of the first two years of the war, for a more conceptual approach. It is not my intention to write a “History” of the naval blockade, for that has been competently done before with the three British official histories³⁵ commissioned immediately following the Armistice and, again, with Marion C. Siney's *The Allied Blockade of Germany, 1914-1916* (1957). Nor do I want to suggest that these factors alone account for the success of Allied economic warfare.³⁶

Rather, this thesis endeavours to provide a more nuanced look at what allowed

³⁵ Arnold-Forster, Bell, and the H. W. C. Davis Papers, Hoover Institution Archives (thereafter cited as HIA), Stanford University, Stanford, California.

³⁶ The Wilhelmine government's ad hoc requisitioning of food supplies left many civilians to depend on the vagaries of the black market. War profiteering thrived throughout the blockade's existence, increasing prices to often ten times the prewar rate. The Great Powers' adherence to the short war illusion also meant that Germany did not adequately devise a contingency plan for nationwide food shortages. The bureaucratic nightmare of food provisioning in wartime Germany is dealt with admirably in George Yaney, *The World of the Manager: Food Administration in Berlin during World War I* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 4-6 and B. J. C. McKercher, “Economic Warfare” in *The First World War: A New Illustrated History*, edited by Hew Strachan, (London: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 212-213.

Britain and the Allies to cross the moral “Rubicon” and tighten trade restrictions on Germany in 1916-1919. Initially, British statesmen viewed the blockade’s retention after the Armistice as a necessary political expedient to ensure peace on Allied terms. But subsequent army occupation reports of the widespread malnutrition in Germany caused others, such as Winston Churchill, Herbert Hoover, and General Herbert Plumer, to denounce the post-Armistice blockade as needless and reprehensible. An international relief effort to revictual Germany exerted pressure on the Allies to lift the blockade, but not before the peace treaty was formally signed on 12 July 1919.³⁷

In what follows, I highlight the politics, propaganda, and morality of the blockade’s wartime and post-Armistice imposition. Chapter 2 traces the evolution of the blockade from its modest paper origins to an effective hunger blockade by 1916. Particular attention is given to the 11 March 1915 Order in Council that stipulated the immediate seizure of all goods (including foodstuffs) bound for Germany. This period in the blockade’s existence was characterized by legal and political manoeuvring on the part of Sir Edward Grey’s Foreign Office, which was given the vital task of creating an international blockade apparatus. The United States, Sweden, and Norway,³⁸ however, were able to stymie much of the early momentum of the blockade by upholding their neutral rights at sea and continuing to trade with Germany. Yet the chapter aims to place this inefficacy and inter-service rivalry of the Foreign Office and Admiralty within the context of the early war years, a period characterized by ad hoc policies and trial and error for all belligerent powers.

Chapter 3 explains how and why the British government was able to overcome this

³⁷ Bane and Lutz, 456.

³⁸ In addition to the neutral northern European countries of Belgium, Denmark, and the Netherlands.

international stalemate or, “transatlantic quandary” as I have termed it, to create a potent weapon of war *and* bargaining chip for peace. There has been some promising scholarship on British food exporters in the First World War,³⁹ which suggests that many continued to trade with their best customer – Imperial Germany – and thus pursued a clandestine policy of trading with the enemy based on economic self-interest.

This much is axiomatic, but it is the idea articulated in John McDermott’s article “‘A Needless Sacrifice’: British Businessmen and Business as Usual in the First World War” (1989) that raises some significant questions for my research. He argues that attitudes towards the blockade changed only when Britons deemed it necessary to reconcile their isolationist and liberal capitalist views with the patriotic needs of King and country:

Both the business community and the Liberal government were imbued in 1914 with a strong *laissez-faire* tradition in a state that was dependent upon exports to pay its way in the world... [But] under the pressure of total war and growing hatred of Germany the government finally established a consistent and effective blockade policy in late 1916, and the end of American neutrality in April 1917 eliminated a major concern for British policymakers.⁴⁰

Chapter 4 explores the relationship between the tightening of the blockade and the intensification of anti-German propaganda released under Lord Northcliffe in the last

³⁹ Namely, Jonathan S. Boswell and Bruce R. Johns, “Patriots and Profiteers? British Businessmen and the First World War,” *Journal of European Economic History* 11 (1982): 423-445; John McDermott, “A Needless Sacrifice: British Businessmen and Business As Usual in the First World War,” *Albion* 21, no. 2 (Summer 1989): 263-282; idem, “Total War and the Merchant State: Aspects of British Economic Warfare against Germany, 1914-1916,” *Canadian Journal of History* 21 (April 1986): 61-76 and “Trading with the Enemy: British Business and the Law during the First World War,” *Canadian Journal of History* 33 (August 1997): 201-220.

⁴⁰ McDermott, “‘A Needless Sacrifice,’” 263-264. Additionally see, idem, “Trading with the Enemy,” 201-202.

year of the war. Northcliffe, as Lloyd George's Director of Propaganda in Enemy Countries, was able to reach an unprecedented audience through his ownership of such popular and widely read newspapers as *The Times* and the *Daily Mail*.⁴¹ *The Times* was particularly critical of Prime Ministers Herbert Henry Asquith's and Lloyd George's governments for their failure to stop British businessmen and neutral countries from trading with the enemy. How was this growing anti-German sentiment depicted in British propaganda and the press? To what extent did Northcliffe's control of print media influence British and American support for the blockade in the latter war years and, more significantly, convince Britons to support the denial of foodstuffs to Germany after the Armistice? These are vital questions that have yet to be asked by historians of the Allied naval blockade. They are, however, at the core of my discussion in Chapter 4 and will aid to explain how wartime propaganda coloured Britain's response to German requests for food relief in the post-Armistice period.

The final section of the thesis will consider in chapters 5, 6, and 7 the last nine months of the blockade's imposition with reference to questions of morality and political expediency. Ultimately, the British War Cabinet and Allied Supreme Economic Council deemed that German civil unrest was a valuable tool to ensure peace.⁴² Chapters 5 and 6 therefore utilize the newly available records of the postwar Supreme Economic Council and Herbert Hoover's American Relief Administration. These archival documents offer a closer look at the controversial Allied decision to prolong the blockade after the ceasefire agreement of 11 November 1918. Chapter 5 focuses on the period from early November 1918 to late February 1919, paying particular attention to the Supreme Economic

⁴¹ Gary S. Messinger, *British Propaganda and the State in the First World War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 146-147.

⁴² 'The Blockade,' pp. 2, 19 February 1919, TNA, CAB 24/150.

Council's 31 December 1918 decision to prolong the blockade after official talk of its relaxation occurred as late as 25 December. What political exigencies arose in this week-long period to remove all talk of lifting the blockade? Research suggests that this decision was not unanimously reached. In fact, Winston Churchill as Secretary of State for War, John Maynard Keynes as a representative of the Treasury Department, and Robert Anderson as the U.S. Board of Trade liaison were three notable diplomats in favour of allowing foodstuffs into Germany. Were there other politicians who raised concern? Was this purely a political consideration in order to stem the tide of Bolshevism in Germany?⁴³ How did morality figure in their discussion of raising the blockade and did Lloyd George's re-election campaign in December 1918 dictate postwar blockade policy in any way?

Chapter 6 then details the efforts of Herbert Hoover (Allied Food Director) and Lord Robert Cecil (Chair of the Allied Blockade Committee) to persuade the "Big Four" Powers to raise the blockade before Germany collapsed further into political and social dislocation. The signing of the Brussels food agreement on 14 March 1919 marks a vital signpost in the relaxation of the blockade and will be discussed at length. Henceforth, Germany could import up to 370,000 tons of food per month from any country.⁴⁴ These shipments, however, did not reach German ports until three months after the Brussels accord. Ultimately, this has led one historian to note that, "German acceptance of the

⁴³ The installation of prominent socialists in Max von Baden's provisional government, along with the growing threat of Karl Liebknecht's radical left-wing Spartacus movement, was proof enough for many Anglo-American politicians that postwar Germany was rife with Bolshevism. Arthur S. Link, ed. *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. 51 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 415; Klaus Schwabe, *Woodrow Wilson, Revolutionary Germany, and Peacemaking, 1918-1919* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 139; Robert Gerwarth and John Horne, eds. *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 42-43.

⁴⁴ Maurice Parmelee, *Blockade and Sea Power: the Blockade, 1914-1919, and its Significance for a World State* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1924), 186-187.

Treaty of Versailles came under the shadow of the economic blockade put in place by the British in 1914. Its final legacy was not as a weapon of war to destroy an enemy, but one to insure peace under Allied terms.”⁴⁵

Chapter 7 explores the postwar legacy of the naval blockade in Britain and Germany. Not since Marion Siney’s 1963 article “British Official Histories of the Blockade” has a scholar analyzed postwar perceptions of the blockade.⁴⁶ Thus, I will seek to answer how the rampant hunger and attendant political instability in Germany was regarded in a post-Versailles landscape. Was the blockade still seen as a legitimate wartime strategy or a dubious weapon of starvation, as Churchill claimed? What effects or implications did these civilian deaths have on Adolf Hitler’s decision to attack the Soviet Union – the breadbasket of Europe – in the summer of 1941?

Finally, Chapter 8 ends this study with a summary of the dissertation and briefly addresses Vincent’s question as to whether the blockade symbolized a lost opportunity for lasting peace in 1919.

A Note on Archival Sources

Archival collections on the First World War are both voluminous and comprehensive in scope. One could, for example, spend decades mastering the origins of the conflict without addressing technological innovations, domestic politics, combat on the various fronts, or how and why the war finally ended. Nevertheless, they would have their choice of archives from London to Washington, Paris to Vienna, and a host of fine collections in between. It is, therefore, the challenge of the researcher to locate archival holdings specific to their topic yet diverse enough to offer an innovative and balanced reading of

⁴⁵ Osborne, 189.

⁴⁶ Siney, “British Official Histories of the Blockade,” 395.

the war years. In the case of Britain's "hunger blockade" of Germany, research material is readily available in North America and the United Kingdom, but collections are scattered geographically.

Stanford University's Hoover Institution Archives possess vast holdings on Allied economic warfare, British propaganda, and, of course, the papers of U.S. Food Administer Herbert Hoover and the American Relief Administration. The Hoover Archives are a world leader in preserving documents on the First World War and Paris Peace Conference; well-indexed collections in French, German, and Italian, in addition to English, make it a formidable research institution. In particular, the Herbert Hoover Subject Collection and Edward Frederick Willis Papers offer an intimate look at the decision-making process of the Supreme Economic Council and American Relief Administration. Hoover was a key liaison between the two organizations in an effort to streamline the Allies' postwar reconstruction of Europe. They also provide a much-needed look at the counter-intuitiveness of using food as a weapon to restore the global balance of power.

This moral dimension of targeting civilians in war is similarly documented in the Graham Lusk and Ralph Haswell Lutz Papers. The latter was a prominent Stanford historian whose papers include the work of American freelance journalist Stephen Miles Bouton (who reported on the grave food conditions in Berlin c. 1918-1919) and army intelligence reports from the General Staff of the U.S. Third Army occupying the Rhineland. Finally, the Mary C. Rixford Papers and British pamphlets from the Director of Propaganda in Enemy Countries act as a valuable counterpoint to the discussion on the morality of denying food to the Central Powers.

Equally comprehensive is the National Archives, formally the Public Records Office, in Kew, Richmond outside of London, England. The Foreign, War, and Cabinet Office as well as the Board of Trade, Customs, and Treasury Department papers are held here. These once confidential records provide a government consensus on the blockade throughout the war and post-Armistice period. Indeed, one can reconstruct a department's opinion of the blockade based on official cables, letters, and heated round-table discussions concerning its political and military value. Particularly useful were the Foreign and Cabinet Office documents (FO 6684, 88867 and CAB 23/14, respectively) that dealt with the political reasons for the continuance of the blockade after 11 November 1918.

In contrast, the Papers of Rear Admiral Dudley De Chair and Private Papers of H. A. Gwynne at the Imperial War Museum in London provide an earlier assessment of the blockade c. 1915-1916. Admiral De Chair was the commander of Tenth Cruiser Squadron – the group in charge of the day-to-day patrolling of the Atlantic and North Sea. Yet his account is laden with minute details (i.e. the exact shipping tonnage of Swedish iron ore in May 1915) and, consequently, adds little to the historian's knowledge of the complex machinery associated with Allied economic warfare. More useful is Gwynne's correspondence with the Minister of the Blockade Lord Robert Cecil. As the editor of the ultra-Tory mouthpiece *The Morning Post*, Gwynne's political connections were exhaustive. Similar to Northcliffe, Gwynne envisioned himself as a de facto adviser to prominent cabinet members. His political aspirations are thinly veiled in his letters to Cecil. But it was his "constructive" criticism of the government's blockade policy – he thought it too lax and wrote as much in *The Post* – that finally caused the Minister of the

Blockade to rebuke him. Cecil, nevertheless, begrudgingly heeded the press baron's advice and carried out a series of reforms in the Foreign Office and the Blockade Ministry that mirrored Gwynne's suggestions for a tighter blockade. Ultimately, these letters highlight the inextricable link between civil and military bureaucracy in the development of British blockade policy after mid-1916.

Lastly, the collection of blockade related material at the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives at King's College, University of London, nicely augments the discussion of morality versus political expediency in war. Sir William Beveridge's tract *The Blockade and the Civilian Population* was written during the lead-up to the Second World War and published as an Oxford pamphlet in December 1939. In it, he advocates that Britain employ a naval blockade of Nazi Germany, as it was "one of the strongest weapons in the British armoury" against Germany in the First World War. Furthermore, Beveridge addresses the supposed "immorality" of targeting Germans on the home front by asserting, "that the hardships of the German civilian population in 1914-1918 were the result, less of the British blockade directly, than of general exhaustion brought on by all the operations of war, of mismanagement, and of placing military demands before civilian needs."⁴⁷

This is a recurring statement made by several interwar British policymakers. They tout the blockade's efficacy in bringing the war to a close, but are reluctant to attach any wider significance to the complete breakdown of German civilian morale in 1918 or the issue of deliberate starvation after the Armistice. Instead, Beveridge focuses solely on the inept food provisioning by the German War Food Office. It is a convenient straw

⁴⁷ William Beveridge, *The Blockade and the Civilian Population* (Oxford, 1939), 3, 27-28.

man, but the myriad reports of the British and U.S. armies and the American Relief Administration at the Hoover Institution Archives tell a far different and grimmer story.

CHAPTER 2

A TRANSATLANTIC QUANDARY: BRITISH IMPLEMENTATION AND INTERNATIONAL STALEMATE, 1914-1916

The Hunger Blockade Contextualized

When the Dutch navy of Philip William, the Prince of Orange, blockaded Flanders on 27 July 1584 he declared what naval historians and legal scholars have termed the “first formal naval blockade” in history.⁴⁸ Numerous coastal cities and ports were subject to naval sieges throughout antiquity and the Middle Ages, but these earlier attempts were a means by which land forces would generally invade and occupy a given territory. The Dutch blockade of Flanders differed markedly because an amphibious invasion was never the goal. Rather, it was the young Protestant prince’s intention to challenge Catholic Spain’s control of the Flemish coast and the newly united Seventeen Provinces or Netherlands. Habsburg trade routes were eventually severed in the southern provinces (specifically, modern-day Belgium, Luxembourg, and parts of France), causing Spanish troops to be ill fed and provisioned throughout most of the mid-to-late 1580s. This episode was part of a wider Dutch and, indeed, Protestant revolt against Habsburg domination in Europe that culminated in the Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648) and the Dutch Golden Age (1580-1670).⁴⁹

Britain, France, and the Netherlands imposed naval blockades over the next century and a half with often little regard for the rights of neutral countries or rival belligerent powers. Admittedly, international law regarding the rules of war at sea was in

⁴⁸ Wolff Heintschel von Heinegg, “Naval Blockade and International Law” in *Naval Blockades and Seapower: Strategies and Counter-Strategies, 1805-2005*, ed. Bruce A. Elleman and S.C.M. Paine (New York: Routledge, 2006), 11.

⁴⁹ Jonathan I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477-1806* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 196-200. See also, Andrew Lambert, *War at Sea in the Age of Sail, 1650-1850* (London: Cassell and Company, 2000), 52-53.

its infancy. Yet this did not stop neutrals such as Denmark, Russia, and Sweden from protesting the “fictitious blockades” erected by the world’s three most powerful navies. In 1780, for instance, Russia’s Catherine the Great denounced the irksome practice of “paper blockades,” whereby a naval power like Britain would search and seize a neutral merchant vessel regardless of the ship’s cargo and without having formally declared war on a particular country. Catherine claimed that the English Channel and North Sea were international waters and, therefore, could not be arbitrarily blockaded by one power over another.⁵⁰

This tension between the Great Powers made plain the need to establish certain criteria as to what rendered a naval blockade legal and binding. Here, the Tsarina posited that in order to be legal a blockade must be “effective” (i.e. imposed with sufficient military force rather than a mere paper declaration).⁵¹ This caveat forced navies to reconsider the use of a blockade for strictly diplomatic ends. It by no means eradicated the use of paper blockades, nor did it completely mitigate the grievances of smaller neutral countries. However, it was an acknowledgement that neutral rights must be considered in concert with the rights of more powerful belligerent nations. By the mid-nineteenth century, in fact, Britain routinely championed the cause of freedom of the seas. Two developments made this stunning reversal possible; a realignment of British foreign policy followed by an economic consideration that had far-reaching domestic and global implications.⁵²

⁵⁰ In 1780, Sweden, Russia, and Denmark formed the League of Armed Neutrality in protest against historic Franco-British disregard for neutral rights at sea. Osborne, 7.

⁵¹ Heinegg, 12.

⁵² There are several studies on the changing nature of nineteenth century British foreign policy, including: Christopher Howard, “The Policy of Isolation,” *History Journal* 10, no. 1 (1967): 77-88 and John Charmley, *Splendid Isolation?: Britain, the Balance of Power, and the Origins of the First World War* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1999).

Britain's foreign policy stance changed from a nation frequently at war (e.g. with Holland in the late seventeenth century and France and America in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century) to a more detached arbiter content to preserve the balance of power in Europe following Napoleon's defeat in 1815.⁵³ Historians and contemporaries alike referred to this shift as a period of "splendid isolation" for Great Britain. Isolationism afforded British statesmen the opportunity to worry less about Continental entanglements and focus, instead, on domestic concerns and the maintenance of a vast overseas empire. As George Goschen, the First Lord of the Admiralty, proudly remarked to a Conservative gathering in February 1896: "Our isolation is not an isolation of weakness, or of contempt for ourselves; it is deliberately chosen, the freedom to act as we choose in any circumstance that may arise."⁵⁴ The problem with this policy, however, was that it could not be maintained long term. There were occasions where intervention was necessary to uphold the existing geopolitical order, but as in the case of the Crimean (1854-1856) and First World Wars, protracted involvement on the continent irrevocably altered the alliance system of the Great Powers.

The second development that caused Britain to support freedom of the seas was equally pragmatic. Access to world markets benefitted the interests of British financiers, industrialists, and businessmen who traded freely around the globe until the outbreak of the First World War. Whether it was stocks and bonds being traded in the City of London or cheaper livestock imported from New Zealand and Argentina, free trade and

⁵³ Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976), 149. See also, David F. Krein, *The Last Palmerston Government: Foreign Policy, Domestic Politics, and the Genesis of 'Splendid Isolation'* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1978); Bernard Semmel, *Liberalism and Naval Strategy: Ideology, Interest, and Sea Power during the Pax Britannica* (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1986); Maartje M. Abbenhuis, *An Age of Neutrals: Great Power Politics, 1815-1914* (Cambridge: University Press, 2014).

⁵⁴ Howard, "The Policy of Isolation," 80.

naval supremacy were the twin pillars of nineteenth century *Pax Britannica*.⁵⁵ These factors help to explain Britain's willingness to sign an international treaty respecting maritime rights in the wake of the Crimean War in April 1856. This Declaration of Paris marked a watershed in the development of maritime law, establishing five principles that must be met for a blockade to be deemed lawful; (1) proper establishment, (2) adequate notice, (3) effective enforcement, (4) impartial application, and (5) respect for neutral rights.⁵⁶

Proper establishment meant that a naval blockade applied only to countries officially at war with one another. The blockading power then had to issue a formal declaration to the various countries under blockade, as well as notify any neutral states known to trade with either belligerent. A general time frame also had to be devised and communicated to neutrals and the enemy, informing them which ports were blockaded and for approximately how long.⁵⁷ Thirdly, effective enforcement sought to end once and for all the customary practice of paper blockades. To be legally effective was to say that a blockade "must be maintained by force sufficient really to prevent access to the enemy coastline... and must not bar access to neutral ports or coasts."⁵⁸ The principle of impartiality was a bitter pill for the Admiralty to swallow given their tendency to let through merchant vessels favourable to the commercial interests of Britain. Finally, respect for neutral rights became the most contentious issue of blockade law,

⁵⁵ Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, 175. The repeal of the protectionists Corn Laws in 1846 removed the final impediment to free trade in Britain.

⁵⁶ Francis Upton, *The Laws of Nations Affecting Commerce during War* (London: Methuen & Co., 1863), 276-277. See also, Thomas Gibson Bowles, *The Declaration of Paris* (London: S. Low, Marston, and Company, 1900).

⁵⁷ Michael G. Fraunces, "The International Law of Blockade: New Guiding Principles in Contemporary State Practice," *Yale Law Journal* 101, no. 4 (January 1992): 896-898.

⁵⁸ Effective enforcement was first established with the Declaration of Paris and reaffirmed in the 1909 London Declaration. *London Declaration Concerning the Laws of Naval War*, Article II, Chapter I, 26 February 1909.

underscoring much of the acrimony between Britain, France and neutrals such as the United States, Sweden, Denmark, and Norway throughout 1914-1916.

It is the aim of this chapter to detail the strategy behind Britain's naval blockade of the Central Powers and examine its use during the first two years of the war. It seeks to answer why it initially proved so difficult for the Allies to impose an effective blockade against Germany. Was it a lack of commitment on the Admiralty's part? How did the Foreign Office quash allegations of the blockade's illegality and disregard for the rights of neutrals? How, for instance, did they reconcile the fact that Britain entered the war to defend the neutrality of Belgium yet violated daily the concept of freedom of the seas? To answer these questions it is first necessary to explore the key socio-political and economic trends influencing military and naval policy in prewar Britain.

Imperialism and Anxiety in Edwardian Britain

In 1904 there was nothing inevitable about a war between Great Britain and Imperial Germany. The decade to come was punctuated by periods of instability in Morocco (1905-1906 and 1911) and the Balkans (1912-1913), to be sure. Yet these ethnic and territorial conflicts were not in themselves a precursor for war, let alone a world war in which 35 million soldiers and civilians were either killed or wounded.⁵⁹ It is, therefore, worth considering the opening sentence in Paul Kennedy's *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism* (1980), which reads: "Why was it that the British and German peoples, who had never fought each other and whose traditions of political co-operation were reinforced by dynastic, cultural, religious, and economic ties, drifted steadily apart in the

⁵⁹ Stevenson, *Cataclysm*, 442-443. See also, Ferguson, 296.

late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries?”⁶⁰ It is Kennedy’s contention that historians must consider in tandem the economic and ideological constraints (i.e. the vagaries of the “Official” Minds in London and Berlin) that informed much of the foreign policy decision-making of late Victorian/Edwardian Britain and Wilhelmine Germany. He maintains that the surest cause of the rivalry was the decline in Britain’s world power, precisely at a time when Germany sought to challenge the staid nineteenth century balance of power via naval construction and the outbreak of war in 1914.⁶¹

That Britain was in a position of imperial decline is hardly in doubt. By the early 1890s the empire was dependent on imports for its very economic survival.⁶² In fact, trade between Great Britain, continental Europe, North America, and Asia astonishingly doubled over a twenty-year period from 1870 to 1890.⁶³ This was a level of unprecedented economic growth and yet it deeply concerned many conservatives who warned against British dependence on world markets. The journalist and war correspondent L. S. Amery was one of those men. In 1905, he acknowledged the sobering fact that “every year the competition for power among the great world states is getting keener,” while arguing that “unless we continue to hold our own, unless we can keep our invincible Navy... our Empire and our trade will be taken away from us by others and we will be starved out, invaded, trampled under foot and utterly ruined.” Simply put, the policy of isolationism no longer seemed quite as “splendid” as it had

⁶⁰ Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism, 1869-1914* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1980), xi.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 466.

⁶² David French, “The Edwardian Crisis and the Origins of the First World War,” *International History Review* 4, no. 2 (May 1982): 208.

⁶³ Nicholas A. Lambert, *Planning Armageddon: British Economic Warfare and the First World War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 20.

several decades before.⁶⁴

This fin-de-siècle anxiety over British decline gave rise to the Tory movement of tariff reform in the first decade of the twentieth century. Its leader was the charismatic politician Joseph Chamberlain, a Birmingham manufacturer who entered politics late in middle age.⁶⁵ He served first in Liberal cabinets before joining Lord Robert Salisbury's Conservative-Unionist government as Colonial Secretary in 1895. Although prone to ardent speeches denouncing the corruptible and plutocratic nature of Whitehall, he also won many supporters for his pragmatic views on empire. Chamberlain preached the necessity of imperial unity at a time when the United States and Germany were narrowing the gap and, in some cases, almost outproducing Britain in terms of industrialization and trade with new overseas markets.

Far from being a Germanophobe, Chamberlain admired the sheer scope and practicality of the German customs union or *Zollverein* reconstituted by Otto von Bismarck in 1866-1867.⁶⁶ Bismarck was then Minister President of Prussia and Chancellor of twenty-two loosely united provinces known as the North German Confederation. Prussia was the predominant member of the Confederation and possessed the last word on economic matters as they affected the entire customs union.⁶⁷ In Germany's *Zollverein* Chamberlain saw the underpinnings of a viable economic model of

⁶⁴ Amery went on to become the First Lord of the Admiralty under Prime Ministers Andrew Bonar Law and Stanley Baldwin in the mid-to-late 1920s. Kennedy, *Anglo-German Antagonism*, 307.

⁶⁵ Sydney H. Zebel, "Joseph Chamberlain and the Genesis of Tariff Reform," *Journal of British Studies* 7, no. 1 (November 1967): 133-135.

⁶⁶ In response to increased Habsburg power in Europe and the ratification of the British Corn Laws in 1815 (a series of protectionist tariffs on grain imports), Prussia and seventeen other German states formed the *Zollverein* in 1834 to promote free trade and economic unity within the customs union. See, Arnold H. Price, *The Evolution of the Zollverein: A Study of the Ideas and Institutions leading to German Economic Unification between 1815 and 1833* (New York: Octagon Books, 1973); John R. Davis, *Britain and the German Zollverein, 1848-1866* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).

⁶⁷ Ross J. S. Hoffman, *Great Britain and the German Trade Rivalry, 1875-1914* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1933), esp. 229-256.

neo-mercantilism, one that Britain ought to emulate with her colonies in order to safeguard home markets and solidify trade within the empire. Consequently, Chamberlain formed the Tariff Reform League (TRL) with several leading politicians in July 1903. The League's mandate was to promote imperial unity and address directly what they believed to be the most pressing issue of contemporary geopolitics – staving off British decline.⁶⁸ The movement called for the melding of free trade with protectionist tariffs on essential goods like wheat, sugar, meat, and wool, with Britain functioning in the role of customs administrator as in Bismarckian Prussia.

Imperial preference lay at the heart of the Chamberlainites' conviction that tangible economic solutions could reverse British imperial decline, and, at the same time, forge closer bonds between colony and metropole. This proposed system of preferential tariffs was a polarizing topic. Canadian Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier, for example, was very much in favour of an economic alliance with Britain.⁶⁹ Yet others closer to home felt that tariff reform was too cumbersome and intricate to sell to an increasingly working class electorate more concerned with their immediate standards of living than future gross domestic product. The tariff movement failed, in part, to translate staunch initial support for the cause into long-term policy gains. Or, as one historian more candidly put it, “by the beginning of 1913, the Unionist leadership had given the Tariff Reform League ten

⁶⁸ Early members included L. S. Amery, First Sea Lord William Palmer (more commonly known as Lord Selborne), and Conservative MPs Henry Chaplin, Sir Joseph Lawrence and Edward Goulding, among others. Later, the League was headed by Austen Chamberlain following his father's debilitating stroke in 1906. Andrew S. Thompson, “Tariff Reform: An Imperial Strategy, 1903-1913,” *Historical Journal* 40, no. 4 (December 1997): 1037.

⁶⁹ Zebel, 140. See also, A. W. Coats, “Political Economy and the Tariff Reform Campaign of 1903,” *Journal of Law and Economics* 11, no. 1 (April 1968): 181-229; A. L. Friedburg, *The Weary Titan: Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1895-1905* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988); E. H. H. Green, “Radical Conservatism: The Electoral Genesis of Tariff Reform,” *Historical Journal* 28, no. 3 (September 1985): 667-692.

years of political rope with which to hang itself.”⁷⁰

The often-overlooked issue of tariff reform clearly illustrates the growing concern among conservatives that the empire was in jeopardy. Furthermore, it parallels the unique challenges wartime Britain faced in trying to convince the international community it was preferable to trade with Anglo-French businesses to the exclusion of Germany. This remained a perennial topic of contention among Liberals and Conservatives, free traders and trade protectionists, not least with patriotic politicians and businessmen from neutral countries. It is in this light that Edwardian Britain’s preoccupation with imperial defence must be viewed in the lead-up to economic warfare with the Central Powers.

Strategy and Finance: The Fisher Revolution in Naval Warfare?

Doing more with less. That is exactly what “Jacky” Fisher promised the Admiralty he would accomplish in the position of First Sea Lord. The Royal Navy faced a lean period in 1903-1904 stemming from massive spending cuts laid out in the annual budget expenditure of the Chancellor of the Exchequer two years prior.⁷¹ A systematic redistribution of government funds was called for in the wake of the Second Boer War (1899-1902). The South African conflict drained both significant financial and material resources from an over-extended treasury. The cost of the war, for instance, increased the national debt by more than 25 percent and, when the repayment plan on the war loan was taken into account, the national debt actually rose 50 percent over three years (c.

⁷⁰ Thompson, 1051.

⁷¹ Michael Hicks-Beach, ‘Financial Difficulties: An Appeal for Economy in Estimates,’ October 1901, TNA, CAB 37/58/109; Paul J. Cain and Anthony G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion, 1688-1914* (New York: Longman, 1993), 450-452.

1900-1903).⁷²

One must be mindful not to over-dramatize the decline of the British Empire or see in these financial constraints a parallel to the austerity measures undertaken by Western governments in our own time. The last gasp of empire came not in 1914 but in the late 1940s and 1950s with the violent struggle for Indian independence and rapid decolonization in Africa, Asia, and the West Indies. The empire was highly profitable at the turn of the twentieth century and still relatively inexpensive to govern. Britain's status as a Great Power in 1914, in fact, cost less to maintain per annum than any rival nation.⁷³ This is a striking detail that must not be overlooked in the haste to depict militarism as the inexorable cause of the First World War and handmaiden of Britain's imperial decline.⁷⁴

But it is true that nations do not just "slither into war." Policy is developed at the top echelons of government and these decisions are arrived at, in part, because they seek to ameliorate a specific issue or concern.⁷⁵ In October 1904, Admiral Fisher was

⁷² Nicholas A. Lambert, "British Naval Policy, 1913-1914: Financial Limitations and Strategic Revolution," *Journal of Modern History* 67, no. 3 (September 1995): 597. See also, Jon Sumida, *In Defence of Naval Supremacy: Finance, Technology, and British Naval Policy, 1889-1914* (Boston: 1989), Appendix, Tables 1 and 2.

⁷³ Generally, the accepted figures on this matter are those of political scientist Quincy Wright, *A Study of War* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1942) and historian A. J. P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), xxix, Table VI. Taylor contends that Tsarist Russia spent 6.3 percent of their annual budget on imperial defence - roughly double Britain's more cost effective ratio of 3.4 percent, while Austria-Hungary and Germany allotted 6.1 and 4.6 percent of their annual expenditure, respectively. See Paul M. Kennedy, "The Costs and Benefits of British Imperialism, 1846-1914," *Past and Present*, no. 125 (November 1989): 190-191; Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 204.

⁷⁴ The Anglo-German naval race is often invoked to demonstrate the "inevitability" of a clash of civilizations. See, for instance, Padfield, *The Great Naval Race*; James Joll, "The Mood of 1914" in *The Outbreak of World War I: Causes and Responsibilities*, 3rd ed., ed. Holger Herwig (Lexington: D. C. Heath & Co., 1991), 17-19; Robert K. Massie, *Dreadnought: Britain, Germany, and the Coming of the Great War* (New York: Random House, 1991); idem, *Castles of Steel: Britain, Germany, and the Winning of the Great War at Sea* (New York: Random House, 2003).

⁷⁵ Herwig, 2-3. See also, Ian. F. W. Beckett, *The Great War, 1914-1918* (London: Pearson, 2001), 14, 23-26.

appointed first sea lord following the retirement of Admiral Walter Kerr. He was charged with the task of reducing naval expenditures while simultaneously preparing the navy for war in the twentieth century. There has been a great deal written on Fisher's promotion of small, fast, torpedo armed crafts, including submarines for the economical "flotilla defence" of British home waters; his preference for fast, lightly armoured battle cruisers over the slower, heavily armoured "Dreadnought" battleship for high seas operations; and the conversion of the navy's modern fuel supply from coal to oil.⁷⁶ In his 1995 article "British Naval Policy, 1913-1914," and the books *Sir John Fisher's Naval Revolution* (1999) and *Planning Armageddon: British Economic Warfare and the First World War* (2012), naval scholar Nicholas A. Lambert argues that Britain's Royal Navy was in a state of strategic flux on the eve of the First World War. These works challenge the perception among historians that the Admiralty entered the war "with an outdated strategic thinking better suited to a navy from the age of sail than the age of steam."⁷⁷

This dissertation accepts as axiomatic many of Lambert's claims regarding Fisher's plan to re-conceptualize the cash-strapped navy and the resistance he encountered from senior naval staff and government officials in trying to do so. This chapter diverges, however, from Lambert's thesis in two important ways. Whereas he treats Fisher as an underappreciated visionary who could have created a stronger fleet if given the chance, I am fundamentally more concerned with what did happen and how it

⁷⁶ See, Nicholas A. Lambert, "Admiral Sir John Fisher and the Concept of Flotilla Defence, 1904-1909," *Journal of Military History* 59, no. 4 (October 1995): 639-660; idem, *Sir John Fisher's Naval Revolution*, 91-94; Geoffrey Till, *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-First Century* (London: Frank Cass, 2004), 63-64; Dominick Jenkins, "Churchill, Fisher, Oil, and the Royal Navy," paper presented at the *International Workshop on The Geopolitics of Global Energy: International Competition, Rivalry and Conflict*, Birkbeck College, University of London, 29 May 2009. Flotilla defence was predicated on the theory that it was wiser to maintain a balanced fleet of submarines, torpedo boats, battleships, and cruisers than simply diverting costlier battleships to patrol narrow channel waters. This, in theory, would give the Royal Navy greater flexibility to respond to potential invasions.

⁷⁷ Lambert, "British Naval Policy: 1913-1914," 596.

shaped the inefficacy of the Allies' blockade campaign during the first two years of the war. Many of Fisher's reforms were reversed by his traditionalist successor Admiral Arthur Wilson early in 1910, whose priority was the strengthening of the main battle fleet. Although in October 1911 the dynamic thirty-six-year-old Winston Churchill became first lord of the Admiralty, and was sympathetic to Fisher's balanced fleet theory (strong torpedo craft and fast battle cruiser forces), prevailing strategic opinion lobbied for two things: heavily armoured battleships to rival German naval construction and plans for a comprehensive blockade of Germany.⁷⁸

It is important to remember also that First Sea Lords did not determine national policy;⁷⁹ they were ultimately forced to work within the bounds of a given cabinet's purview. By 1907-1908, naval budgets under Liberal Prime Ministers Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman and H. H. Asquith, who succeeded Campbell-Bannerman after the latter's death in April 1908, were trimmed even more than in the post-Boer War era. In December 1908 Asquith's cabinet insisted the Admiralty draft a war plan elucidating the pros and the cons of waging economic warfare against Germany. This document, entitled "The Economic Effect of War on German Trade," argued that Germany's economy would be crippled by a stoppage of imports via the North Sea and determined that even a slight rise in the price of raw materials and foodstuffs would significantly compromise the German war effort.⁸⁰ It is therefore counter-intuitive to claim that the Royal Navy underwent a complete revolution in strategic direction and policy under John Fisher.

⁷⁸ Lambert, "British Naval Policy," 599-600, 625-626.

⁷⁹ Idem, *Planning Armageddon*, 86, 502. See also, Franklin Arthur Johnson, *Defence by Committee: The British Committee of Imperial Defence* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960).

⁸⁰ 'The Economic Effect of War on German Trade,' Admiralty memorandum, Committee of Imperial Defence paper, E-4, 12 December 1908, Appendix V, 'Report on the Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence to Consider the Military Needs of the Empire,' (July 1909), TNA, CAB 16/5/25.

Fisher's balanced fleet theory was no less visionary, but it took the stalemate of the First World War at sea, as it did on land, to fully demonstrate the need for better coordination of the fleet and armed services, as a whole.⁸¹

Lambert concludes his new research on economic warfare by asserting that "the failure to make the blockade effective was not a function of the Royal Navy's inability to carry it out, or the consequence of the continued neutral resistance (which admittedly remained considerable); rather, it was largely a result of the incapacity of the British system of government to coordinate and integrate departmental action."⁸² He is correct to point out the incapacity of the state to properly manage the blockade, particularly during the first eighteen months of the war. Regrettably, though, his analysis ends in February 1916 with the appointment of Robert Cecil as Minister of the Blockade. This is precisely when the British state began to comprehend the international scope and vast administration required to enforce these strict economic measures. Consequently, this chapter ends in early 1916, while subsequent chapters (Chapters 3 and 4) explain this fundamental shift in policy with the growth of an efficient civil-military bureaucracy under David Lloyd George. In effect, Lambert's work ends where this present analysis begins.

Prewar Planning and International Law

Anglo-German tensions reached their apogee in the July Crisis (28 June - 31 July) that led to the outbreak of war on 4 August 1914. The Royal Navy at once implemented a blockade of Germany in accordance with a 1909 recommendation from the Committee of Imperial Defence, which stated: "We are of the opinion that a serious situation would be

⁸¹ Geoffrey Till, "Review of *Sir John Fisher's Naval Revolution*," *Journal of Military History* 64, no. 1 (January 2000): 217.

⁸² Lambert, *Planning Armageddon*, 499.

created in Germany owing to the blockade of her ports, and that the longer the duration of the war, the more serious the situation would become.”⁸³ One must remember that naval blockades were prohibited unless they could be deemed legally “effective” (i.e. maintained with enough military force – as opposed to a paper declaration – while not blocking neutral vessels from entering or exiting their ports). This principle was established with the 1856 Declaration of Paris and reaffirmed in the London Declaration Concerning the Laws of Naval War in 1909.⁸⁴

In late 1908, British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey invited senior diplomats from France, Germany, Russia, Austria-Hungary, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Japan, and the United States to discuss, among other topics, what constituted contraband in times of war. Sixty-four articles on international maritime law were drawn up in the British capital on 26 February 1909.⁸⁵ Ultimately, the London Declaration decided which goods could be withheld from a belligerent nation on an “absolute” or “conditional” basis, and those that would have to remain on a “free” list of non-contraband items. Absolute items were non-negotiable goods that were considered essential to war production and, therefore, must be denied to the enemy. These included explosives, guns, warships, armour, and military vehicles. Conditional items, however, could serve both a military and civilian function – foodstuffs, clothing and fabrics, gold and silver,

⁸³ ‘Report of the [C.I.D.] Sub-committee to consider the Military Needs of the Empire,’ 24 July 1909, quoted in Avner Offer, “Morality and Admiralty: ‘Jacky’ Fisher, Economic Warfare, and the Laws of War,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 23, no. 1 (January 1988): 100. For an intimate look at the prewar blockade policy of the British Admiralty see, Christopher Martin, “The 1907 Naval War Plans and the Second Hague Peace: A Case of Propaganda,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 28, no. 5 (October 2005): esp. 843-851.

⁸⁴ Denys P. Myers, “The Legal Basis of the Rules of Blockade in the Declaration of London,” *American Journal of International Law* 4, no. 3 (July 1910): 571.

⁸⁵ *History of the Naval Operations*, 1926, Vol. IV, Chapter VII: Blockade of Germany, 165-166, TNA, ADM 116/3423.

paper money, and oil.⁸⁶ Additionally, any of these essential items could move from the conditional to absolute contraband list if the blockading power felt it necessary when prosecuting the war effort.

Each nation at the conference wanted specific concessions to protect its food supply and maintain a basic standard of living if a global conflict were to arise. Germany came to the table wanting to safeguard its ability to trade with northern neighbours such as Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and the Netherlands. For centuries Holland functioned as a natural *entrepôt* for goods entering and exiting Germany; Swedish iron ore, Norwegian copper, and American grain and cotton were all shipped to the Reich via the bustling port of Rotterdam.⁸⁷ This helps to explain the German General Staff's decision not to violate Dutch neutrality during the invasion of Belgium and France in the opening days of the war. Indeed, Helmuth von Moltke the Younger noted that trade with the Netherlands was absolutely vital to Germany's survival in a pan-European war: "For us, it will be of the utmost importance to have in Holland a country whose neutrality will assure imports and exports. It will have to be our windpipe that enables us to breathe."⁸⁸

British strategic planners also recognized the importance of neutral countries, but many were unsure how to seize contraband without violating their rights and the principle of freedom of the seas. For John Fisher, however, the decision was quite simple. In private correspondence with fellow diplomat Ernest Satow, senior conference delegate Sir Eyre Crowe recounted a frank conversation with the admiral:

⁸⁶ *London Declaration Concerning the Laws of Naval War*, Article IX, Chapter I.

⁸⁷ Marc Frey, "Trade, Ships, and the Neutrality of the Netherlands in the First World War," *International History Review* 19, no. 3 (August 1997): 541-542.

⁸⁸ Gerhard Ritter, *Der Schlieffenplan: Kritik eines Mythos* (Munich: Verlag R. Oldenbourg, 1956), 180.

Sir J. Fisher told me personally three days ago that in the next big war, our commanders would sink every ship they came across, hostile or neutral, if it happened to suit them. He added, with characteristic vehemence, that we should most certainly violate the Declaration of Paris and every other treaty that might prove inconvenient.⁸⁹

The Foreign Office was aware of the Admiralty's determination not to squander the economic and military advantages of a blockade of Germany. Yet Grey could not disregard international law so easily. He pressed for the participating nations to ratify the London Declaration, thereby binding the leading maritime powers, including Britain, to a strict code of what could and could not be seized in war. The treaty passed through the British House of Commons with little controversy. It required, however, the approval of the House of Lords, who collectively refused to ratify a document that clearly subordinated the Royal Navy's command of the sea to the rights of neutral countries. Without the support of these powerful lords in the upper chamber of Parliament, Britain was forced to leave the naval treaty unsigned, as did the other nine countries invited to the conference proceedings.⁹⁰

When war broke out on 4 August 1914 the Asquith government adopted neither Fisher's proposal to sink all ships, nor Grey's insistence on adhering to the conventions set forth in the London and Paris Declarations. Instead, the Liberal cabinet passed

⁸⁹ Private Letter from Eyre Crowe to Ernest Satow, 11 April 1909, TNA, FO 30/33/12/4. This was also the opinion of naval captain Mark Kerr and Secretary of State for War Colonel J. E. B. Seely, who presented a similar memorandum to the C.I.D. two years after Fisher's strongly worded recommendation. See, 'Protection of Trade and Furnishment of Food Supply in the Event of War with Germany,' May 1911, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives (hereafter cited as LHCMA), King's College, University of London, 15/2.

⁹⁰ Memorandum re: International Law and Belligerent Rights, 18 October 1920, TNA, ADM 116/3619. See also, Arthur Marsden, "The Blockade," in *British Foreign Policy under Sir Edward Grey*, ed. F. H. Hinsley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 489-490.

several Orders in Council (most notably two on 21 September and 29 October 1914), which stated that goods initially safeguarded under the Declaration's non-contraband free list could be arbitrarily seized. Moreover, neutral countries previously not subject to search and seizure on the high seas had to prove that their cargo was not bound for the Central Powers. Finally, in retaliation for Germany's decision to declare a war zone around the British Isles, Britain extended the blockade on 11 March 1915 to cover all items passing through the Atlantic, North, and Mediterranean Seas.⁹¹

The Short War Illusion and Business as Usual

Prewar expectations of a short war undeniably conditioned the Foreign Office and Board of Trade's attitude to economic warfare. Despite recent protracted conflicts such as the American Civil War (1861-1865), the "short war illusion" prevented politicians and military leaders from conceiving war plans beyond the first five months of combat.⁹² It is not surprising then that brokers in the City of London and businessmen throughout the country were given so little direction on economic policy if the war was to be over by Christmas.⁹³

The government encouraged companies to adopt a policy of "business as usual," which entailed maintaining trade relations with countries that were not members of the Central Powers and establishing even friendlier relations with countries known to trade with Germany. "This war will have a most excellent effect," proclaimed Liberal M.P. and economist Leo Chiozza Money, "upon [the] British economy and British enterprise. The

⁹¹ 'Food Blockade Near, Hints Grey,' *New York Times*, 20 February 1915; William E. Arnold-Forster, *The Economic Blockade, 1914-1919: Before the Armistice and After* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), 5-6-10.

⁹² Michael Howard, "Europe on the Eve of the First World War," in *The Coming of the First World War*, ed. Robert Evans and Hartmut Pogge von Strandmann (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 10-12; Jon Lawrence and Martin Dean et al., "The Outbreak of War and the Urban Economy: Paris, Berlin, and London in 1914," *Economic History Review* 45, no. 3 (August 1992): 564.

⁹³ Beckett, 42-42.

British trader, therefore... may confidently count upon several years [of] freedom from German competition.” The war, in short, provided a rare opportunity to supplant with British goods some of Imperial Germany’s and Austria-Hungary’s estimated £400 million in annual trade.⁹⁴ Yet many companies grew ambivalent about cutting off supplies to Germany – Britain’s largest trading partner – once the expectations of a short war proved illusory.

Morality did not figure in most businessmen’s discussion of Germany in the early war years nor was it a lack of patriotism that caused British businesses to continue trading with the enemy. Pragmatism, rather, informed their day-to-day mindset.⁹⁵ Trade between the Allies and Central Powers was also made easier by the accepted *laissez-faire* attitude of the Board of Trade. The Board’s president Walter Runciman openly supported free trade, while the War Trade Department, whose task it was to issue trade licenses to export abroad, was woefully understaffed and often hurried the investigation process to facilitate greater trade.⁹⁶ Justices of the Peace had to notarize these licenses and ensure that the applicant sufficiently detailed a cargo manifest and specified a final destination for the goods. It was not uncommon, however, for magistrates to pre-authorize trade licenses or even permit an applicant to write in pencil, thereby allowing companies to submit doctored papers whose contents and destination were never officially verified.

These trade violations were innocuous at first, beginning with the magistrates’ expeditious licensing of British goods, but they were nonetheless indicative of a laxness

⁹⁴ Leo Chiozza Money, “British Trade and the War,” *Contemporary Review* 106 (July-December 1914), quoted in John McDermott, “Total War and the Merchant State,” 63.

⁹⁵ David French, *British Economic and Strategic Planning, 1905-1915* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1982), 73-76; McDermott, “A Needless Sacrifice,” 265.

⁹⁶ McDermott, “Trading with the Enemy,” 207.

in the blockade administration. The Home Office, who oversaw the war effort on the home front, ultimately came to a similar conclusion in a report to the C.I.D. in early 1915: "... these instances seem to throw considerable doubt upon the efficiency of such declaration as a safeguard against enemy trading."⁹⁷ Recent research suggests though that the Home Secretary Reginald McKenna would have resigned had the practice of business as usual fallen by the wayside in August 1914. Like Runciman at the Board of Trade, McKenna was a devout free-trader who believed that stopping all trade to Germany would do more harm than good to the British economy.⁹⁸

Indirect Trade and the Northern Neutrals

As a result of this haphazard administration and the liberal capitalist tendencies of Asquith's cabinet, raw materials and foodstuffs still reached German ports in 1914-1915 and continued unimpeded until mid-1916. In fact, large quantities of Dutch meat, potatoes, butter, and eggs were imported to Germany throughout 1915 at five times the prewar rate. The Dutch were without question the "windpipe" that enabled Imperial Germany to breathe, especially after the 11 March 1915 British Order in Council stipulated that food was now contraband.⁹⁹

Why did neutral countries continually break the Allied blockade and risk unnecessary involvement in the First World War? This question is not only vital to understanding the varying motives of neutral powers, but also sheds light on the early inefficacy of the blockade machinery. Perhaps Grey articulated this transatlantic quandary best when he addressed the House of Commons on 26 January 1916: "You

⁹⁷ 'Trading with the Enemy,' C.I.D. Paper 209-B, 25 January 1915, TNA, CAB 42/1/23.

⁹⁸ Brock Millman, *Managing Domestic Dissent in First World War Britain* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), 38; Greg Kennedy, "Strategy and Power: The Royal Navy, Foreign Office and the Blockade," *Defense Studies* 8, no. 2 (June 2008): 191.

⁹⁹ Frey, 547.

have no right to deprive neutrals of goods which are genuinely intended for their own use... You cannot take over the administration of neutral countries... It is not in our power to do that under whatever system you have, whether you call it blockade, or whatever name you give to it.”¹⁰⁰ There were several objections to Grey’s viewpoint, but he persisted in arguing that Germany was bound to receive supplies via the neutrals and it would be far more advantageous to offer them trade incentives than a public rebuff or, worse yet, a heavy-handed threat.¹⁰¹ This was a common assumption in Asquith’s government; the United States notwithstanding, neutral countries were geographically situated between hegemonic land and sea powers. Britain and Germany demanded respect and economic cooperation in their quest for victory. Germany, however, was more willing to resort to coercion.

The sinking of the RMS *Lusitania* off the Irish coast on 7 May 1915 stands as one of the defining moments of the war. The ocean liner was bound for New York when a German submarine (*Unterseeboot* or U-boat) torpedoed and sank the ship, killing nearly 1,200 people onboard, including 80 children and 128 Americans.¹⁰² The Imperial German Navy (*Kaiserliche Marine*) reasoned that the British passenger liner was carrying war matériel to the Entente powers and was thus fair game. This act marked the midway point of Germany’s initial use of unrestricted submarine warfare to offset its commercial shipping losses inflicted by the Allied blockade at the start of the war. Yet the main difference between the two modes of blockade – the Allied surface blockade

¹⁰⁰ Sir Edward Grey, ‘Great Britain’s Measures against German Trade,’ Speech to the House of Commons, 26 January 1916, pp. 9, 25, in the Mary C. Rixford Papers, Box 1.

¹⁰¹ W. E. Hume-Williams, *International Law and the Blockade* (London: Sir Joseph Causton & Sons Ltd., 1916), Mary C. Rixford Papers, Box 1, HIA, 8.

¹⁰² Thomas A. Bailey, “The Sinking of the *Lusitania*,” *American Historical Review* 41, no. 1 (October 1935): 57.

versus the German U-boat – was that the Royal Navy did not sink enemy or neutral vessels without warning and citizens of neutral countries were not deliberately killed to demonstrate one’s naval superiority.¹⁰³

The long-term ramifications of U-boat warfare will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. In the short term, however, these reprisals had the effect of scaring neutral countries into compliance with German trade demands. Consequently, most neutrals felt “bound to give Germany the largest quantity of foodstuffs they could, as otherwise the Germans would... torpedo their vessels without mercy.”¹⁰⁴ The sinking of the *Lusitania* did not immediately compel the United States to enter the war. It did, however, temporarily undercut Allied trade with ambivalent neutrals and reinforce the fact that this was a total war where morality could be subordinated for the “good” of the war effort.¹⁰⁵ This was both a costly and dangerous precedent to set.

French Economic Tactics: Too Little, Too Late?

From August 1914 to April 1917 the naval blockade of the Central Powers was ostensibly a British affair. But this should not diminish the supporting role of the French. The Third Republic was stretched both financially and militarily by the German invasion and subsequent race to the sea that bogged down the *Deutsches Heer* and solidified the 724 km stretch of Franco-Belgian territory known as the Western Front. Unlike Asquith’s

¹⁰³ Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, 247.

¹⁰⁴ Frey, 547; Keegan, 266-267.

¹⁰⁵ Indeed, the concept of “total war” is predicated on the assumption that there will be an “erosion of the boundary between soldiers and civilians, [where] civilians become the backbone of the war effort as well as targets of military violence.” The German novelist, essayist, and First World War veteran Ernst Jünger was the first person to coin the term in the 1930s. See, Roger Chickering and Stig Förster et al., *A World at Total War: Global Conflict and the Politics of Destruction, 1937-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 9, 56. See also, Anton Bertram, “The Economic Weapon as a Form of Peaceful Pressure,” *Transactions of the Grotius Society* 17 (1931), 159; Alexander B. Downes, “Desperate Times, Desperate Measures: The Causes of Civilian Victimization in War,” *International Security* 30, no. 4 (Spring 2006): 163-164; idem, *Targeting Civilians in War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), esp. Chapter 3.

Britain, the centrist government of President Raymond Poincaré could not devote considerable time or resources to a program of economic warfare when the need was much greater at the front. From the outset of the war the blockade tactics of the French were clearly meant to support British policy rather than being developed in tandem with it.¹⁰⁶

Very little has been written about France's role in the Allied blockade, but the work that does exist – both in French and English – is certainly worth considering. The closest one gets to an official history is Louis Guichard's *The Naval Blockade, 1914-1918*. Published in 1930 with the aid of documents from the historical section of the French Navy, the monograph is sympathetic to the predicament of French policymakers, who were consistently thwarted by the British policy of business as usual.¹⁰⁷ Where the French wanted to isolate Germany economically, the British second-guessed this strategy for the sake of diplomatic appearances. Where the British were lenient with companies caught trading with the enemy, the French advocated decisive policies to eradicate trade leakages. This is the tone of Guichard's narrative for the early war years. The author was a lieutenant in the French Navy during the Great War, which partly explains his frustrations with inter-Allied diplomacy and the blockade machinery as a whole.

Guichard is not wrong to suggest that the blockade was “marked by two years of infirmity of purpose born of fear of offending the neutrals.”¹⁰⁸ Yet he is incorrect to assume that the machinery's flaws and inefficacy were entirely British in design. In fact,

¹⁰⁶ Marjorie M. Farrar, *Conflict and Compromise: The Strategy, Politics, and Diplomacy of the French Blockade, 1914-1918* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 2-3, 192; idem, “French Blockade Policy, 1914-1918: A Study in Economic Warfare,” PhD Dissertation, Stanford University, 1969, 3.

¹⁰⁷ Louis Guichard, *The Naval Blockade, 1914-1918*, trans. Christopher R. Turner (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1930), xiv-xv. See also, Denys Cochin and Jean Étienne Paul Gout, *Les Organisations de blocus en France pendant la guerre, 1914-1918* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit et cie, 1926).

¹⁰⁸ Guichard, 306.

France's difficulty in mounting an effective program of economic warfare had little to do with the size of the French Navy or their headstrong ally across the Channel. From the war's outset the government discussed what economic options were available to it. In November 1914, Foreign Minister Théophile Delcassé proposed that an inter-ministerial committee be established to handle all matters pertaining to the blockade. He used as an example the British model of the Restriction of Enemy Supply Committee to gain Parliament's assent.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, he discussed the committee in detail with representatives from the Ministries of War, Finance, Justice, Commerce, Agriculture, and Foreign Affairs, who all agreed to share departmental resources with the creation of the *Comité de Restriction des Approvisionnements et du Commerce de l'Ennemi* (more commonly known as *Comité R.*).

Delcassé's plan, while not wholly original, was a practical option that could have centralized the French blockade effort. The committee initially investigated the re-exportation of goods from neutral Switzerland to Germany, while Britain concentrated their efforts on the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, and Norway. In early 1915, the French determined that Italy, a country rich with olive trees, was suddenly importing a vast amount of olive oil from Spain. When cross-referenced with their prewar imports, the *Comité* could see that Italy did not typically purchase olive oil from Spain or any other country for that matter. Further investigation revealed that the Italians were importing the oil only to re-export it to Germany via Switzerland. The cooking oil was then used by the German army as a substitute for gasoline, which was considered

¹⁰⁹ The British committee was established at the start of the war and later merged with the War Trade Advisory Committee (WTAC) in late 1915. Following the creation of the Ministry of the Blockade in February 1916, the committee became known as the Restriction of Enemy Supplies Department in January 1917. Siney, *The Allied Blockade of Germany*, 71-72.

“conditional” contraband under both the Declaration of London and more extensive 11 March Order in Council.¹¹⁰ This is merely one example of the kind of work undertaken by the French Foreign Ministry to eradicate trading with the enemy. The Italian case was partially rectified with its declaration of war against the Central Powers in May 1915. Indeed, with Italy joining the war on the Entente side, exports to Switzerland dried up, leaving the Reich to fend for itself in both the production and distribution of oil.¹¹¹

Despite the *Comité* proving to be an efficient and reliable means of curtailing trade with the enemy, Parliament and the War Ministry vehemently resisted any attempt to expand its discretionary powers. For instance, Delcassé appropriately advocated preclusive purchasing of neutral goods bound for the Central Powers. This policy entailed monitoring closely what items Germany regularly purchased from neutral countries – be it cattle from Switzerland or sulfuric acid from Norway – and stockpiling them to deprive the enemy of essential goods. Admittedly, it would have required a substantial commitment from the government to finance such a project. The War Ministry cried foul, claiming that francs should not be needlessly diverted from the front to sponsor preclusive purchasing of “random” goods. Parliament, meanwhile, balked at the thought of its prerogative powers being usurped by an inter-ministerial body, even though the *Comité* possessed no decision-making rights.¹¹² One can see that France’s greatest problem with the blockade in 1914-1915 was financial in nature, made worse by inter-service rivalry that hampered a viable policy of economic warfare.

It is telling that interest in preclusive purchasing was revived in February-March

¹¹⁰ Marjorie M. Farrar, “Preclusive Purchases: Politics and Economic Warfare in France during the Great War,” *Economic History Review* 26, no. 1 (1973): 119.

¹¹¹ Stevenson, *Cataclysm*, 82.

¹¹² Siney, 72.

1916 at the behest of French Premier Aristide Briand and General Joseph Joffre.¹¹³ Joffre, as Commander-in-Chief of the French Army, experienced devastating losses at the Battle of Verdun (roughly 140,000 deaths over a two month period), as the Fifth German Army attempted to “bleed the French white” and knock them out of the war altogether. The brutal fighting continued for an additional eight months with total death figures exceeding 300,000 men on each side.¹¹⁴ Briand looked to the *Comité* to facilitate a trade deal with the Netherlands, whereby France would purchase meat from the Dutch above market value to deprive Germany of a vital source of protein. By 1916, the war of attrition as experienced daily at Verdun and the Somme was now waged over the distribution of food on the home front.¹¹⁵

American Neutrality and the Moral Predicament

The United States was the most powerful country to proclaim its neutrality at the start of the First World War, much to the consternation of the Allies who struggled to persuade the Americans as to the “righteousness” of their respective blockades. U.S. neutrality was a hard fought principle dating from George Washington’s Proclamation of Neutrality in April 1793, which gave Congress the right to decide when to go to war.¹¹⁶ The Proclamation and more extensive Act of Neutrality (1794) made plain that the United States’ neutrality was non-negotiable and their loyalty not for sale in the ongoing Anglo-French wars of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

¹¹³ Farrar, “Preclusive Purchases,” 120.

¹¹⁴ Keegan, 179. These figures represent the number of French and German deaths at the Battle of Verdun, not the number of casualties. It is worth noting that the Allies broadly used the term “casualties” to denote both those ‘killed’ or ‘wounded’ in action. The Germans, however, reserved the term only for those killed in action. Therefore, the casualty figures for the French at Verdun would far exceed 300,000. See, James McRandle and James Quirk, “The Blood Test Revisited: A New Look at German Casualty Counts in World War I,” *Journal of Military History* 70, no. 3 (July 2006): 667-701.

¹¹⁵ Farrar, “Preclusive Purchases,” 121.

¹¹⁶ Nils Ørvik, *The Decline of Neutrality, 1914-1941, with special reference to the United States and the Northern Neutrals* (London: Frank Cass, 1971), 18.

Woodrow Wilson echoed Washington's sentiments upon Germany's violation of Belgian neutrality and the Entente's declaration of war against the Central Powers. The Democratic President publicly stated that although "the United States is on terms of friendship and amity with the contending Powers," the government would not tolerate acts of war on American territory or in their jurisdiction and, equally, forbade U.S. citizens and companies from participating in the European war.¹¹⁷ Wilson's speech outlined the nature of American neutrality by identifying specific acts that were considered tantamount to violating U.S. sovereignty. Broadly, they were:

- (1) Accepting a commission or post in a belligerent's land or sea force.
- (2) Enlisting to serve in a belligerent's land or sea force.
- (3) Hiring or retaining a person to enlist in said belligerent's military.
- (4) Procuring arms for a belligerent.
- (5) Aiding in any way a vessel known to be a ship of war.
- (6) Engaging in privateering.

The President concluded by noting that America would not permit belligerent vessels to frequent its waters for the purposes of engaging in hostile activity. He referenced the likelihood of a naval blockade in the Atlantic and cautioned Americans to avoid, at all costs, transporting soldiers or contraband of war.¹¹⁸

Wilson's Proclamation of Neutrality did not distinguish between a legal versus paper blockade, but critics of the Allied blockade policy certainly did. The State Department told the U.S. ambassador in London on 26 September 1914 to remind Grey that the Declaration of London was not a document of convenience. Its principles ought to be adhered to rather than enforcing certain ones acceptable only to the British Admiralty. The Americans believed Britain was flagrantly violating articles in the

¹¹⁷ Woodrow Wilson, "Proclamation of Neutrality by the President of the United States, 4 August 1914," *American Journal of International Law* 9, no. 1 (January 1915): 110.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 111-113.

declaration that ran counter to their long-distance blockade of Germany. In particular, the State Department objected to Britain's liberal application of the doctrine of "continuous voyage," which permitted the Royal Navy to seize a neutral ship's cargo on the presumption that it was destined for the Central Powers. Here, the British did not have to prove that the ship's captain had foreknowledge of the contraband (i.e. establishing intent to transport sensitive matériel), or that all of the cargo was bound for a belligerent power.¹¹⁹ Thus neutral ships were more likely to be seized under the current British blockade system.

Did the Royal Navy aggressively apply the doctrine of continuous voyage and, in the process, seize many neutral goods unintended for enemy use? The answer is affirmative in both cases. Yet, as the papers of Admiral M. W. W. P. Consett, a British naval attaché stationed in Sweden and Denmark, and Rear-Admiral Dudley De Chair, Commander of the Tenth Cruiser (Blockade) Squadron attest, there were many instances where contraband passed undetected in 1914-1915.¹²⁰ Moreover, the Americans were not entirely in a position to criticize Great Britain's right to blockade. Throughout these early diplomatic talks the United States held firm that Britain was enforcing a large scale paper blockade, which had been outlawed in the Declaration of Paris nearly six decades prior. But the problem was that the Americans, like the other delegates at the naval conference, never ratified the London Declaration. Furthermore, unlike Britain, France, and Prussia, the United States was not a signatory of the Declaration of Paris, and was

¹¹⁹ Siney, *The Allied Blockade of Germany*, 24.

¹²⁰ M. W. W. P. Consett, *The Triumph of Unarmed Forces: An Account of the Transactions by which Germany during the Great War was able to obtain Supplies prior to her Collapse under the Pressure of Economic Forces* (New York: Brentano's, 1923); Rear-Admiral Dudley de Chair, "How the British Blockade Works," 1916, Imperial War Museum (London) [hereafter cited as IWM], E.P. 293.

thus unable to invoke its provisions.¹²¹

There was also the issue of historical precedent to take into consideration. On 2 April 1915, the State Department took exception to Britain's Order in Council that declared the entire North Sea and Atlantic a war zone. There is little doubt that American statesmen such as presidential advisor Colonel Edward M. House and Walter Hines Page, the U.S. ambassador to Britain, were sympathetic to the Allied cause. What they objected to, though, was the stoppage of American vessels carrying non-contraband items and the cordon of Royal Naval Reserve cruisers restricting neutral ports.¹²² Even the sinking of the *Lusitania* in May 1915 did not lessen the State Department's opposition to the Allied blockade, which Secretary of State Robert Lansing denounced in November as totally "ineffective, illegal, and indefensible."¹²³

Recent history, however, played in Britain's favour. The British had experienced similar economic injury under the Union blockade of the Confederate states during the Civil War, during which the English cotton industry was decimated without supplies from the American South. In 1861 President Abraham Lincoln stated that neutral trade would not be interfered with, but any ship – regardless of nationality – caught running the blockade would be stopped and its cargo potentially seized. Additionally, the North would not permit merchant vessels to come within a certain radius of a blockaded port or coast.¹²⁴ To circumvent the Northern blockade British merchants began trading in greater volume in the West Indies, particularly in Bermuda and the Bahamas, which lay

¹²¹ Malbone W. Graham Jr., "Neutrality and the World War," *American Journal of International Law* 17, no. 4 (October 1923): 707.

¹²² Siney, *The Allied Blockade of Germany*, 69-70.

¹²³ Ørvik, 44.

¹²⁴ A. Maurice Low, *The Law of Blockade* (London: Sir Joseph Causton & Sons Ltd., 1916), in the Mary C. Rixford Papers, HIA, 4-5.

strategically close to the Confederate ports of Wilmington, North Carolina, Charleston, South Carolina, and Savannah, Georgia.¹²⁵ British and Confederate vessels repeatedly ran Lincoln's blockade in an attempt to maintain trade relations with one another and, in the case of the former, reaffirm their naval superiority in the age of *Pax Britannica*.

Despite Britain's neutrality and the Paris Declaration that prohibited blockading neutral ports, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that blockades did not have to be enforced at close range to be legally effective. This caveat was decided in the heat of battle to give the North greater latitude in their fight against the South. It was done without consulting international maritime law yet it established a precedent that allowed navies to more efficiently deploy their fleet at strategic points rather than forming a ring around a single port or body of water.¹²⁶ Ultimately, the Union blockade of the American South demonstrated the ideal way to establish a blockade at a safe distance, which better suited modern navies equipped with new weapon systems and wireless technology.

This caveat placed the United States in a unique moral predicament throughout 1914-1916. The Royal Navy, after all, was employing the American practice of a distant blockade but on a grander scale. When the situation had been reversed during the Civil War, the United States redefined the parameters of belligerency – legally and geographically – by expanding the blockade radius to cover up to 1,000 miles off the southern U.S. coast.¹²⁷ There, the Northern fleet could lie in wait for neutral or

¹²⁵ See, Stephen R. Wise, *Lifeline of the Confederacy: Blockade Running during the Civil War* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988); David G. Surdam, *North Naval Superiority and the Economics of the American Civil War* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001); Frank Everson Vandiver, *Confederate Blockade Running through Bermuda, 1861-1865: Letters and Cargo Manifests* (New York: Kraus, 1970); Thomas P. Lowry, "The Big Business of Bahamian Blockade Running," *Civil War Times* 46, no. 3 (May 2007): 56.

¹²⁶ W. Stanhope Sprigg, "The British Blockade: What It Means, How It Works," *Pearson's Magazine* (1917), in the Mary C. Rixford Papers, HIA.

¹²⁷ Low, 7.

belligerent vessels attempting to run the blockade. The irony was not lost on British journalists and intellectuals who spoke openly about the hypocrisy of American opinion on the Allied blockade.

In a tense exchange in the pages of *The Atlantic Monthly*, Oxford classicist Gilbert Murray rebuked American journalist and, later, Committee on Public Information (CPI) propaganda expert Arthur Bullard for his belief that “We have apparently started ‘a wholesale repudiation of legal restraints [and] decided that there is no sea law’.”¹²⁸ Bullard, of course, argued that neutral countries ought to have greater control over their transatlantic trade and, secondly, that an international prize (naval) court should be established to protect neutrals from the vagaries of belligerents’ war aims. This is what Grey asked of the Great Powers at the London Declaration in 1909. Thus the failure to ratify the naval treaty and establish a prize court¹²⁹ led Bullard to wonder whether, “he [Grey] has been effaced by the British Junkers and, no longer directing British policy, is now reduced to the rôle of registering it and trying – not very successfully – to justify it?”¹³⁰ His accusations spoke to the prevailing opinion among U.S. nationalists that America alone shouldered the burden of freedom and democracy while old world Europe was tearing itself apart.

¹²⁸ Gilbert Murray, *Great Britain’s Sea Policy: A Reply to an American Critic*, reprinted from *The Atlantic Monthly* (London: T. Fisher Unwin Ltd., 1917), in the Mary C. Rixford Papers, HIA, 3. The CPI was created by the U.S. government on executive order in April 1917 to influence public opinion through a variety of print and film mediums. Its aim was to bolster support for the American war effort and undercut German attempts to sway American opinion.

¹²⁹ These naval courts determined the rules of capturing a vessel’s cargo or “prize” during wartime. The use of prize courts became increasingly prevalent throughout the “Age of Sail,” (1571-1850) and continued into the twentieth century in the form of a proposed international prize court at the Hague Conference of 1907. See Donald Petrie, *The Prize Game: Lawful Looting on the High Seas in the Days of Fighting Sail* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1999), 4-5; Henry B. Brown, “The Proposed International Prize Court,” *American Journal of International Law* 2, no. 3 (July 1908): 476-489.

¹³⁰ Arthur Bullard, “Our Relations with Great Britain,” *The Atlantic Monthly* 118, (October 1916): 453-454, 457. See also, Thomas A. Bailey, *The Policy of the United States towards the Neutrals, 1917-1918* (Massachusetts: Peter Smith, 1966), 11.

These moralistic sentiments did not sit well with Professor Murray and other British writers who put pen to paper to remind the United States that they, too, neglected freedom of the seas in favour of a wartime blockade against the enemy.¹³¹ Moreover, these writers invoked history to discredit the official German claim that Britain was willfully starving women and children on the home front to hasten an Allied victory. Doubt was cast, for example, on Germany's adherence to international law with the "rape" of Belgium in the opening days of the war. The extent of the German army's cruelty and cowardice was recounted in popular verse with the 1915 poem *In The Trail of the Hun*:

*Women screen your firing-line/Villages burned down to dust/
Torture, murder, bestial lust/Filth too foul for printer's ink/
Crimes from which the apes would shrink/Strange the offers that you press/
On the God of Righteousness!*¹³²

In pamphlets published for both British and American readership writers continued to juxtapose British morality with the seeming inhumanity of the German High Command or *Oberste Heeresleitung* (OHL), who sacrificed innocent lives – be they Belgian, French, German or American – for the sake of an additional three hundred feet of territory or one less ship carrying potential war matériel.¹³³

This increasing disregard for civilian lives and the greater need to assert one's national rights, in the end, pushed neutral countries towards a more active form of

¹³¹ Murray, 11; Low, 13-14, 20.

¹³² Charles Masterman, "Report of the Work of the Bureau Established for the Purpose of Laying before Neutral Nations and the Dominions the Case of Great Britain and Her Allies," *Interim Report of the War Propaganda Bureau*, 15 June 1915, TNA, INF 4/5. Barry Pain's *In the Trail of the Hun* (1915), quoted in Nicoletta F. Gullace, "Sexual Violence and Family Honor: British Propaganda and International Law during the First World War," *American Historical Review* 102, no. 3 (June 1997): 727.

¹³³ Bernhard R. Wise, *The Freedom of the Sea* (London: Darling & Sons, Ltd., 1915), in the Mary C. Rixford Papers, HIA, 9-10.

participation in the First World War. For the United States it was a thirty-two month evolution from neutral to belligerent, while Scandinavia and the Netherlands continued to moderate a fine line between proud neutrality and collaboration with Allies and the Central Powers with often varying degrees of success. Britain entered the First World War with definite assumptions concerning the nature and scope of the conflict in Europe.¹³⁴ What appeared to be a war for dynastic power and territorial aggrandizement in the Balkans turned into a global conflagration. Prewar expectations were quickly replaced and tempered with limited victories and high mortality rates.

Ultimately, Asquith's Liberal government experienced a steep learning curve with the naval blockade of the Central Powers and spent the first two years of the war placating neutrals and British businessmen. Taken together, the blockade policy of the Allies c. 1914 to early 1916 lacked a coherent strategy and an inter-departmental administration to implement necessary changes. Yet 1916 was a year in which belligerents and neutrals were tested like never before. Verdun and the Somme completely disavowed the Great Powers of the short war illusion and helped to remind them "... we are now proceeding on the assumption that this will be a long war,"¹³⁵ where business as usual would no longer suffice.

¹³⁴ Bailey, *The Policy of the United States*, 15. See also, Maartje M. Abbenhuis, "In Fear of War: The First World War and the State of Siege in the Neutral Netherlands, 1914-1918," *War in History* 13, no. 1 (January 2006): 16-17, 40; Duncan Scott, "The Effects of the British Blockade of the Central Powers on Selected Neutral Nations, 1914-1919," MA Thesis, California State University, 1996, 42-47.

¹³⁵ Sir Edward Grey to P.M. Asquith quoted in Lambert, *Planning Armageddon*, 441. For a concise overview of the learning curve experienced by the Royal Navy see, James Goldrick, "The Impact of War: Matching Expectation with Reality in the Royal Navy in the First Months of the Great War at Sea," *War in History* 14, no. 1 (2007): 22-35.

CHAPTER 3

BEYOND A “NEEDLESS SACRIFICE”: TOTAL WAR AND THE TIGHTENING OF THE BLOCKADE, 1916-1918

New Players, New Approach

By early 1916 there was a widespread belief in the British Parliament that the current prosecution of the war was simply not enough to achieve victory at the front.

Commenting on the difficulty of breaking the strategic deadlock, Britain’s Secretary of State for War, Lord Kitchener, said in dismay: “I don’t know what is to be done. This isn’t *war*.”¹³⁶ After nearly eighteen months of continuous fighting, and seeing no clear end in sight, politicians scrambled to reassure soldiers and civilians that their sacrifices were not in vain. The British public and the Press demanded more accountability of Prime Minister H. H. Asquith’s government and, in return, more was expected of the country in its fight against Imperial Germany.¹³⁷ Ultimately, 1916 was the year in which the Entente and the Central Powers ratcheted up the military, political, and socio-economic stakes in a process that military historian Alan Kramer has aptly referred to as the “radicalization of warfare” between 1914 and 1918.¹³⁸

This chapter explores the crucial ways in which the naval blockade of Germany was increasingly tightened during the last three years of the war (i.e. January 1916 to November 1918). It argues that drastic changes were made to the existing machinery of

¹³⁶ The emphasis is Kitchener’s own. David R. Woodward, “Britain in a Continental War: The Civil-Military Debate over the Strategical Direction of the Great War, 1914-1918,” *Albion* 12, no. 1 (Spring 1980): 37.

¹³⁷ Sir Eyre Crowe, 24 January 1916 Minute, TNA, FO 382/1099/1353. The introduction of conscription in Britain with the Military Service Act of January 1916 was one example of this greater civic involvement in the war. See, John W. Graham, *Conscription and Conscience: A History, 1916-1919* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1922).

¹³⁸ Alan Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction: Culture and Mass Killing in the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), esp. 31-69.

the blockade after 1915, which fostered greater inter-allied and departmental cooperation and wrecked havoc on German food supply and morale.

The creation of a separate Ministry of the Blockade in February 1916, for example, provided the British government with an opportunity to more clearly define its economic and naval policy vis-à-vis belligerent rights. Several important changes were made by the Ministry to halt the flow of goods entering Germany, which allowed the Foreign Office to exert more control over the commerce of neutral countries.¹³⁹ It has been said, "... that the chief achievement of the British Navy [throughout the First World War] was to conquer the co-operation of the world."¹⁴⁰ At first glance, the word "conquer" may seem misplaced because Britain did not silence its allies' opinion or conquer neutral countries in their fight against the Central Powers. What they insisted on, however, was tacit cooperation to overwhelm the enemy to the point of defeat. In the face of these new stringent demands, the United States and neutral Scandinavian countries were forced to rethink the price of neutrality.¹⁴¹

The sweeping changes to Britain's blockade policy, along with the global crop failure of 1916, had a devastating impact on German food supply. During the "Turnip Winter" of 1916-1917, caloric intake plummeted on the home front as scarce foodstuffs were diverted to soldiers at the front.¹⁴² Although resourceful substitutes were found for staple items like milk, pork, cheese, and butter, the vast majority of the country survived on a poor diet of watery turnips and stale bread.

¹³⁹ Osborne, 119.

¹⁴⁰ A. E. Zimmern, *The Economic Weapon in the War against Germany* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1918), pp. 10, in the Mary C. Rixford Papers, Box 1, HIA.

¹⁴¹ "American Neutrality Reconsidered," *Columbia Law Review* 36, no. 1 (January 1936): 105-144.

¹⁴² Vincent, 45. See also, J. A. Salter, *Allied Shipping Control: An Experiment in International Administration* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921), 1; Hardach, 17.

In order to overcome the increasing hunger and economic isolation, Kaiser Wilhelm II ordered the Imperial German Navy to resume the policy of unrestricted submarine warfare. Beginning on 1 February 1917, German submarines were stationed in the Atlantic Ocean and the North, Baltic, and Mediterranean Seas with the aim to sink all ships – even neutral vessels – destined for Britain.¹⁴³ It was a reckless gamble that failed primarily because the German High Command (OHL) did not adequately consider the ramifications of targeting neutral ships.¹⁴⁴ They incorrectly believed that the loss of neutral and Entente shipping would starve Britain long before the U.S. could mobilize its navy or a sizable expeditionary force.¹⁴⁵

Indeed, the United States promptly broke off diplomatic relations within two days of the Kaiser's declaration and cited submarine attacks on American shipping in its declaration of war on the *Kaiserreich* on 6 April 1917. The entry of the United States as an "associated power" of the Entente marked a decisive turning point in the First World War. American intervention brought about what has been described as the third and final phase of the conflict.¹⁴⁶ An examination of the "hunger blockade" and its effects on Germany c. 1917-1918 will show that this assessment could not be more accurate.

The creation of the Allied Blockade Committee (ABC) in December 1917 finally allowed the Allies to secure an airtight blockade of the Central Powers.¹⁴⁷ It was the

¹⁴³ Karl E. Birnbaum, *Peace Moves and U-Boat Warfare: A Study of Imperial Germany's Policy towards the United States, April 18, 1916 – January 9, 1917* (Stockholm: Almquist & Wiksell, 1958).

¹⁴⁴ Halpern, 101. See also, Stevenson, *Cataclysm*, 214; H. E. Goemans and Mark Fey, "Risky but Rational: War as an Institutionally Induced Gamble," *Journal of Politics* 71, no. 1 (January 2009): 45-47.

¹⁴⁵ Memorandum by Admiral Henning von Holtzendorff to Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg re: "The Merchant Tonnage Issue and the Supply of England," 22 December 1916, quoted in Dirk Steffen, "The Holtzendorff Memorandum of 22 December 1916 and Germany's Declaration of Unrestricted U-Boat Warfare," *Journal of Military History* 68, no. 1 (January 2004): 219-220.

¹⁴⁶ Stevenson, *Cataclysm*, 247.

¹⁴⁷ "Freedom of the Seas re: Blockade and Economic Warfare, Appendix, Development of the Blockade, 2 December 1918," TNA, ADM 1/8545/312.

culmination of more than three years of diplomatic manoeuvring to convince the United States that economic reprisal was the only responsible course of action against German belligerency at sea. In the next chapter, “Chapter 4: Print War and the Art of Persuasion,” I discuss the lengths to which British press baron Lord Northcliffe went to sway U.S. public opinion in favour of intervention and capitalized on their involvement in a propaganda campaign that played on Germany’s fear of hunger and isolation.

In this chapter, however, I examine the broader implications of the hunger blockade’s success. How did the Allies completely prohibit neutral countries from trading with the Central Powers and what sort of physical effects did the Germans experience as a result of sustained malnutrition? The answer to both questions will show that Britain’s blockade underwent massive structural changes starting in early 1916, which gradually wore down Germany’s resolve and undeniably aided in its defeat.¹⁴⁸

Administrative Changes and the Price of Neutrality

As the war entered its second winter in December 1915, Britain’s top politicians, military personnel, and the press took stock of the year’s successes and failures both on land and at sea. Admittedly, there was not much success to celebrate. Highly publicized failures like the Battle of Loos (25-28 September), where, among other tactical errors, a poorly timed chlorine gas attack on German positions accidentally killed or wounded more than 2,500 British troops,¹⁴⁹ and the recent evacuation of the Allies from Gallipoli (beginning on 15 December 1915),¹⁵⁰ confirmed for the British that even a strong numerical

¹⁴⁸ Zara Steiner, “The Foreign Office and the War,” in *British Foreign Policy under Sir Edward Grey*, ed. F. H. Hinsley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 528.

¹⁴⁹ Stevenson, *Cataclysm*, 128-129; Donald Richter, *Chemical Soldiers: British Gas Warfare in World War I* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 69-73, 88.

¹⁵⁰ Keegan, 248. See also, Robin Prior, *Gallipoli: The End of Myth* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), esp. 190-209, 221-236; T. H. E. Travers, “Command and Leadership Styles in the British Army: The 1915 Gallipoli Model,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 29, no. 3 (July 1994): 432-434.

advantage, use of chemical weapons, and considerable assistance from the Dominion countries had failed to turn the tide against the Central Powers. If more troops from far-flung corners of the world was not the key to victory, what then was the answer?

The Commander of the Grand Fleet, John Jellicoe, proposed that the government should tighten the naval blockade of Germany using whatever means possible. In private correspondence with John Fisher, who retired as First Sea Lord over the Gallipoli fiasco in May 1915, Jellicoe voiced his disgust with the timidity of the Foreign Office in its handling of the Allied blockade: “I write letter after letter on the blockade questions, but the FO seems quite imbecile. They are afraid of their own shadows and imagine that every neutral is anxious to go to war with us and can do us harm. I don’t believe it and never shall till I see the declaration of war.”¹⁵¹

Although Jellicoe’s words were harsh, he only voiced them to senior naval staff after learning that the Foreign Office quietly permitted the Northern Neutrals to stockpile domestic goods.¹⁵² He believed that there was only one reason why neutral countries would import and hoard commonplace items like grain, textiles, meat, and coffee – in order to re-export them to Germany at a much higher price. In a separate meeting arranged by Arthur Balfour, current First Lord of the Admiralty and cousin of Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Lord Robert Cecil, Jellicoe discussed his concerns with the parliamentary under-secretary in early December. Above all, he believed that greater pressure had to be applied to the neutrals; if they were not willing to voluntarily comply with Allied trade demands, then Britain would have to force them.

Cecil, for his part, expressed how hamstrung he felt by Grey’s cautiousness and

¹⁵¹ Lambert, *Planning Armageddon*, 487-488.

¹⁵² “Memorandum from Admiral John Jellicoe to Admiralty, 15 November 1915,” TNA, FO 382/474/192190. See also, Greg Kennedy, “Strategy and Power,” 194.

did not bristle at Jellicoe's advice to clamp down on neutral trade. In fact, he welcomed suggestions on how to better exploit the economic angle of the war. For the next several months, Cecil sent Jellicoe several confidential documents on the government's blockade policy, in which he asked the admiral to critique the work of the Foreign Office.¹⁵³ This entire exchange was done without Grey's knowledge, but that, of course, was the whole idea.

Grey, like Asquith, increasingly found himself without many allies as the war entered 1916. Cecil intentionally distanced himself from his superior and watched while the criticism mounted. As Lord Beaverbrook, the Anglo-Canadian owner of the *London Evening Standard*, later described the problem of Britain's wartime leadership c. 1915-1916: "The politicians gave little credit to the generals. The generals denounced the politicians. The soldiers and sailors serving in the forces had little confidence in either. The public had no heroes."¹⁵⁴

By early February 1916, word had spread throughout the government that Britain's blockade "leaked at every seam."¹⁵⁵ All signs pointed to the continued placation of the neutrals by the Foreign Office. Conservative newspapers happily seized upon the opportunity to publish headlines denouncing the "make-believe blockade" as a "farce" perpetrated by an overly cautious foreign minister. These were followed by subsequent newspaper articles and a heated debate in the House of Commons on 23 February 1916 that clearly indicated Grey's days were numbered when it came to the

¹⁵³ Letter from Lord Cecil to Lord Crewe [Secretary of State for the Colonies], 19 December 1915, TNA, FO 800/196/71.

¹⁵⁴ Lord Beaverbrook, *Men and Power* (London: Hutchinson, 1956), xi.

¹⁵⁵ *The Spectator*, 19 February 1916. See also "Blockade of Germany – Firm Attitude Towards the Neutrals," *The Age*, 28 January 1916; McDermott, "Total War and the Merchant State," 69.

blockade.¹⁵⁶ The foreign secretary was well aware of the criticism he was garnering both in the media and in Parliament and wrote to Asquith to voice his concerns.

Grey told the prime minister that he was unable to devote the proper time to effectively manage the naval blockade.¹⁵⁷ He found that dealing with the neutrals took too much time away from his other duties and requested that Robert Cecil oversee all future blockade matters in his place. In fact, this arrangement suited all the parties involved.¹⁵⁸ The British press, Admiralty, Tory opposition, and even his colleagues in the Foreign Office all maintained that Grey did not have the stomach for total war. Therefore, his letter presented the government with an opportunity to reevaluate their priorities and craft a more cogent blockade policy in regards to belligerent rights. Grey, meanwhile, could still retain his position as foreign minister – at least until Asquith’s government fell in December 1916 – while not compromising his stance on the preservation of neutral rights.¹⁵⁹

The prime minister took Grey’s advice seriously and consolidated the various trade departments (e.g. War Trade Department, War Trade Intelligence Department, War Trade Statistical Department, Rationing Committee, Foreign Trade Department, Section on Financial Transactions, and the Contraband Department) into one larger Ministry of the Blockade headed by Cecil. Although Grey may have divested himself of the day-to-day management of the blockade, Cecil’s workload increased exponentially. He still

¹⁵⁶ “The Make-Believe Blockade,” *Morning Post*, 15 February 1916; “The Blockade Farce,” *Daily Mail*, 16 February 1916; MP Major Hunt, Speech to the House of Commons, 23 February 1916, *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5th series, vol. 80, col. 775. See also, Armin Rappaport, *The British Press and Wilsonian Neutrality* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1951), 77; Richard Evans, *From the Frontline: The Extraordinary Life of Sir Basil Clarke* (Stroud: History Press Spellmount, 2013), esp. Chapter 10.

¹⁵⁷ Lambert, *Planning Armageddon*, 496.

¹⁵⁸ Excluding the neutrals, of course.

¹⁵⁹ Osborne, 120.

served as the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, yet was now in charge of a complex new portfolio that answered directly to the Foreign Office. As Minister of the Blockade, he also represented that department as well as the Foreign Office in Parliament, which brought with it another level of public visibility that ensured his work would – for better or worse – not go unnoticed.¹⁶⁰

News reports of Cecil's appointment were overwhelmingly positive. For example, an editorial piece in *The Spectator*, Britain's oldest politically independent magazine, remarked that:

His appointment is a very important one. It marks a new stage in the highly delicate business of managing the blockade... What Robert Cecil is required to do, and we are perfectly confident [he] will do, is to remember in every act that the blockade is a naval engine of war, and cannot be employed as though it were an engine of peace. The object of the blockade must never be lost sight of for a moment.¹⁶¹

Both the British press and the government agreed in rare unanimity – the naval blockade of Germany desperately needed tightening and Robert Cecil was considered the most capable politician for the job.

A lawyer by profession, Cecil was well aware of the various legal constraints facing the Allies in their haste to end the policy of “business as usual.”¹⁶² Unlike Grey, however, he was willing to violate certain principles of international law in order to rule the waves.¹⁶³ His first task was to limit the flow of exports from the neutral Scandinavian

¹⁶⁰ Siney, *The Allied Blockade of Germany*, 136.

¹⁶¹ “The New Cabinet Minister,” *The Spectator*, 26 February 1916.

¹⁶² The practice of “business as usual” meant the businesses in Allied countries tried to circumvent the blockade by continuing to trade with the Central Powers for purely economic reasons.

countries to the Central Powers in a controversial practice known as forcible rationing – that is, forcing the Northern Neutrals to agree to prewar level imports on “absolute” and “conditional” contraband. Beginning in late February and early March 1916, Cecil met with several legal advisors and trade officials regarding the status of Britain’s trade agreements with the Northern Neutrals. Above all, he wanted to ascertain exactly how many goods were finding their way into German hands and, secondly, if there was legal precedent for restricting Allied exports to the neutrals.¹⁶⁴

Cecil found the answer to both questions in a Foreign Office memorandum written by legal expert A. Pearce Higgins. Higgins’ research into the legality of reducing neutral trade to prewar figures revealed that a myriad of goods (food, oils, and textiles) still passed undetected to Germany each month via Denmark, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. The importation of American wheat, for instance, collectively increased in the neutral European countries by over 31 million bushels from October 1914 to October 1915.¹⁶⁵ This discovery, along with Jellicoe’s assertion that the forcible rationing of neutrals was the only solution for a tighter blockade, ultimately compelled Cecil to find a legal basis for such action.

Independent of Cecil’s request, Higgins studied countless documents on maritime and international law in order to find a legal precedent. Try as he might though Higgins

¹⁶³ Guichard, 69-70. See also, Robert Cecil, *A Great Experiment: An Autobiography* (London: J. Cape, 1941); Gaynor Johnson, *Lord Robert Cecil: Political and Internationalist* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

¹⁶⁴ Osborne, 122.

¹⁶⁵ A. Pearce Higgins, “The Policy of Rationing Neutral States Adjoining Germany and its Relation to International Law, 19 November 1915,” pp. 3, TNA, CAB 37/137/37; Edward Grey, *Great Britain’s Measures against German Trade: A Speech Delivered in the House of Commons on 26 January 1916* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1916), pp. 7-9, in the Mary C. Rixford Papers, Box 1, HIA. See also, Isabell V. Hull, *A Scrap of Paper: The Making and Breaking of International Law during the Great War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 196-198; Great Britain, *Further Correspondence between His Majesty’s Government and the United States Government Respecting the Rights of Belligerents* (London: H. M. Stationary Office, 1916).

could not find a suitable justification for forcible rationing. Part of the problem stemmed, of course, from the fact that Britain had been a champion of the rights of neutral countries since 1856.¹⁶⁶ After the March 1915 Order in Council that stipulated all goods destined for Germany were considered contraband, the neutrals agreed to voluntarily ration exports of raw materials and foodstuffs.¹⁶⁷ But that was as much as the neutrals were willing to concede; they still refused to commit to specific amounts of exports and would most certainly balk at the mention of limited imports from the Allies.

Nevertheless, it was Higgins' recommendation that Britain should disregard the neutrals' concerns in this particular instance. He believed that the introduction of forced rations could be "morally justified" because the sinking of the *Lusitania* in May 1915 and the use of floating mines in international waters proved that Germany was not adhering to the same moral code of conduct.¹⁶⁸ The neutrals were involved at this point whether they liked it or not. Forced rations were seen as a small price to pay for ending the war as quickly as possible.¹⁶⁹

In addition to the introduction of forced rations in neutral countries, the Ministry of the Blockade undertook two other measures to tighten its economic stranglehold against the Central Powers. Starting in late February 1916, and continuing until the ratification of the Treaty of Versailles in July 1919, the British compiled a list of

¹⁶⁶ Particularly throughout the American Civil War (1861-1865). See, Bernard Mountague, *A History Account of the Neutrality of Great Britain during the American Civil War* (London: Longmans, 1870); Frank J. Meril, *Great Britain and the Confederate Navy, 1861-1865* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970); Brent J. Steele, "Ontological Security and the Power of Self-Identity: British Neutrality and the American Civil War," *Review of International Studies* 31, no. 3 (June 2005): 519-540.

¹⁶⁷ Ørvik, 52-53; Osborne, 8-9.

¹⁶⁸ Higgins, 6-7. See also, Kramer, 47.

¹⁶⁹ The viewpoint of Conservative MP W. Ellis Hume-Williams was typical of the British government's stance on neutrals trading with the enemy: "Happy the nation which is able to stand aloof... The misfortunes of those who fight are the opportunities of those who watch... is it too much to ask that those who prosper so greatly should accept inconveniences which are a necessary element of the situation and which are in infinitesimal proportion to the misfortunes of those who fight[?]" See, Hume-Williams, *International Law and the Blockade*, HIA.

international companies with known ties to German banks and businesses. These companies were publically blacklisted; their names were published on a “Statutory List” and distributed to foreign governments worldwide.¹⁷⁰ To associate with a blacklisted firm was to endure the ultimate form of bureaucratic red tape. Embassies in neutral countries were notified that all ships suspected of carrying blacklisted cargo would be immediately detained and subjected to a lengthy search and seize process.¹⁷¹

The blacklist system was implemented by Cecil to dissuade the neutrals from trading with the enemy. But he also realized that the neutrals required an incentive to completely suspend trade with such a lucrative and sizable market.¹⁷² In return for adhering to prewar levels of imports and limiting trade with the Central Powers, Britain did its best to expedite “legitimate” (i.e. permissible) trade between the United States, Entente, and the Northern Neutrals. Beginning on 4 March 1916, American exporters were given the opportunity to ship goods through the Allied blockade zone without any interference from the Royal Navy. They simply needed to apply to the British embassy in Washington, D.C. two weeks beforehand for what was called a “navicert” – a commercial passport that guaranteed the ship free passage to its destination.¹⁷³

Cross-referenced with the Statutory List, the embassy would either grant or deny the request for a navicert based on the applicant’s answers to six pertinent questions. The Ministry of the Blockade wanted to know: (1) the name of the ship, (2) name of the

¹⁷⁰ Robert Cecil, *Black List and Blockade: Interview with Lord Robert Cecil in Reply to the Swedish Prime Minister* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode Ltd., 1916), pp. 5-6, in the Mary C. Rixford Papers, Box 1, HIA; H. W. Carless Davis, *History of the Blockade*, (London: H. M. S. O., 1920), pp. 14, in the Ralph Haswell Lutz Papers, HIA.

¹⁷¹ Edward Grey to Foreign Trade Department, 1 July 1916, in Kenneth Bourne and D. Cameron Watt, eds., *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office, Part II: from the First to the Second World War. Series H, Vol VII: Blockade and Economic Warfare, January-October 1916* (Frederick: University Publications of America, 1989), 256-268.

¹⁷² McDermott, “‘A Needless Sacrifice’,” 264.

¹⁷³ Osborne, 125.

steamship line responsible for shipping the goods, (3) anticipated date(s) of shipment, (4) name and address of the American consignor, (5) name and address of the consignee in Britain, France, or the neutral Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands, and, most importantly, (6) a list and detailed description (with exact figures) of the goods requested for shipment. If the items did not notably exceed prewar levels and both the steamship line and U.S. consignor were not on the blacklist, then the certificate was usually granted.¹⁷⁴

The addition of navicerts made it far easier for goods to flow unimpeded across the Atlantic provided that they were sanctioned beforehand via the blacklist, while the introduction of forcible rations in neutral Europe ensured that extra food and other contraband did not fall into enemy hands.¹⁷⁵ Statistics compiled by the Foreign Office in the first six months of the Ministry of the Blockade's existence revealed that trade between the neutrals and Germany decreased as a result of these more stringent measures.

For instance, the figures in Table 1 indicate that Danish exports to Germany dropped considerably between the summer of 1915 (i.e. prior to the introduction of forced rations and the Statutory List) and the autumn of 1916 (i.e. after their implementation). Conversely, Danish exports to Britain steadily increased during the same period due to newly cemented trade agreements with the Entente and the influx of American goods expedited by the navicerts.¹⁷⁶ The chart below is merely an example of

¹⁷⁴ Siney, *The Allied Blockade of Germany*, 139-141. Once the system of navicerting became standard practice in the United States, it was not unusual for the British embassy in Washington to receive around 1,600 applications per day. See, McDermott, "Trading with the Enemy," 207.

¹⁷⁵ Scott, "The Effects of the British Blockade of the Central Powers on Selected Neutral Nations," 32-40; Philip Dehne, "From 'Business as Usual' to a More Global War: The British Decision to Attack Germans in South America during the First World War," *Journal of British Studies* 44, no. 3 (July 2005): 516, 533-535.

¹⁷⁶ Ørvik, 100-101; W. Arnold-Forster, 24.

A Sample of Danish Exports to Britain and Germany, July 1915 – October 1916

Goods Exported from Denmark (measured in metric tons)	To Britain	To Germany
Butter:		
July – December 1915	4,380	4,048
January – May 1916	4,720	3,529
June – July 1916	5,143	3,378
August 1916	4,844	3,639
September – October 1916	5,140	2,796
Bacon:		
July – December 1915	7,353	2,514
January – May 1916	7,284	1,751
June – July 1916	7,216	721
August 1916	6,938	1,773
September – October 1916	8,264	1,345

[Table 1] Source: Archibald C. Bell, *A History of the Blockade of Germany and the Countries Associated with Her in the Great War, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and Turkey, 1914-1918* (London: H. M. Stationary Office, 1937), 476.

the quantities and type of foodstuffs imported by the British and the Germans from Denmark; the trends were similar with Swedish, Dutch, and Norwegian exports.¹⁷⁷

Despite the fact that neutral exports were still reaching Germany into late 1916, the Ministry of the Blockade was actively working to stem the tide. The salient point to remember is that these figures are representative of the deliberate and wholesale tightening of the blockade of Germany by the British in 1916.¹⁷⁸

Germany and the Turnip Winter of 1916-1917

As early as October 1914, when the price of potatoes rose for the first time since the beginning of the war, Germans displayed “significant unrest” at the difficulty of

¹⁷⁷ Dutch exports experienced a similar pattern from mid-1916 onward. See, Edward Grey to Netherlands Minister, [undated], in Bourne and Watt, 380-383. For complete statistics of each neutral’s trade with the Allies and Germany c. 1914-1918 refer to Consett, *The Triumph of Unarmed Forces, 1914-1918*, esp. 298-336.

¹⁷⁸ Arthur John Brereton Marwick, *The Blockade Bites Deep: Britain, France, and Germany, 1917*, pp. 6-8, LH 15/2/28, in LHCMA.

affording the food they readily consumed in peacetime.¹⁷⁹ Yet it was not until the so-called “Turnip Winter” (*Kohlrübenwinter*) of 1916-1917 that the food situation in Germany could be truly classified as dire.¹⁸⁰ An early frost in the autumn of 1916 destroyed the majority of the potato crop and ushered in an extraordinarily cold winter with average temperatures ranging from 0° to –32° Celsius.¹⁸¹

In place of potatoes as a staple item in the German diet, people on the home front reluctantly turned to the swede turnip (rutabagas) for their daily source of carbohydrates. Unlike potatoes, Germans rarely ate turnips prior to 1916. In fact, they were widely used as pig fodder before the war,¹⁸² but the exceptionally poor harvest, harsh weather, and the simultaneous tightening of the naval blockade by the British¹⁸³ were all factors that combined to make the winter of 1916-1917 a very challenging time for German civilians.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁹ Davis, 50.

¹⁸⁰ Ernest H. Starling, “The Food Supply of Germany during the War,” *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 83, no. 2 (March 1920): 234-236; Lina Richter, *Family Life in Germany under the Blockade* (London: National Labour Press, 1919), 39-41. See also, Vincent, 45; Herwig, *The First World War*, 288; Roger Chickering, *Imperial Germany and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 140-141.

¹⁸¹ Davis, 181-182.

¹⁸² The German government ordered the slaughter of 9 million pigs in the spring of 1915. This event, known as the “pig massacre” (*Schweinemord*), was initially celebrated by the middle and lower class as a way to free up a large supply of pork, precious grain, and other fodder for public consumption. In the long-term, however, the mass killing of pigs led to the complete disappearance of pork from the German diet and a decline in overall crop yields from a lack of pig manure used to fertilize fields. It was an exceedingly shortsighted decision and indicative of the government’s haphazard attitude towards the production and distribution of food throughout the war. See, Chickering, 42-43.

¹⁸³ Asquith was forced to resign as Prime Minister of Britain and replaced by current Secretary of State for War, David Lloyd George, during the winter of 1916 (5 December). It was a popular political move that temporarily united the Liberals and Conservatives in their fight against the Central Powers. See, Michael Graham Fry, “Political Change in Britain, August 1914 to December 1916: Lloyd George Replaces Asquith; The Issues Underlying the Drama,” *Historical Journal* 31, no. 3 (September 1988): 609-627; J. M. McEwen, “The Struggle for Mastery in Britain: Lloyd George versus Asquith, December 1916,” *Journal of British Studies* 18, no. 1 (Autumn 1978): 131-156; Barry McGill, “Asquith’s Predicament, 1914-1918,” *Journal of Modern History* 39, no. 3 (September 1967): 283-303; Richard Murphy, “Walter Long, the Unionist Ministers, and the Formation of Lloyd George’s Government in December 1916,” *Historical Journal* 29, no. 3 (September 1986): 735-745; J. A. Turner, “The Formation of Lloyd George’s ‘Garden Suburb: A Fabian-like Milnerite Penetration,’” *Historical Journal* 20, no. 1 (March 1977): 165-184.

¹⁸⁴ Yaney, 21, 26-28; Bell, 605.

The war diaries of Princess Evelyn Blücher, an educated Englishwoman who married into German nobility, were one of the first sources in English to describe the blockade's impact on the day-to-day life of Germans who lived under its grip. Commenting on the precarious food situation in Berlin during the Turnip Winter, she states:

We are all growing thinner everyday, and the rounded contours of the German nation have become a legend of the past. We are all gaunt and bony now, and have dark shadows round our eyes, and our thoughts are chiefly taken up with wondering what our next meal will be...¹⁸⁵

Blücher's work is of unique interest to historians of the naval blockade and home front Germany c. 1914-1918. Given that her ties to Lancashire were not entirely severed, she was an English lady living in enemy territory that had been her permanent home for more than a decade. Far from being the poetic musings of a wealthy woman, Blücher's writings attest to the fact that Allied success was achieved at a substantial cost to Germans on the home front.

Initially, the slow denial of foodstuffs to the Central Powers had the effect of producing a tenacious and thrifty mindset in the German people. Not content to live without basic items, *ersatz* items or substitutes were to be had for almost every conceivable good. According to the German War Food Office (*Kriegsernährungsamt* or KEA), butchers could make over 800 "certified" varieties of sausage that substituted various items for protein and fat, while ground walnut shells and corn served as viable substitutes for coffee (the Germans were used to drinking ground chicory before the war)

¹⁸⁵ Evelyn Mary (Stapleton-Bretherton) von Blücher, *An English Wife in Berlin: A Private Memoir of Events, Politics, and Daily Life in Germany throughout the War and the Social Revolution of 1918* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1920), 158.

and coarse *Kriegsbrot* or rationed bread was made from a combination of rye and wheat flour mixed with several substitute items (including turnips, of course).¹⁸⁶

But as the naval blockade tightened, conditions on the home front greatly deteriorated and substitutes became far more dubious in quality. The government instituted more meatless days to conserve what little supplies of protein it had left.¹⁸⁷ As one housewife from Leipzig wryly noted in her diary, she was quite content to eat the substitute for chicken or beef, which was rat. It was only when the Germans were reduced to eating “substitute rat” that she truly felt aggrieved.¹⁸⁸ To make matters worse, the War Food Office devised a new system of rationing in the autumn of 1916 that assigned extra meat and carbohydrates to skilled labourers and munitions workers, while “weak Germans”¹⁸⁹ had their rations of meat and milk drastically reduced. Although 50 percent of all the work done in the munitions industry was carried out by women in 1917, the loss of rations for “weak” children and the elderly (i.e. those who did not work in the war industry) made for hungrier, more desperate families overall.¹⁹⁰

In 1913, a study conducted by doctors with the British Royal Society found that the average man expended approximately 3,000 calories a day. Ideally, he should consume a minimum of 3,300 calories per day in order to account for a 10 percent loss in digestion. Similarly, the study revealed that the average woman expended 2,300 calories

¹⁸⁶ Davis, 206; Vincent, 126.

¹⁸⁷ Davis, 126.

¹⁸⁸ Caroline Ethel Cooper, *Behind the Lines: One Woman's War, 1914-1918; the Letters of Caroline Ethel Cooper* (London: Jill Norman & Hobhouse, 1982), 188-189.

¹⁸⁹ This term was used by the War Food Office to denote anyone who was not enlisted in the military or involved in German war production. See, Lothar Burchardt, “The Impact of the War Economy on the Civilian Population of Germany during the First and Second World Wars,” in *The German Military in the Age of Total War*, ed. Wilhelm Deist (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1985); Thierry Bonzon and Belinda J. Davis, “Feeding the Cities,” in *Capital Cities at War: Paris, London, and Berlin, 1914-1919*, eds., Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 308.

¹⁹⁰ Davis, 186-187.

a day and, therefore, required roughly 2,650 calories to maintain proper nutrition. The German government guaranteed its citizens at least 1,985 calories a day as late as April 1916.¹⁹¹ Yet during the Turnip Winter the average middle to lower class German subsisted on only 1,000 calories a day. Government rations could be supplemented, of course, but with the price of common foodstuffs increasing by nearly 800 percent on the black market over the course of the war, very few people ever had enough to eat.¹⁹²

In contrast to wartime Germany, the standard of living improved for the average working class British family over the course of the war. Social and military historian Jay Winter aptly describes this phenomenon as the “paradox of the Great War.”¹⁹³ His research, along with other studies on Britain’s food supply 1914-1918, shows that while British civilians were not immune to rations, long food lines, and minor civil unrest in early 1918, they did not experience hunger or serious deprivation. In fact, wage increases and temporary demographic shifts caused by soldiers being employed and fed by the state, women working long hours in factories, and a decline in the birth rate, meant that the average family’s buying power actually increased. Overall, this “...is why even though aggregate food supply declined during the war, nutritional levels rose.”¹⁹⁴

Conversely, by 1917 in Germany, the search for food consumed the majority of people’s free time on the home front. Most days began the same way. The household awoke early to frigid, damp air, having chosen to conserve their supply of coal for

¹⁹¹ Starling, 226, 236.

¹⁹² Kramer, 153; Davis, 180. For more information on the spending habits of various social classes in wartime Germany see, Armin Triebel, “Variations in patterns of consumption in Germany in the period of the First World War,” in *The Upheaval of War: Family, Work and Welfare in Europe, 1914-1918*, edited by Richard Wall and Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), esp. 168-189.

¹⁹³ Jay Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, Second Edition (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 101, 103-153.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 213-214, 225, 229. See also, Linda Bryder, “The First World War: Healthy or Hungry?” *History Workshop* 24 (Autumn 1987): 141-157.

cooking. Breakfast, however, left much to be desired; usually a stale piece of *Kriegsbrot* and, depending on the age of the children, a small glass of watered down milk or *ersatz* coffee.¹⁹⁵ If a person was employed in the munitions industry, they were forced to work seven days a week for fifteen hours a day.¹⁹⁶ This grueling work schedule denied them the opportunity to stand in line for rations, which had become a fulltime job – typically ten hours a day – during the last two years of the war. In place of their parent(s), children began skipping school in order to stand in breadlines from dusk to dawn. Truancy rates skyrocketed, although very little could be done to enforce attendance because “hunger, exhaustion, cold, inflation, mass conscription, and emotional trauma had uprooted the traditional relationships of authority in nuclear families.”¹⁹⁷

Many Germans simply resorted to theft when the monotony of queuing for rations became too time-consuming. In fact, the term “self-help” was coined late in the war as a euphemism to describe the increasing theft of everyday items like coal, food, and clothing.¹⁹⁸ Butcher shops and grocers were routinely looted and groups of schoolchildren (some as young as twelve-years-old) took to robbing freight trains and tram/passenger cars en route to urban areas. Stealing was not just a young person’s game either. Theft rates among women increased by 82 percent from 1914 to 1918.¹⁹⁹ Many farmers and food purveyors refused to sell their products at urban market stalls because gangs of women and children repeatedly stole from them.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁵ Richter, 26-33.

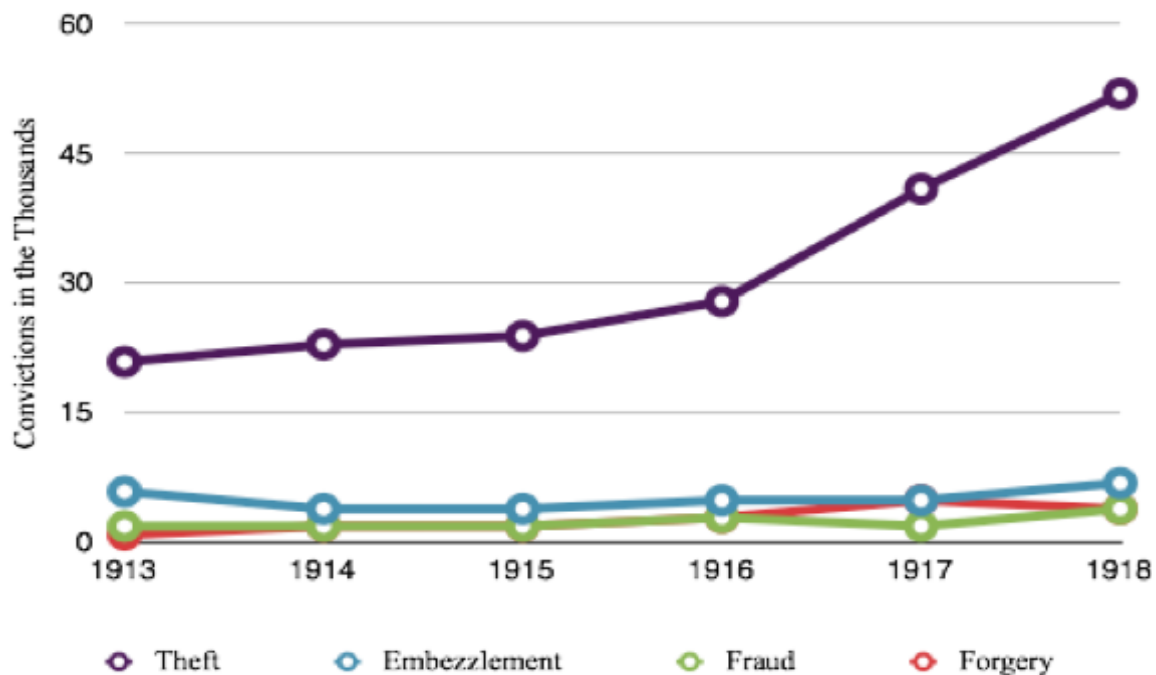
¹⁹⁶ Kramer, 152-153.

¹⁹⁷ Andrew Donson, *Youth in the Fatherless Land: War Pedagogy, Nationalism, and Authority in Germany, 1914-1918* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010), 133, 152.

¹⁹⁸ Young-Sun Hong, “The Contradictions of Modernization in the German Welfare State: Gender and the Politics of Welfare Reform in First World War Germany,” *Social History* 17, no. 2 (May 1992): 259, 265-268; Richard Bessel, “Mobilization and Demobilization in Germany, 1916-1919,” in *State, Society, and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War*, edited by John Horne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 219.

¹⁹⁹ Donson, 165-166.

Types of Crimes Committed by Women in Berlin, 1913-1918



[Figure 1] Source: Statistics from Belinda J. Davis, *Home Fires Burning: Food Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I* (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 223. Chart from David A. Janicki, “The British Blockade during World War I: The Weapon of Deprivation,” *Student Pulse: International Student Journal* 6, no. 6 (2014): 5.

For example, Figure 1 shows the correlation between Germans’ standard of living on the home front and the rise in the number of thefts perpetrated by women in wartime Berlin. Incidences of fraud, forgery, and embezzlement remained virtually unchanged from their prewar rate, which is important to note in relation to the massive increase in female theft convictions starting in 1916, when the Allies effectively tightened their blockade against the Central Powers, peaking in 1918 with 50,000 convictions after two years of a starvation diet. Meanwhile, the police regularly sent informers to stand in ration lines as a way to measure the “mood of the people” in major German cities.

²⁰⁰ Davis, 223.

Informants reported hearing chants of “finish up with that ridiculous war, we’re croaking of hunger!” and “enough with that murder at the front... we don’t want to starve any longer!”²⁰¹

Given that material goods were in short supply both at home and on the battlefield, German police were known to enter homes unannounced throughout 1917 and search for “excess” goods to be sent to the front. Policemen typically raided closets in search of spare and mismatched bits of clothing.²⁰² By the end of the brutal Turnip Winter, it was obvious to the authorities that Germans on the home front were hungry, exasperated, and slowly starving to death. How long could the home front realistically hold out given these extreme conditions? That was the question on everyone’s mind. The Imperial German government ultimately decided that it, too, should ratchet up its naval operations in an effort to end the war as quickly as possible.

U-Boats, American Intervention, and the Allied Blockade Committee

Tired and hamstrung by the increasing “strategic passivity” of the Imperial German Navy, Admiral Henning von Holtzendorff was convinced that his country could defeat the British by waging a more aggressive counter-blockade against Allied merchant shipping. The head of the German Admiralty Staff became a vocal proponent of reinstituting unrestricted submarine warfare – the sinking of enemy and neutral vessels without warning – after the Allies took steps to tighten the blockade against Germany in early 1916.²⁰³

Using statistics compiled by the influential German banker Dr. Richard Fuss, Holtzendorff wrote several proposals over a ten-month period in which he advocated the

²⁰¹ Ibid., 224.

²⁰² Vincent, 130-131.

²⁰³ Steffen, 216.

German navy attack all merchant ships bound for Great Britain. Given the British Isles' dependence on seafaring trade, he wagered that if the German navy sank 600,000 tons of goods en route to Britain each month, the Allies would be forced to sue for peace no later than August 1917.²⁰⁴ Holtzendorff wrote more than half a dozen versions of the same memorandum espousing the advantages of unrestricted submarine warfare, but it was his 22 December 1916 report that finally convinced Kaiser Wilhelm II to proceed.

It was this now-or-never mentality that appealed to the German High Command at the end of 1916 (especially the new Chief of the General Staff, Paul von Hindenburg, and First Quartermaster General, Erich Ludendorff). Crop failure and colder temperatures were widespread throughout Western Europe during the latter half of the year. However, the Allied naval blockade exacerbated the poor living conditions in Germany by denying civilians the opportunity to offset their meager food supply with imports from around the world. Although the Germans were facing their coldest and leanest year in recent memory, Holtzendorff truly thought that Germany could turn the tables on Britain with its "strategic" use of U-boats and win the war.²⁰⁵ Even Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, who was Holtzendorff's biggest critic regarding the use of unrestricted submarine warfare begrudgingly stated, "... if the military authorities consider the U-boat war essential, I am not in a position to contradict them."²⁰⁶

Germany resumed unrestricted submarine warfare on 1 February 1917. The controversial decision violated international law and further isolated Germany from the

²⁰⁴ Holger H. Herwig, "Total Rhetoric, Limited War: Germany's U-Boat Campaign, 1917-1918" in *Great War, Total War: Combat and Mobilization on the Western Front, 1914-1918*, eds., Roger Chickering and Stig Förster (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 193-194.

²⁰⁵ Steffen, 217-218, 221. Holtzendorff's theory was also based on the findings of an economics professor at the University of Heidelberg, Hermann Levy, who argued that if Britain's ability to import wheat was severely hampered, the country would be forced to sue for peace. See, Downes, *Targeting Civilians in War*, 106.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 108.

international trading community. Woodrow Wilson, for instance, immediately severed all diplomatic communication with the *Kaiserreich* and encouraged other neutrals to follow suit.²⁰⁷ The real turning point came less than a month later when a British ocean liner (RMS *Laconia*) was sunk off the coast of Ireland. The *Laconia* was traveling from the United States back to England when a German U-boat torpedoed the ship on 25 February 1917, killing two American citizens – a woman and her young daughter – four British civilians, and six British crewmembers.²⁰⁸ In his 2 April address to Congress on the eve of America's entry into the war, President Wilson referenced the incident, arguing: "that neutrality is no longer feasible or desirable where the peace of the world is involved... and the menace to that peace and freedom lies in the existence of autocratic governments... We have seen the last of neutrality under these circumstances."²⁰⁹

Even before the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) saw combat on the Western Front, it was the United States' economic contribution to the Allied war effort that helped turn the tide against the Central Powers.²¹⁰ As the most powerful neutral in the world, America's decision to abandon its neutrality forced other neutrals to rethink their position on the war. Geography was a key factor for neutrals on both sides of the Atlantic. South American countries like Brazil, Guatemala, and Bolivia were very quick to side with the United States and promptly joined the Allied embargo of the Central

²⁰⁷ Robert Lansing, *War Memoirs of Robert Lansing, Secretary of State* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1970), 307; Eli F. Heckscher et al., *Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Iceland in the World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930), 90-91.

²⁰⁸ Osborne, 156.

²⁰⁹ Ørvik, 107, 114. See also, Robert W. Tucker, *Woodrow Wilson and the Great War: Reconsidering America's Neutrality, 1914-1917* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 188-189.

²¹⁰ The AEF spent six and a half months training after the U.S. declaration of war against Germany in April 1917. See, James H. Hallas, ed., *Doughboy War: The American Expeditionary Force in World War I* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), esp. 31-60; Jennifer D. Keene, *Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 8-34; James J. Cooke, *Pershing and His Generals: Command and Staff in the AEF* (Westport: Praeger, 1997), 47-60.

Powers in April 1917.²¹¹ The Northern Neutrals, however, were far more reluctant to sever all ties with Germany given their proximity to Central Europe and longstanding history of commercial trade.

Germany's resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare further compounded the problem of allegiance.²¹² Swedish, Danish, and Norwegian ships, in fact, refused to sail across the North Sea to Britain for fear of being attacked by German U-boats. As Minister of the Blockade, Lord Cecil openly chided the Northern Neutrals for not complying with pre-existing trade agreements stating: "if you go on playing the game of the Germans, you will be starved [too]. We're going to apply some very drastic measures."²¹³ This was no idle threat on Cecil's part. He was frustrated with neutral Europe and seriously considered reneging on Britain's promise to expedite sanctioned trade between Europe and North America.

American intervention ultimately ensured that the Allies could adopt an even harsher stance with Germany and the European neutrals with virtually no repercussions.²¹⁴ The goal was to make the blockade as airtight as possible and the United States had very definite ideas on how to best achieve economic and naval predominance in the final years of the war. In addition to joining the naval blockade of the Central Powers, the U.S. State Department announced a partial embargo of U.S. exports to the Northern Neutrals in the summer of 1917 for staple items like steel, iron, minerals, oil, meat, fodder, fertilizer, and grain.²¹⁵

²¹¹ Bell, 621.

²¹² Graham Jr., "Neutrality and the World War," 709.

²¹³ Frey, "Trade, Ships, and Neutrality of the Netherlands in the First World War," 552.

²¹⁴ "We Join the Blockade against Germany," *Boston Daily Globe*, 19 June 1917.

²¹⁵ War Trade Intelligence Department, "Summary of Blockade Information, July 1917," TNA, CAB 24/19; Cecil Spring Rice, "Telegram to Foreign Office from Washington, D.C.," 12 August 1917, TNA, T 172/431/44.

The Wilson administration also insisted on the creation of a new inter-allied council to oversee the day-to-day running of the blockade. Knowing full well that the Ministry of the Blockade was answerable only to the British prime minister and the Foreign Office, the U.S. government was reluctant to impose such harsh economic measures without an equal say in the formation of policy.²¹⁶ France was the first country to broach the idea of creating a blockade council comprised of British and French policymakers in September 1915. The Asquith government immediately rejected the idea and France grudgingly agreed to leave the day-to-day organization of the blockade primarily to the British.²¹⁷ Two years later, though, and facing the German U-boat menace alone, Britain realized that it needed to cooperate more with its allies.

Therefore, in December 1917, the British Foreign Office called a meeting with Robert Cecil and various trade officials from the United States, Italy, and France to discuss the creation of a joint council known as the Allied Blockade Committee (ABC).²¹⁸ Using the Ministry of the Blockade for its administrative framework, the ABC named Lord Cecil its chairman, appointed war trade officials from each of the Allied countries, and also included a representative from the Foreign Office. It is important to note that even after the U.S. entered the war, with three out of six committee members hailing from Britain, there was no denying that the British were still in charge of the Allied naval blockade.²¹⁹ In theory, this joint venture provided the Allies with a unified voice in matters of economic and naval policy. In practice, however, the Allied Blockade Committee merely continued the work of the Ministry of the Blockade under a more

²¹⁶ Parmelee, 115.

²¹⁷ Farrar, *Conflict and Compromise*, 24-28.

²¹⁸ Bell, 619-620.

²¹⁹ Osborne, 174-175.

palatable name.

The first major initiative passed by the ABC made it more difficult for German U-boats to openly attack Allied shipping.²²⁰ The U.S. Navy advocated creating a vast minefield in the North Sea that would stretch from the Scottish Highlands to the southern tip of Norway and act as a buffer between the British Isles, Allied and neutral commerce, and enemy submarines. Construction of the “Northern Barrage,” as it was called, began on 3 March 1918 under the direction of U.S. Mine Force Commander Joseph Strauss. The joint Anglo-American project took eight months to complete. In total, the Allies painstakingly laid 70,000 mines packed with a combined weight of 21 million lbs. of dynamite.²²¹ Official estimates from the U.S. Navy reckoned that the mines were responsible for destroying four U-boats and damaging twelve others.²²²

In an excerpt from a poem written by several members of Mine Force Squadron One, the main group tasked with completing the Northern Barrage, the men proudly characterized their role in the Allied war effort as follows:

At fall of dusk we softly steal/From out each firth; and forth/

Seeking the aid of night's dark tide/To strike hard from the North...

Until the world is safe again, And each Boche crime set is right/

*The Hun shall know no mercy from the 'Raiders of the Night.'*²²³

The Northern Barrage was the final nail in Germany's coffin when it came to neutralizing

²²⁰ *The Northern Barrage: Mine Force United States, Atlantic Fleet* (Annapolis: U.S. Naval Institute, 1919), 17. See also, Josephus Daniel, *The Northern Barrage: Taking Up The Mines* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1920); William Snowden Sims, *The Victory at Sea* (New York: Doubleday, Page, & Company, 1920); A. B. Feuer, *The U.S. Navy in World War I: Combat at Sea and in the Air* (Wesport: Praeger, 1999), esp. 11-36.

²²¹ *The Northern Barrage*, 14.

²²² Reginald Rowan Belknap, *The Yankee Mining Squadron; or, Laying the North Sea Mining Barrage* (Annapolis, MD: United States Naval Institute, 1920), 101-108.

²²³ “The Northern Barrage,” 111.

the U-boat menace. American intervention galvanized the British to seal any remaining leaks in the naval blockade via the Northern Neutrals and fiercely guard its commercial interests in the North Sea and the Atlantic.²²⁴

Deprivation, Illness, and Defeat

Despite the evidence in the British official history on the blockade, various memoirs and first-person accounts of the level of deprivation on the German home front – including startling reports from Allied army officers stationed in Germany after the Armistice²²⁵ – there has been some debate among scholars over the actual severity of the food crisis. Avner Offer and Gerd Hardach, two economic historians writing in the late 1970s and 1980s, rejected the idea that any non-combatants starved as a result of the Allied naval blockade.²²⁶ The majority of academic research since the mid-1980s, however, largely supports the contention that the Allied naval blockade not only played a significant role in the collapse of the *Kaiserreich*, but also directly contributed to the deaths of several hundred thousand enemy civilians.²²⁷ A postgraduate scholar at the University of Oxford, in fact, discovered new evidence that sheds light on the veracity of the “hunger blockade” claim.

Mary Elisabeth Cox, a researcher studying trends in the black market in wartime Germany, recently uncovered several documents at German state libraries and archives

²²⁴ The latter task was largely achieved with the development of the convoy system, whereby Allied warships accompanied commercial vessels in their voyage across the Atlantic Ocean. The British, of course, resurrected the convoy system and the Northern Barrage as part of its naval strategy against Germany in the Second World War. See, Martin Middlebrook, *Convoy: The Battle for Convoys* (London: Allen Lane, 1976); Stephen Roskill, *The War at Sea, 1939-1945* (London: H. M. S. O., 1954-1961).

²²⁵ See Chapters 5 and 6 for a more in-depth look at these Allied reports on German food supply and poor living conditions under the post-Armistice blockade.

²²⁶ Offer, *The First World War*, 46-53; Hardach, 31-32.

²²⁷ The exact figure quoted by European historian and demographic expert Jay Winter is 478,500 German civilian deaths stemming from starvation and malnutrition. See, Jay Winter, “Surviving the War: Life Expectation, Illness, and Mortality Rates in Paris, London, and Berlin, 1914-1919,” in idem and Jean-Louis Robert, eds., *Capital Cities at War*, 517. See also, Kramer, 134; Bell, 672-673.

that confirm "... the [Allied] blockade inflicted severe nutritional deprivation on children and other non-combatants."²²⁸ Specifically, she found a book that contained a list of the height and weight of German schoolchildren gathered by the Imperial Statistical Office (*Kaiserliches Statistisches Amt*) over a ten-year period from 1914 to 1924.²²⁹ There are nearly 600,000 measurements in total; the vast majority deal with children from lower and working class backgrounds (350,695 to be exact), although statistics were compiled for children of the upper and middle class as well.

The documents show that even prior to the war the average height of German children varied slightly depending on their families' income. In 1914, for example, the average height of a ten-year-old girl in Stuttgart was 130 cm (4'2") at the lower end of the social spectrum (this label encompassed everything from the poorest segments in society to the average working class family) compared to 133 cm (4'4") for middle class ten-year-olds and 136 cm (4'5") for girls from more prosperous families. Young German males experienced a similar growth trend at the start of the twentieth century. The average ten-year-old boy stood at 130 cm (4'2") if he was from a poor or working class family compared to 132 cm (4'3") from a middle class family and 134 cm (4'4") from a more affluent background.²³⁰

The outbreak of the First World War continued this German prewar trend of height discrepancy in childhood relative to household income and greatly exacerbated it

²²⁸ Mary Elisabeth Cox, "War, Blockades, and Hunger: Nutritional Deprivation of German Children, 1914-1924," University of Oxford Discussion Papers in Economic and Social History, no. 110 (February 2013): 1.

²²⁹ The data was collected annually by either a doctor or teacher trained to take simple anthropometric measurements. Cox, 2-5. See also, J. Adam Tooze, *Statistics and the German State, 1900-1945: The Making of Modern Economic Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), esp. 40-75; Paul Weindling, *Health, Race, and German Politics between National Unification and Nazism, 1870-1945* (Cambridge University Press, 1993) 54.

²³⁰ Cox, 6, 9.

as the conditions on the home front deteriorated for the first time during the Turnip Winter of 1916-1917. Applying this growth metric, it should come as no surprise that German children from lower socio-economic classes lost far more weight over the course of the war than children from wealthier families. The raw data indicates though that all three social classes – upper, middle, and working/lower class – were directly impacted by the lack of food and poor living conditions relative to their age, gender, and household income. By 1917, the Imperial Statistical Office determined that the median height of ten-year-old boys and girls measured 2 cm shorter than their 1914 counterparts.²³¹ Growth discrepancy was even more pronounced in terms of overall weight loss. For instance, following German unification in 1871, children routinely submitted to anthropometric measurements as part of a government initiative to record the height and weight of all school age children.²³²

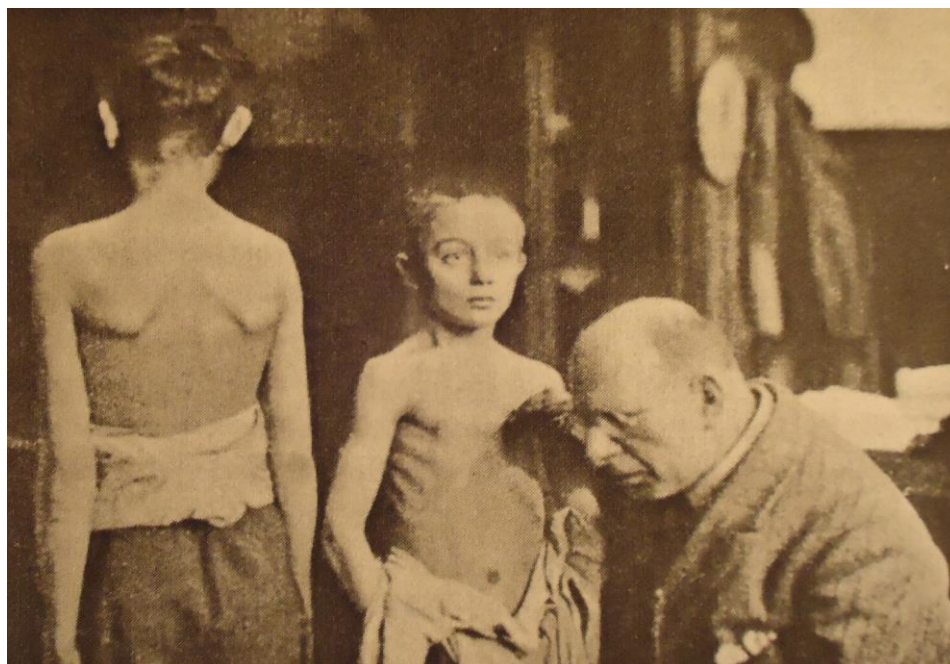
The figures collected at the end of 1917 revealed that children weighed between 1.8 and 3.6 kg, or between 4 and 8 lbs. less than they had before the war.²³³ This information ultimately provides a useful timeline to view the cumulative effects of malnutrition on the German civilian population. A fifteen-year-old child should theoretically weigh more than their twelve-year-old self provided that they have sufficient food. Government rations of 1,000 calories a day were certainly not enough to promote growth in children or maintain proper weight in adults.²³⁴ Drastic weight loss was indicative of the level of deprivation on the German home front following the failed crop harvest of 1916 and significant changes to the administration of the Allied naval

²³¹ This is one example to illustrate the change in adolescent growth patterns in Germany c. 1914-1919. The pattern is consistent regardless of the age of the child. See, Cox, 8-9, 31-34.

²³² Ibid., 4.

²³³ Donson, 126-127.

²³⁴ Kramer, 153.



[Figure 2] A doctor examines German children during the war. The boys are clearly underweight and showing obvious signs of malnourishment. Source: Andrew Donson, *Youth in the Fatherless Land: War Pedagogy, Nationalism, and Authority in Germany, 1914-1918* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010), 128.

blockade under Cecil.

Indeed, the Germans only referred to the economic sanctions as a “hunger blockade” after Britain, France, and the U.S. restricted indirect trade with Germany via the neutrals in 1916-1917.²³⁵ Although the Allied press denounced these “exaggerated reports of the food shortages” as a “masterstroke by the psychologists in Germany... to appeal to the heart and pocketbook of [the neutrals],”²³⁶ the loss of neutral imports and dwindling domestic resources proved that the “hunger” label was entirely apt. Moreover, the figures quoted by Mary Elisabeth Cox do not even take into consideration that many children stopped going to school after 1915 because they were either too sick to attend or forced to stand in long ration lines throughout the day. In fact, in order to accommodate

²³⁵ Cox, 2.

²³⁶ “German Hunger Talk Mere Lure,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 15 May 1917; “Shortage of Food Will Not Induce Germans To Quit,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 30 June 1918; “The German Hunger Appeal,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 19 November 1918.

the grueling daily search for food, German school administrators shortened the school day by half.²³⁷ Yet the truncated school day only encouraged more families to pull their children from the classroom. The height and weight of these “truant” children may well differ from the official measurements given that malnutrition and related health issues increasingly prevented more children from attending school and, thus, regularly being weighed in the first place.²³⁸

Lastly, there is the issue of the deadly 1918 influenza pandemic to consider. The influenza of 1918, known colloquially as the “Spanish Flu,” was a variant of the H1N1 virus that swept the globe in a matter of six months and infected more than 25 percent of the world’s population.²³⁹ Although estimates vary, historians and the medical community generally agree that at least 50 million people (i.e. 4 percent of those infected) died as a result of contracting the virus.²⁴⁰ Unlike other influenza outbreaks either before or after the First World War, the 1918-1919 flu was especially deadly, as it attacked otherwise healthy individuals in the prime of life. Political scientist Andrew T. Price-Smith recently described the unique killing pattern of the Spanish Flu as forming the letter “W” – with deaths occurring across all segments of society but particularly among children, healthy younger adults (twenty to forty-year-olds), and older people – as opposed to traditional influenza outbreaks that typically kill only the very young and the

²³⁷ Donson, 126.

²³⁸ Ibid., 133-135.

²³⁹ The virus was a subtype of Influenza A; a similar yet far less virulent strain of H1N1 or “swine flu” was responsible for killing more than 280,000 people worldwide in 2009. See, Fatimah S. Dawood, A. Daniel Luliano et al., “Estimated global mortality associated with the first 12 months of 2009 pandemic influenza A H1N1 virus circulation: A Modeling Study,” *The Lancet Infectious Diseases* 12, no. 9 (September 2012): 687-688.

²⁴⁰ Andrew T. Price-Smith, *Contagion and Chaos: Disease, Ecology, and National Security in the Era of Globalization* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2009), 57. For a comparative perspective on the spread of the disease see, Howard Philips and David Killingray, eds., *The Spanish Influenza Pandemic of 1918-1919: New Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2003), esp. Chapters 5 and 6.

elderly.²⁴¹

The influenza virus spread across Europe in three waves. The first wave (spring 1918) primarily affected soldiers when newly infected American troops and Chinese Labour Corps members arrived in Britain and France via North America in March 1918. Incidences of death were rare during this period, however, as those who became infected experienced normal flu-like symptoms. Yet the second (late summer 1918) and third (autumn 1918) waves were much deadlier than the first and affected soldiers and civilians alike. The 1918 flu proved exceptionally lethal in densely populated areas like Southeast Asia, where 17 million people died in India from the disease, and in major urban centres across Europe and North America.²⁴² Individuals who contracted the virus in the late summer – early autumn waves died not so much from the virus itself, but rather a secondary infection from pneumonia, tuberculosis, or through massive blood loss. The lack of oxygen to the lungs and heart caused victims to turn a distinct bluish colour in the final hours of their life, which has been described by one historian as a hallmark of “this strange and terrifying epidemic.”²⁴³

The Spanish Flu thrived in city centres and areas with poor sanitation and hygiene, and the virus particularly wreaked havoc on people with compromised immune systems and soldiers stationed in trenches along the Western Front. Take, for example, the high mortality rate of infected Allied soldiers; one British soldier died from the influenza virus for every ten British soldiers killed on the battlefield, while the ratio was

²⁴¹ Price-Smith, 60.

²⁴² Jeffrey K. Taubenberger and David M. Morens, “1918 Influenza: The Mother of All Pandemics,” *Emerging Infectious Diseases* 12, no. 1 (January 2006): 16-17.

²⁴³ Mark Osborne Humphries, “Paths of Infection: The First World War and the Origins of the 1918 Influenza Pandemic,” *War in History* 21, no. 1 (January 2014): 56-57, 61-64. See also, Alfred W. Crosby, *Epidemic and Peace, 1918* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1976); idem, *America's Forgotten Pandemic: The Influenza of 1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Tom Quinn, *Flu: A Social History of Influenza* (London: New Holland Press, 2008), esp. 123-146.

one out of six for French troops and, notably, one flu related death for every American soldier killed on the battlefield. In comparison to the Allies, though, the German army fared even worse with infection rates as high as 80 percent in some units (1.5 million infected in total). The number of critically ill patients overwhelmed German army hospitals to the point that staff actually stopped counting flu related deaths in mid-1918.²⁴⁴

Likewise, the nutritional deprivation experienced by Germans on the home front led to extremely high rates of mortality from the Spanish Flu.²⁴⁵ An estimated 400,000 German civilians died from the influenza pandemic in 1918 and although the death toll was higher in America (450,000 civilians), Germany suffered proportionately more flu related deaths given the country's smaller population of 65 million people compared to 103 million in the United States.²⁴⁶ Moreover, as the two charts in the chapter appendix (Tables 2 and 3) on female and infant/adolescent mortality in Germany c. 1913-1921 illustrate,²⁴⁷ there was a significant spike in civilian mortality long before the pandemic ever struck. The year 1917 was the first time that deaths on the home front markedly increased from previous combat years. The death rate for young adults (ages fifteen to twenty) jumped from roughly fifteen per one thousand people in 1916 to twenty per one thousand in 1917. Mortality was even higher for young children (ages one to five) in

²⁴⁴ Price-Smith, 64-70.

²⁴⁵ This was also the case in Austria. See, Dr. Böhm, "Sanitary Statistics and Mortality of the Population of Vienna during the War, 1914-1918," Table III, 18 March 1919, in the Ralph Haswell Lutz Papers, HIA. Dr. Böhm was the chief medical examiner in Vienna throughout the war. The document includes very detailed autopsy reports conducted on a cross-section of the Viennese population from mid-to-late 1918. Each report, regardless of the final cause of death, described the "highly lean" and "weak" appearance of the dead due to "insufficient nourishment." See also, Maureen Healy, *Vienna and the Fall of the Habsburg Empire: Total War and Everyday Life in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 307.

²⁴⁶ Price-Smith, 61.

²⁴⁷ Refer to the chapter appendix on pp. 89.

1917 with twenty-two dying per one thousand than in either 1918 (roughly eighteen per one thousand) or 1919 (thirteen per one thousand people).²⁴⁸ This evidence indicates that the high rate of civilian mortality in wartime Germany cannot be solely attributed to the virulence of the Spanish Flu in the final months of the First World War.

The Allied naval blockade was the common denominator that applied sustained economic and political pressure to isolate Germany and its allies from the international trading community. As discussed in Chapter 2, German cries of illegality were quickly silenced by the might of Britain's Royal Navy and the combined power of the French and British economies to establish a commercial blockade of the North Sea, Mediterranean, and the Atlantic. In practice, however, it was the neutrals – the U.S. and the Northern Neutrals such as Denmark, Norway, and Sweden – that truly prevented the British from ensuring that no contraband made its way to the Central Powers.

Early negotiations with the neutrals were fraught with tension and political posturing on either side. Yet the British chose to force the neutrals' hand at the beginning of 1916 with the creation of a separate Ministry of the Blockade under the direction of the British Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Lord Robert Cecil. Cecil promised to tighten the naval blockade through comprehensive trade agreements with the neutrals, blacklisting international businesses with German ties, and lessening the wait time involved with transporting "approved" goods from the U.S. to the Allies and neutral Europe with the use of navicerts or commercial passports.

These new measures greatly clamped down on indirect trade with the enemy and helped to sway the United States to the Allies' side in April 1917 after Germany

²⁴⁸ E. Roesle, "The Mortality in Germany, 1913-1921: The Effects of War Casualties and Famine on Mortality," *Journal of American Statistical Association* 20, no. 150 (June 1925): 168-171.

torpedoed multiple commercial vessels off the coast of the British Isles. Germany's declaration of unrestricted submarine warfare caused the U.S. to reevaluate the price of its neutrality in light of mounting civilian deaths at sea. Indeed, the blockade of Germany was no longer viewed as a "needless sacrifice" by cautious businessmen and politicians looking to play both sides.²⁴⁹ American intervention in the First World War allowed the British to close gaping holes in the blockade where goods from the U.S. previously traveled unimpeded to the Northern Neutrals and, eventually, made their way to Germany.

In a bid to flex their economic might, the U.S. War Trade Board insisted in the winter of 1917 that Britain delegate more power to its allies in the form of the Allied Blockade Committee to oversee all aspects of transatlantic trade. This committee attempted to equalize the decision-making on Allied economic warfare by sharing the responsibility of patrolling the North Sea and the Atlantic Ocean through the convoy system and the creation of an elaborate minefield between Scotland and Norway (the Northern Barrage). It would be an understatement to claim though that the Allied Blockade Committee was anything other than a larger Ministry of the Blockade with the "Allied" label added largely for diplomatic reasons. Both the U.S. War Trade Board and the French government agreed that Cecil should remain the Minister of the Blockade.²⁵⁰ Moreover, the ABC consisted of three representatives from Britain in comparison to two each from the United States and France.

Germany, meanwhile, was plunged into a state of deprivation on the home front after the Turnip Winter of 1916-1917 when average caloric intake consisted of only 1,000

²⁴⁹ McDermott, "A Needless Sacrifice," 282.

²⁵⁰ Guichard, 62-67.

calories a day. The newly tightened Allied blockade, colder than normal temperatures, and a widespread shortage of oil and coal meant that many homes went without heat or an evening meal. The rest of 1917 brought little change from the hardship of the previous winter, as American intervention ensured that the world's most powerful neutral country now turned its full attention to defeating the *Kaiserreich*.

The collapse of Imperial Germany came after four years of fighting the Allies in Europe, East Africa, and at sea. The nutritional deprivation at home and on the Western Front exacerbated the deadliness of the 1918 influenza in Germany. German civilians and soldiers were affected by the totality of the First World War in a way that the Allies never experienced. The hunger blockade proved so effective because it pitted primarily landlocked countries in Central Europe (Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Bulgaria) against the world's strongest naval power and empire (Britain) with committed allies in France, Italy, and the United States.²⁵¹ Hunger and deprivation were daily impediments that wore away Germany's resolve and, as will be explored in the next chapter, aided in the defeat of the Central Powers with timely hunger-themed propaganda.²⁵²

²⁵¹ Although an ally of the British, the Russian Empire did not figure prominently in the management and administration of the naval blockade.

²⁵² Siney, *The Allied Blockade of Germany*, v.

Chapter 3 Appendix

Infant and Adolescent Death Rates in Germany / 1,000, 1913-1921

Year	Under 1 year old	1-5 years old	5-10 years old	10-15 years old	15-20 years old
1913	151	13.2	5.9	3.9	6.5
1914	164	13.1	6.1	4.2	10.1
1915	148	16.8	8.4	4.8	15.1
1916	140	15.0	7.7	5.2	15.1
1917	149	22.0	8.7	6.1	23.1
1918	158	17.7	11.6	8.9	33.1
1919	145	13.4	7.7	5.6	11.5
1920	131	11.1	6.4	4.6	9.4
1921	134	10.7	5.0	3.7	7.2

[Table 2] Source: E. Roesle, "The Mortality in Germany, 1913-1921: The Effects of War Casualties and Famine on Mortality," *Journal of American Statistical Association* 20, no. 150 (June 1925): 168.

Female Death Rates in Germany / 1,000, 1913-1921

Year	20-25 years old	25-30 years old	30-35 years old	35-40 years old	40-45 years old
1913	4.0	4.7	5.3	6.1	6.9
1914	4.1	4.9	5.4	6.2	7.1
1915	4.1	4.7	5.4	6.3	7.2
1916	4.4	5.0	5.7	6.6	7.5
1917	5.4	5.9	6.6	7.7	8.9
1918	11.6	12.7	12.4	11.7	11.5
1919	6.2	6.7	7.2	7.6	8.3
1920	5.8	6.8	7.0	7.2	7.6
1921	4.4	5.1	5.5	6.1	6.7

[Table 3] Source: E. Roesle, "The Mortality in Germany, 1913-1921: The Effects of War Casualties and Famine on Mortality," *Journal of American Statistical Association* 20, no. 150 (June 1925): 171.

CHAPTER 4

PRINT WARS AND THE ART OF PERSUASION: LORD NORTHCLIFFE AND ANGLO-GERMAN PROPAGANDA

British Newspapers and the Press c. 1914

In an age where radio broadcasts and telephones were in their infancy, the printed word was king. Newspapers were the predominant medium by which most Britons and Europeans received their current political and socio-economic news at the start of the First World War. The growth of the British press was due primarily to the sweeping Elementary Education Act of 1870, which sought to spread literacy and ensure a basic level of education for British schoolchildren between the ages of five and twelve.²⁵³ Subsequent amendments to the Act in 1888, 1891, and 1902, in addition to mandatory attendance for children under thirteen, did much to lay the groundwork for universal education in the decades thereafter. By 1914, children raised in this era of Gladstonian Liberalism²⁵⁴ were now literate adults accustomed to reading or, at the very least, encountering newspapers on a daily basis. Technological advances in late nineteenth century industrialization and mass production equally made possible Fleet Street's meteoric rise.

Mass literacy afforded middle and lower working class Britons a window into contemporary politics and entertainment, as newspapers could be purchased on most urban street corners for as little as one penny. These "penny populars" reported on the

²⁵³ M. L. Sanders and Philip M. Taylor, *British Propaganda during the First World War, 1914-1918* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1982), 2-3.

²⁵⁴ This term refers to the Liberal idealism espoused by William Gladstone upon his return to Downing Street in 1880. During his second premiership Gladstone embarked on a series of reforms to extend the franchise and ensure equal representation in Parliament for both urban and rural constituencies. Part of this process entailed properly educating the newly enfranchised electorate under the Reform Act of 1867. Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism*, 146-149, 158. See also, H. C. G. Matthew, *Gladstone, 1875-1898* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), esp. 162-183.

latest political scandals in the country, offering salacious and up-to-date details to an eager readership. The period from 1890 to 1910 saw a dramatic rise in newspaper circulation throughout Europe and North America.²⁵⁵ This growth in circulation, coupled with the abolition of tax on paper and advertising, meant that the Press held an enviable position in early twentieth century Britain. Whitehall traditionally enacted legislation with little regard for public opinion because politics were seen as “the special business of kings, nobles, aristocratic persons[,]” and Members of Parliament (MPs).²⁵⁶ Yet the popular press of Fleet Street, backed by advertising revenue and a surge in readership, did not think twice about publishing a scathing opinion piece on the Government.

Indeed, the public’s clamour for information ensured that political parties paid greater attention to the editorials of late Victorian and Edwardian newspapers. The Liberal, Conservative, and Labour parties openly courted the favour of newspaper editors and proprietors in the hopes of influencing public opinion to support their respective agendas.²⁵⁷ “It was a comparatively easy task in prewar days to deal with the press,” noted the Foreign Office’s head of Political Intelligence, Sir William Tyrrell, “[because] the issues which presented themselves in the popular mind were mainly confined to Anglo-German relations, and on this subject there was practical unanimity in our Press....”²⁵⁸ The *Kaiserreich*, after all, provided a common enemy for both the Press and Asquith’s government to focus their mutual distrust and condemnation.

²⁵⁵ Alice Goldfarb Marquis, “Words as Weapons: Propaganda in Britain and Germany during the First World War,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 13, no. 3 (July 1978): 468.

²⁵⁶ Gary S. Messinger, *British Propaganda and the State in the First World War* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992), 13.

²⁵⁷ These political agendas included: welfare reforms to the long-standing Poor Law (Liberal party), protectionist tariffs and anti-Home Rule measures in Ireland (Conservative party), and expanding the role of trade unions (Labour party). Stephen Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain*, vol. I (1984), 369.

²⁵⁸ Memorandum by Sir William Tyrrell, 10 December 1921, TNA, FO 600/329.

Patriotism and Propaganda: Two Sides of the Same Coin

The eighteenth century Anglo-Irish philosopher and statesman Edmund Burke argued that along with the clergy, nobility, and the bourgeoisie, there existed another political class or force independent of the established ranks of power – the Press or the “Fourth Estate.”²⁵⁹ Much like the newly empowered Third Estate in France c. 1789-1792, the Fourth Estate demanded a voice in political affairs. The press that Burke referred to were conservative papers like *The Times* and *Morning Post*, which hired journalists to cover debates in the House of Commons.²⁶⁰

At the outbreak of the First World War, *The Times* and *Morning Post* still remained the reliable authority on domestic politics and foreign affairs, but now the market was also saturated with countless other newspapers of varying journalistic quality. While the British press was not homogeneous in its political outlook, there very much existed a civic tradition of journalism whose goal was to report the news as it was happening. The war then provided the Fourth Estate with an opportunity to prove itself indispensable to the state. As historian and propaganda expert Gary Messinger aptly notes, “the most conspicuous feature of British official propaganda... appears to have been the extreme care taken by the British, even more than was the case in other countries, to let nongovernmental sources do the work of opinion manipulation which the Cabinet wanted done.”²⁶¹ Patriotic journalism and official propaganda were ultimately treated as two sides of the same coin in wartime Britain.

²⁵⁹ The Scottish historian and essayist Thomas Carlyle attributes Burke with coining the phrase “the Fourth Estate.” Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (London: James Fraser, 1908), 392. See also, Sanders and Taylor, 4.

²⁶⁰ Wilfred Hindle, *The Morning Post, 1772-1937: Portrait of a Newspaper* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1974), 69.

²⁶¹ Messinger, 22-23.

In contrast to Imperial Germany where propaganda was highly regulated by the state, the Liberal governments of H. H. Asquith and David Lloyd George actively recruited successful authors and press barons to influence public opinion at home and in neutral countries.²⁶² In late 1914, the British Foreign Office established an official propaganda department located at Wellington House in Buckingham Gate, London. Over the course of four years the bureau published nearly 1,200 propaganda pamphlets aimed at persuading Britons, the populations of the dominions and colonies, Americans, Scandinavians, and allies like Russia and France to stand firm in their resolve against German militarism. This was a war of words intended to reassure allies and neutrals that Britain's cause was just. Early war propaganda apportioned sole blame to Germany for starting the war thereby justifying the need for British intervention.

A bold speech made by Asquith at Guildhall on 9 November 1914 best articulated Britain's war aims. Here, the Prime Minister called for the restoration of Belgium and an end to the fighting in France. He also highlighted a respect for the rights of neutral and smaller states and asserted that the Allies must wrest the *Kaiserreich* from the grips of Prussian domination. Thus British propaganda sought to impart Asquith's sentiments through the release of patriotic posters and pamphlets.²⁶³ References to the German "Hun" – a hulking and reprehensible character who had no regard for humanity – firmly placed the enemy on the dark side of Manichean imagery of good versus evil. This type

²⁶² In early 1915 the German Imperial Ministry of War forbade the press from publishing anything "injurious to the Fatherland." This censorship prohibited newspapers from releasing statistics on mortality rates or discussing any political disagreements between Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg and Kaiser Wilhelm II. See, Ralph Haswell Lutz, ed. *The Fall of the German Empire, 1914-1918*, vol. I (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1932), 177-183.

²⁶³ Sanders and Taylor, 137-138. See also, J. Gooch, "Soldiers, Strategy, and War Aims in Britain, 1914-1918," in Barry Hunt and Adrian Preston (eds.), *War Aims and Strategic Policy in the Great War* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), 25-26.

of literature was known as “atrocities propaganda”²⁶⁴ and was the specialty of Wellington House and its famed authors like H. G. Wells, Arthur Conan Doyle, Rudyard Kipling, and Arnold Toynbee during the early war years.

However, vilification of the enemy was soon replaced by a greater need to counteract German propaganda that charged the naval blockade was unlawful and inhumane. The German War Press Office (*Kriegspresseamt*) targeted the Allies’ flagrant disregard for international law as a means to gain support in the United States and neutral Scandinavian countries. “The only useful slogan we have is ‘Freedom of the Seas,’” remarked a *Kriegspresseamt* official in mid-1917. The Allied blockade was at the centre of Germany’s propaganda campaign to discredit the enemy, but it ultimately proved disastrous to their international credibility because of the inherent violence of the submarine warfare with which Germany responded to the blockade. Wellington House easily dispelled the German allegations by reminding Britons and neutrals that although search and seizures were inconvenient, its intrusion on neutral rights paled in comparison to lethal German aggression.²⁶⁵

The use of chemical warfare at the Second Battle of Ypres in April 1915, for instance, or the sinking of the *Lusitania* the following month, and reintroduction of unrestricted submarine warfare in January 1917: these were all tactics employed by the German High Command to achieve victory at whatever cost. It also was difficult for the

²⁶⁴ Wellington House identified eight categories of anti-German propaganda for dissemination to the masses. These involved exploiting (1) German stereotypes (i.e. embodied in the hard-nosed Prussian officer), followed by (2) pejorative references to “Huns” or the French equivalent “Boches,” (3) atrocity stories particularly involving women and children, and (4) continually labeling the enemy as “militaristic” and “aggressive.” Other trends involved (5) deflecting military setbacks and, likewise, (6) exaggerating the importance of limited victories on the battlefield. (7) Key slogans like “Britons: Lord Kitchener wants you” and (8) equating honour and patriotism with support for the war effort allowed the Foreign Office to target as many people and political groups as possible. See, J. A. C. Brown, *Techniques of Persuasion: From Propaganda to Brainwashing* (Harmondsworth: Middlesex, 1963), 94.

²⁶⁵ Marquis, 491.

Kriegspresseamt to decry the human cost of the naval blockade for fear of admitting its effectiveness against the German civilian population. That would have been “tantamount to an admission of Prussian vulnerability” and difficulty in managing domestic resources.²⁶⁶ The Reich obdurately chose instead to downplay food and material shortages for the duration of the war. By 1917, Wellington House had sufficiently silenced German attempts to turn global opinion against the Allied naval blockade, and by the following year the Allies were using the threat of a post-bellum blockade to hasten the war’s end.

This chapter on wartime propaganda is part of a broader narrative on the growth of civil-military relations in Britain during the First World War. It explores the relationship between the tightening of the naval blockade and the intensification of anti-German propaganda released by the British government in the later war years (i.e. 1917-1918). It argues that in harnessing the power of Fleet Street Lloyd George’s government recognized the importance of the Press in controlling the flow of sensitive information. Nowhere is this more evident than in the influential career of press baron Lord Northcliffe. First, in his role as chairman of the British War Mission to the United States and, later, head of Allied Propaganda in Enemy Countries, Northcliffe functioned as a bridge between the civil and military elements in wartime Britain. His ruthless business acumen earned him the moniker “the Napoleon of Fleet Street,” but it was his deft control of First World War propaganda that had Adolf Hitler admitting in the interwar years: “What we failed to do [in 1914-1918], the enemy did, with amazing skill and really brilliant calculation... I, myself, learned enormously from this enemy war

²⁶⁶ Sanders and Taylor, 149.

propaganda.”²⁶⁷

The Role of Censorship

Censorship was a tool that went hand in hand with Allied propaganda. Following Britain’s declaration of war on 4 August 1914 the Foreign Office ordered the British cable ship *Teleconia* to cut the underwater cables between the United States and Germany, in effect, severing the fastest method of communication between the two countries. This gave Britain an immeasurable advantage in the war of words to come. It made Germany dependent on slower wireless telegraphy, where newspaper reports from Berlin to Washington arrived considerably later than headlines from London. Secondly, it isolated the Central Powers by forcing them to rely on often week-old press reports from the Northern Neutrals, which made the practice of German espionage and intelligence gathering much harder.²⁶⁸ It lastly provided Britain an opportunity to shape public perception of the war at home and abroad with the help of Fleet Street and the ever-expanding powers of DORA (Defence of the Realm Act) and Britain’s naval blockade.

British newspaper editors were naturally loath to support any form of censorship of the press. A January 1915 opinion piece in the left-leaning *Daily Chronicle* clearly shows the influences against the success of the Asquith government’s initial calls for voluntary cooperation: “To send an article to the Press Bureau is to invite a severity of treatment which can easily be escaped by the simple process of not sending [it]. Some of our contemporaries escape it in this way every day... A policy of this sort simply puts a

²⁶⁷ Harry J. Greenwall, *Northcliffe: Napoleon of Fleet Street* (London: Wingate, 1957); Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, translated by Ralph Manheim (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1971), 176.

²⁶⁸ Messinger, 100-101.

premium on a newspaper not ‘playing the game.’”²⁶⁹ The tightening of measures under the Defence of the Realm Act, however, made evasion of the censors much harder. The act, amended on more than five occasions during the war, gave His Majesty’s Government wide-ranging powers of state control unseen in peacetime. Under this emergency legislation individuals, institutions, and companies were subject to prosecution by civil courts if their actions – even indirectly – aided the enemy’s war effort. To that end, posters or leaflets deemed unpatriotic were torn down and confiscated, while those responsible faced potential jail time pending further investigation by the British Home Office.²⁷⁰

Postal censorship was another mechanism used by the state to control the flow of seditious and sensitive information. Letters to and from the front were routinely scrutinized for their content – references to troop movements, war aims, and low morale were blacked out altogether. Yet mail censorship in wartime was nothing new. Indeed, King George III’s government tampered with mail in the American colonies in the months leading up to the American Revolution and the practice became commonplace in the Northern and Southern states during the American Civil War. Such measures after all were “... necessary to check espionage, prevent merchandise entering or leaving Germany and forestall efforts to promote uprisings by the circulation of seditious and inflammatory literature,” argued Lord Robert Cecil.²⁷¹ In an official address to the American people in mid-1916 the Minister of the Blockade acknowledged the inconvenience posed by mail censorship, but stated that all efforts were being made to

²⁶⁹ ‘The Censor’s Uneven Hand,’ *Daily Chronicle*, 18 January 1915.

²⁷⁰ Brock Millman, “HMG and the War against Dissent, 1914-1918,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, no. 3 (July 2005): 424.

²⁷¹ Robert Cecil, *Why Mail Censorship is Vital to Britain* (London: JAS Truscott & Son Ltd., 1916), British Library, London, England (hereafter cited as BL), 1, 4.

return individuals' mail within 48 hours. The implication was that innocent parties had nothing to fear. Conversely, swift actions would be taken to shut down the business operations of Britons and Americans who continued to trade with the enemy.²⁷² How were these restrictive measures met with in the U.S. and how did support for the Allied war effort trump widespread dissent in Britain and America? To answer these questions one must trace the storied career of press baron Lord Northcliffe.

Alfred Harmsworth: The Making of a Propagandist

Born Alfred Harmsworth in Dublin, Ireland in 1865, Northcliffe rose to prominence as a newspaper magnate in the 1890s and first decade of the twentieth century. Known by several biographers as the “founder of modern journalism,” he was able to reach an unprecedented audience through his ownership of *The Times*, *Evening News*, and ever-populist *Daily Mail*.²⁷³ Northcliffe controlled 40 percent of the morning newspapers, 45 percent of the evening, and 15 percent of all Sunday newspapers circulating in Britain in the opening days of the war.²⁷⁴ Newspaper headlines kept Britons informed about major developments on the fighting in France and Belgium, and chances were high that those headlines belonged to a Northcliffe-owned paper.

The press baron was a vocal proponent of British intervention in the Great War and frequently criticized politicians and institutions that were seen as “soft” on Prussian militarism. His censure extended to H. H. Asquith's war leadership during the Shell Crisis over the shortage of munitions in the spring of 1915, which helped, in part, to topple the Prime Minister's Liberal government and force him to take ministers from the

²⁷² Sanders and Taylor, 21.

²⁷³ Jean Chalaby, “Northcliffe: Proprietor as Journalist,” in Peter Catterall ed., *Northcliffe's Legacy: Aspects of the British Popular Press, 1896-1996* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), BL, 27.

²⁷⁴ J. M. McEwen, “The National Press during the First World War: Ownership and Circulation,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 17, no. 3 (July 1982), 466-467.

Conservative opposition.²⁷⁵ Northcliffe's continued criticism was then central to Asquith's replacement as prime minister by the minister of munitions, David Lloyd George, on 5 December 1916, Lloyd George having shown in Northcliffe's estimation a greater determination to wage all-out war. Nevertheless, Northcliffe's criticism with British war policy did not stop, and his newspapers were unrelenting in their calls for victory on the Western Front and an ever-tightening blockade of Germany in the North Sea and Atlantic.²⁷⁶ While Northcliffe touted Lloyd George, to be "the man to win the war," he envisioned himself alongside the new Prime Minister formulating policy, offering advice, and, ultimately shaping the peace settlement in Britain's favour.²⁷⁷

Lloyd George's War Cabinet colleagues regarded Northcliffe as the proverbial "thorn" in their Prime Minister's side. "Unscrupulous," "dangerous," and "he will not rest until he is made [a] Dictator" was how one high-ranking advisor described him.²⁷⁸ The prime minister, however, saw another use for the loquacious and wily press baron – wartime propagandist for His Majesty's Government. From 7 June to 3 November 1917, Northcliffe toured the United States as Chairman of the British War Mission in the hope

²⁷⁵ The Shell Crisis occurred after the Battle of Neuve Chapelle (10-13 March 1915) when Asquith's Liberal government was forced to admit that the British army was running out of high explosive shells and other vital munitions due to the prolonged nature of the war. The scandal garnered massive attention in the British press, particularly *The Times*, and was one of the defining moments in the rise of David Lloyd George's political career. As Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lloyd George expressed serious reservations about the Secretary of State for War, Lord Kitchener, and his mismanagement of the country's munitions supply. The negative press, coupled with Lloyd George's can-do attitude, convinced the government to create a Ministry of Munitions in May 1915 with Lloyd George at its helm.

²⁷⁶ 'The British Blockade,' *The Times*, 16 October 1915, 'The Blockade of Germany: Customs Complaint against City Merchants,' *The Times*, 24 November 1915 and 'Trading with the Enemy,' *The Times*, 22 January 1916. See also, Lord Northcliffe, *At The War* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1916), 318-319.

²⁷⁷ *The History of The Times. IV: The 150th Anniversary and Beyond, 1912-1948*, Part I (London: Macmillan, 1952), 314-316. See also, J. M. McEwen, "Northcliffe and Lloyd George at War, 1914-1918," *Historical Journal* 24, no. 3 (September 1981): 655.

²⁷⁸ George Riddell to Frances Stevenson, in *Lloyd George. A Diary by Frances Stevenson*, edited by A. J. P. Taylor (London: Hutchinson, 1971), 89-90.

of solidifying Anglo-American relations and harmonizing Allied war aims.²⁷⁹ Historian J. Lee Thompson is right to argue “[that] by sending him [Northcliffe] across the Atlantic, Lloyd George also schemed to muzzle the criticism of his newspapers and particularly their support of the army against government ‘interference’ with strategy.”²⁸⁰ Thus, by appealing to Northcliffe’s patriotism and vanity, Lloyd George effectively undercut the former’s public opposition while utilizing his vast influence and connections abroad.

Although the U.S. had joined the Allied war effort in April 1917, Northcliffe’s publicity campaign was a shrewd move to allay American fears of the war’s futility and perceived ulterior motives of British policymakers. As early as January 1916, British diplomats in Washington informed the Minister of the Blockade Robert Cecil “that there was a growing feeling [in America] we were using the blockade for our commercial advantage and to the injury of American trade.” This Foreign Office cable plainly revealed the inadequacy of Britain’s pre-1917 diplomacy with the world’s largest neutral power. When asked how to rectify the situation, Washington replied: “Get a good publicity agent and put your case before the American people... who can understand the legal technicalities of [the] blockade? Who is impressed by the nicely balanced phrases of the official mind?”²⁸¹ Northcliffe aimed to solve the transatlantic gap by eschewing what he deemed the “elitist” diplomacy of Whitehall for a more transparent and open dialogue with the United States.

²⁷⁹ ‘Telegrams from Sir Hardman Lever concerning Lord Northcliffe’s Mission to the U.S.A.’ 17 June 1917, TNA, T 172/425; ‘Western and General Report no. 19,’ 6 June 1917, TNA, CAB 24/146.

²⁸⁰ J. Lee Thompson, “‘To Tell the People of America the Truth’: Lord Northcliffe in the USA, Unofficial British Propaganda, June-November 1917,” *Journal of Contemporary British History* 34, no. 2 (April 1999): 246.

²⁸¹ Letter from H. A. Gwynne to Lord Robert Cecil, 14 February 1916; Letter from Unknown Press Correspondent in Washington, D.C. to H. A. Gwynne, 30 January 1916, Papers of H. A. Gwynne, Imperial War Museum (cited as IWM hereafter).

Compared to the frocked coat foreign secretary Arthur Balfour, Northcliffe was seen as a new kind of Briton altogether. Dressed humbly in an old suit and rumpled hat, his public addresses were impassioned speeches on the necessity of Anglo-American cooperation. This war, he stated, “is a matter of whole nations in arms... Let every man give to this War that concentration of thought and purpose of mind that have made his business a success... Let everything else stand aside.”²⁸² His speeches were also laden with the message that Britain’s commitment to the Allied war effort was genuine and unwavering. This last point went a long way to alleviate U.S. reticence concerning the blockade’s wartime imposition and the notion that American Doughboys would be vainly sacrificed for the political and commercial interests of Great Britain.²⁸³ Throughout the First World War Northcliffe was commonly referred to on both sides of the Atlantic as ‘the Most Powerful Man in the Country.’²⁸⁴ He had travelled to America on more than twenty occasions prior to his official visit in mid-1917 and was regarded by many in the press as more American than British. While this did not endear Northcliffe to the old guard of the War Cabinet, it firmly established his position as *the* British authority on wartime public relations with the United States.

The Propaganda of Crewe House

Upon his return to England Northcliffe was appointed the Director of Propaganda in Enemy Countries by Lloyd George in February 1918. This post, located at Crewe House in Mayfair, suited the press baron’s talents remarkably well. He possessed an almost uncanny ability to understand what type of propaganda would best foster dissent in the enemy ranks and aid in shortening the war. For example, in a 10 June 1918 letter

²⁸² Max Pemberton, *Lord Northcliffe: A Memoir* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1923), 184-185.

²⁸³ Thompson, “‘To Tell the People of America the Truth’,” 244, 251-253.

²⁸⁴ McEwen, “Northcliffe and Lloyd George at War,” 651.

to foreign secretary Balfour, Northcliffe was adamant that:

Propaganda, as an active form of policy, must be in harmony with the settled war aims of the Allies... We may be inclined to believe that every German is something of a Junker, we have to remember that he is also a potentially reasonable man. There is much evidence that the German people as a whole desire above all else the cessation of the war. They are suffering more than their opponents... [Yet] it must be made plain that we are prepared to continue a ruthless policy of commercial blockade.²⁸⁵

This letter is significant for several reasons. Firstly, his rationale that Germans differed little from their Allied combatants was in marked contrast to the propaganda released by Crewe House's predecessor, Wellington House. The latter agency chose to vilify the enemy through the release of posters depicting the atrocities of the barbarous "Hun." Much of this imagery was based on familiar prewar stereotypes, which seemed dreadfully outmoded to the War Cabinet by 1918. It lacked, for instance, the visceral impact of the war's grim reality – casualties were mounting daily while territorial gains were sporadic and, even then, short-lived. Therefore, the principal aim of Northcliffe's department was to refashion propaganda in a way that would convince the enemy to lay down their arms because the alternative seemed futile.²⁸⁶ Skilled in the art of marketing and mass persuasion Lord Northcliffe was the ideal man to head this new agency.

²⁸⁵ 'Report on the Work of the Department of Propaganda in Enemy Countries,' 1918-1919, TNA, CAB 24/75, 24.

²⁸⁶ Propaganda leaflets were first distributed to German troops in the spring of 1916. But they focused too heavily on disproving German propaganda myths (i.e. the claim that German P.O.W.s were mistreated and underfed) rather than establishing their own claims. Crewe House did not make the same mistake. Campbell Stuart, *The Secrets of Crewe House: The Story of a Famous Campaign* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1920), 9, 52-53. See also, Philip M. Taylor, *British Propaganda in the Twentieth-Century: Selling Democracy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 52.

(a) The Balloon Post

Crewe House released its propaganda to the enemy via the Balloon Post or *Luftballon*. Leaflets written in German were attached to an 8 x 20 foot air balloon and sent over the frontlines into enemy territory. Once in mid-air the leaflets were released by a timed spring-loaded mechanism, a process that was repeated more than a thousand times each day and with great effect. By August 1918, Britain's Balloon Post dropped 100,000 pamphlets per day and released a staggering 6.7 million leaflets in the last five and a half weeks of the war. Moreover, Northcliffe ingeniously contrasted German prewar stereotypes with its "war weary" 1918 counterpart.²⁸⁷ A few examples will suffice. One highly effective leaflet entitled, "What are you fighting for, Michael?" asked German soldiers "have you ever really thought for what you are fighting?... Your Kaiser has decorated Hindenburg with the Iron Cross. What has he given you? Privation, sorrow, poverty, hunger, for your wives and children, misery, sickness and tomorrow a grave."²⁸⁸ This talk of Germany's plight was followed by a cartoon leaflet in which the mythic Germania is seen riding a chariot with a general, presumably Helmuth von Moltke the Younger, and an admiral. The chariot is pulled by the German *Volk* and tempted by the "carrot" of a quick victory in August 1914. The image is sharply contrasted with the same figure after four years of protracted war. Now, in 1918, Germania has lost her lustre and the German people have withered in size and are no longer content with the *ersatz* or substitute victory promised by the German High Command.²⁸⁹ Prewar illusion versus bleak wartime reality – that was the real genius of Northcliffe's propaganda in

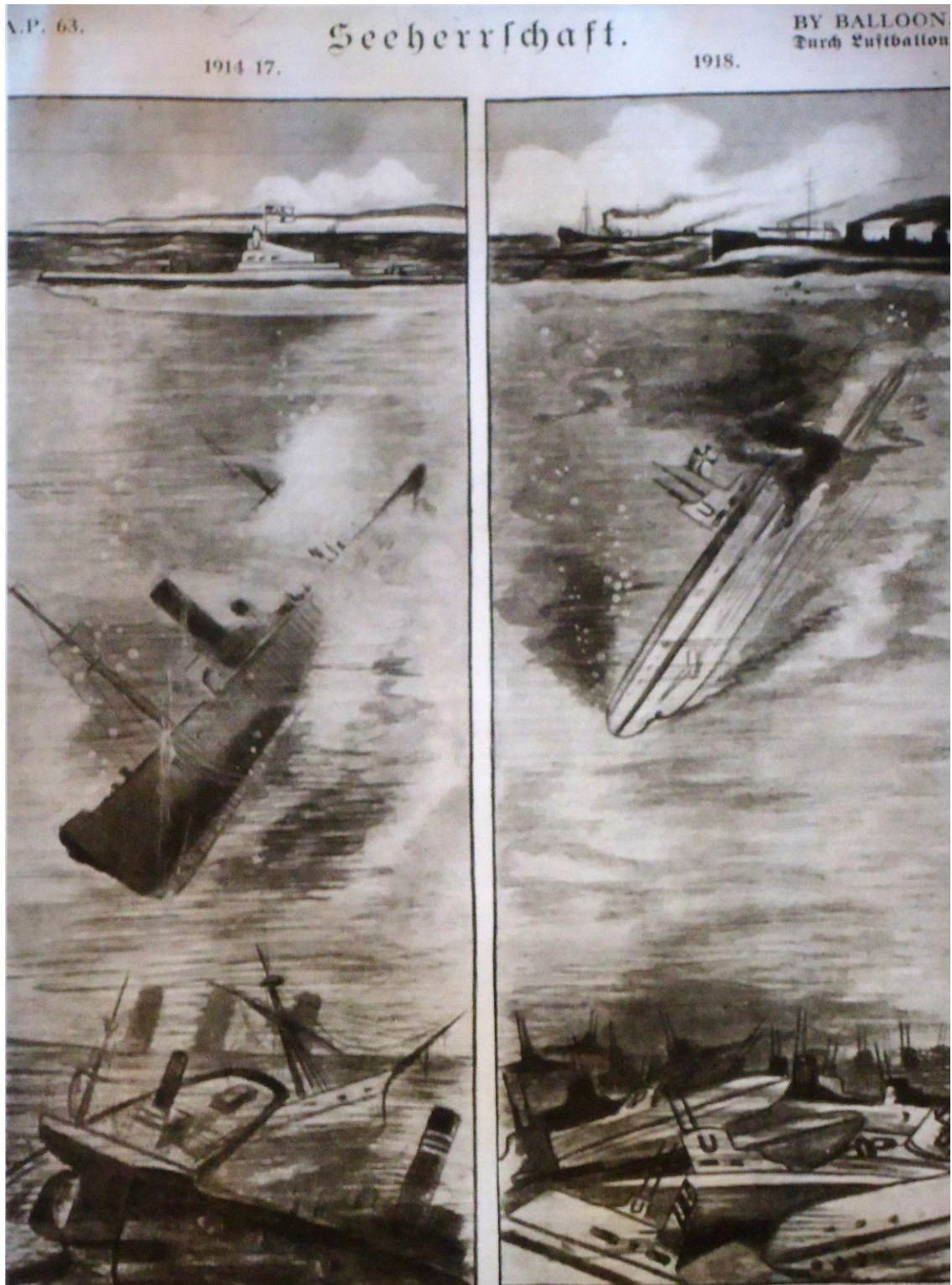
²⁸⁷ 'Report on the Work of the Department of Propaganda in Enemy Countries,' 27, 33-34.

²⁸⁸ "*Um was kämpfst Du, Michel?*" Great Britain. Director of Propaganda in Enemy Countries, 1918. Box 1, HIA.

²⁸⁹ '*Germania, 1914 v. 1918*,' Great Britain. Director of Propaganda in Enemy Countries, 1918, Box 1, HIA.



[Figure 3] "Germany," Hoover Institution Archives. An example of the type of propaganda released by the Balloon Post. Note the difference between the hearty *volk* and High Command in 1914 and their 1918 war profiteering counterpart. Despite the withered appearance of Germania in 1918, the civil-military leadership still managed to stockpile money in the rear of its chariot (i.e. on the backs of the German people.)



[Figure 4] "*Seeherrschaft*," Hoover Institution Archives. Another pamphlet released by the Balloon Post depicting Britain's naval supremacy. The aim here was to demonstrate the impending Allied victory. It acknowledges, for example, the German U-boat menace in the early years of the war. But using the simple motif of compare and contrast, it effectively illustrates Germany's reversal of fortune as the war progressed.

comparison to the staid, familiar images of Wellington House.

This was the first major instance where British policymakers used the blockade for propaganda purposes by threatening its prolongation after the war. The Foreign Trade Department had tried the previous year to “advocate exploiting the alarm already manifested in Germany at the idea of a post-bellum trade war.”²⁹⁰ Yet the War Cabinet dismissed the proposal as “a dangerous policy from which it might be difficult to draw back [international] credit.” However, Northcliffe’s blockade related propaganda succeeded because the threat was introduced at a time when rampant hunger and malnutrition swept Germany and the United States was firmly aligned with Britain and France against the Central Powers.²⁹¹ Commenting on the success of Britain’s late propaganda efforts, Northcliffe contended that “Had the German army been well fed and provisioned, the effect might not have been [as] striking, but gradually weakened by the merciless blockade of the Allies, German soldiers proved receptive to the insidious ideas disseminated by the Balloon Post.”²⁹²

(b) Inter-Departmental and Allied Cooperation

Another achievement of Crewe House was its ability to coordinate and work seamlessly with various Cabinet departments and Allied propaganda agencies in France, Italy, and the United States. Although Northcliffe’s department was answerable only to the prime minister, it was merely one important cog in Britain’s wartime machinery. By 1918, six separate offices reported directly to David Lloyd George on all issues relating to

²⁹⁰ ‘Foreign Trade Department Memorandum on Trade War,’ 27 June 1917, TNA, RECO 1/356, esp. 9-30.

²⁹¹ ‘War Cabinet Memorandum re: Foreign Trade Department on Trade War,’ 20 July 1917, TNA, RECO 1/356, 35-36.

²⁹² Lord Northcliffe, [Explanation and Effect of Allied Propaganda] Memo, Great Britain. Director of Propaganda in Enemy Countries, Box 1, HIA. See also, ‘Propaganda,’ Some Research Notes from Victor Bonham-Carter, 2/15, LHCMA and Erich Ludendorff, *My War Memories, 1914-1918*, vol. 1 (London: Hutchinson, 1920), 361-362.

propaganda.²⁹³ The Ministry of Information headed by Lord Beaverbrook (Canada's Max Aitken) was responsible for the distribution of British propaganda in Allied and neutral countries, in effect, taking over the work of Wellington House in 1918. Additionally, the Foreign Office maintained an interest in the propaganda released by Beaverbrook and Northcliffe's respective agencies, while the War Office's MI7 department and the National War Aims Committee created in August 1917 focused on domestic issues such as censorship and "counter-act[ing] war weariness and pacifism."²⁹⁴

Finally, the longstanding Press Bureau continued its work under the umbrella of the War Office to liaise with General Headquarters and soldiers at the front. Dispatches from accredited war correspondents John Buchan and Henry Nevinson were then printed in widely read newspapers like *The Times*, *Daily Telegraph*, and *Morning Post*, to name only a few.²⁹⁵ "In the early days of propaganda," bemoaned Robert Cecil when asked to characterize the government's relationship with the Press, "even Westminster was found to be too far from Fleet Street."²⁹⁶ One can see that this was clearly not the case by the war's end. Civilian involvement in the official propaganda effort was one of the hallmarks of British civil-military relations c. 1917-1918.

All too often the web of government bureaucracy can become overly tangled. Wellington House, for example, had very little day-to-day contact with either the War

²⁹³ Refer to Chapter 4 Appendix, Figure 6, "The Organization of Official British Propaganda, 1918," for a diagram illustrating the flow of information to and from Lloyd George's War Cabinet in the last year of the war. The primary difference between the early propaganda efforts of Wellington House and the government's later propaganda campaign was its emphasis on the production and distribution of propaganda in enemy countries.

²⁹⁴ Sue Malvern, *Modern Art, Britain, and the Great War: Witnessing, Testimony, and Remembrance* (New Haven: Yale, 2004), 46.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 62. Buchan had headed the Department of Information in 1917 (known as the Ministry of Information by 1918) and Nevinson was a respected journalist and father of the war artist, C. R. W. Nevinson, prior to reporting from the Western Front.

²⁹⁶ Robert Cecil, 'General Notes on Propaganda,' undated, TNA, INF 4/1B.

Office or Admiralty, yet worked closely with the Foreign Office. This division of labour led to disorganization and inter-departmental rivalry as various departments competed for creative control.²⁹⁷ No one agency held a monopoly on wartime propaganda; however, the frequent interaction between Crewe House, the Foreign and War Office, as well as the Ministry of Information and the Press Bureau was a significant improvement on earlier attempts to coordinate propaganda.

Northcliffe was also keen on cooperating with the Allied and Associated Powers to ensure that propaganda was utilized to its full advantage. On 14 August 1918 he held a four-day long conference with foreign representatives in London to encourage a united effort to tip the balance in the Allies' favour.²⁹⁸ Various strategies were discussed to exploit what Ludendorff termed "the black day of the German Army" – the highly successful Allied attack at the Battle of Amiens (8-12 August). Not only did the battle mark the end of trench warfare, it ushered in the last hundred days of the First World War with a remarkable Allied advance of 19 km that broke up six German divisions and left thousands of soldiers surrendering en masse.²⁹⁹ More than 50,000 German troops became Allied POWs in the battle's aftermath. Amiens was undoubtedly a turning point for the Allies. It also provided Crewe House with some insight into the overall impact of their campaign at a very pivotal stage in the war. Despite the German High Command's insistence that soldiers simply disregard the "lies" of the Balloon Post, "the large number

²⁹⁷ George Cockerill, *What Fools We Were* (London: Hutchinson and Company Ltd., 1944), 63. See Chapter 4 Appendix, Figure 7, "The Department of Enemy Propaganda at Crewe House," for a detailed look at the inner workings of Northcliffe's agency.

²⁹⁸ Peter Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words: British, American, and Canadian Propaganda and Fiction, 1914-1933* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1987), 73; Messinger, 154.

²⁹⁹ Robert B. Asprey, *The German High Command at War: Hindenburg and Ludendorff and the First World War* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1991), 61. See also, Rod Paschall, *The Defeat of Imperial Germany, 1917-1918* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 1989) and Stevenson, *Cataclysm*, 347-348.

of German prisoners taken with leaflets in their pockets [at Amiens] proved that these [propaganda pamphlets] were doing their work.”³⁰⁰

The Success of British Propaganda and the Collapse of Germany’s Allies

What exact role did propaganda play in the enemy’s defeat? One cannot say for certain. What is clear, however, is that the propaganda of Crewe House did one thing exceptionally well. It ultimately reinforced the suspicions and fears of many soldiers in the ranks of the Central Powers, where dissent and war weariness were palpable throughout most of 1917-1918.³⁰¹ By early 1918, “the Turkish resistance that had halted [the Allies] at Gallipoli; the Bulgarians in the hills above Salonika, the Austro-Hungarian[s] on the Isonzo; and above all the German resistance on the Western Front had ceased to be so formidable.”³⁰² What follows is a detailed look at how enemy propaganda affected each of the powers.

(a) Austria-Hungary

The political and ethnic composition of the Habsburg Empire was fragmented and fragile. After 1867 one monarch ruled both the Austrian empire with its capital in Vienna and the Kingdom of Hungary with its seat of government in Budapest. At its core a constitutional monarchy, the Habsburg Empire had two distinct parliaments, each run by its own prime minister (Karl von Stürgkh in Austria and István Tisza in Hungary). To complicate matters further eleven major ethnic groups comprised this polyglot empire. Nearly 53 million Germans, Czechs, Magyars, Poles, Italians, Slovenes, Romanians, Ukrainians, Slovaks, Croats, and Serbs lived together under Habsburg rule.

³⁰⁰ *The History of The Times*, 348, 359.

³⁰¹ George G. Bruntz, “Allied Propaganda and the Collapse of German Morale in 1918,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (January 1938): 61.

³⁰² Stevenson, *With Our Backs to the Wall*, 245.

The Dual Monarchy was the name given to this multinational empire in the wake of Austria's defeat by Bismarckian Prussia in the Austro-Prussian War of 1866. Indeed, a political union or compromise (*Ausgleich*) with Hungary in 1867 was seen as the only way to maintain Austria's status as a Great Power in late nineteenth century Europe.³⁰³ By late 1916, the empire was entering its twilight phase. The much beloved and long reigning monarch Franz Josef died on 21 November. His successor and great-nephew, Karl, found himself head of an empire that was decaying from within. The young emperor was sympathetic to the plight of Hungarian nationals who wanted autonomy from Austria, but was ultimately in over his head.³⁰⁴

The structure of the Habsburg army was also flawed. "Designed not to fight a major war but rather to maintain a delicate political balance in the empire," is how Holger Herwig described the cumbersome organization of their military. It consisted of three wings – a combined Austro-Hungarian army and two national reserve forces; the Austrian contingent or *Landwehr* and a Hungarian section, the *Honved*. Initially, German was spoken in both the joint army and the *Landwehr*, while Hungarian predominated in the *Honved*. Yet ethnic grievances in Bosnia and Herzegovina later forced the military to include instruction in *all* eleven national languages.³⁰⁵ Communication between the various wings was extremely challenging because the number of soldiers fluent in more than three or four languages dwindled as casualties mounted and troops were reassigned to new units.

³⁰³ Alan Sked, *The Decline and Fall of the Habsburg Empire, 1815-1918* (London: Harlow, 1989), 191-202.

³⁰⁴ Hew Strachan, *The First World War* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 271-272.

³⁰⁵ Holger H. Herwig, *The First World War: Germany and Austria-Hungary, 1914-1918* (London: Arnold, 1997), 13.

(b) Bulgaria

Bulgaria was a latecomer to the Central Power alliance, entering the war on 14 October 1915. Yet they were by no means new to the dynastic power struggle occurring in the Balkans. The country's prewar foreign policy helps to explain Bulgaria's decision to take up arms with an Austro-Hungarian-German-Turkish coalition against the Entente.

Tsarist Russia was all too eager to promote anti-Ottoman discord in the Balkans following their defeat in the Crimean War (1853-1856), which brought an increased Turkish presence to the Caucasus and led Russia to again declare war on Turkey in April 1877. Emboldened by promises of Russian assistance and independence from Ottoman rule, Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro, and Romania joined forces with the Romanovs to beat back Turkish influence in the region. Their resultant victory spurred nationalist desires and facilitated the creation of a Balkan League in 1912.³⁰⁶ The peace, however, was short-lived as newly independent Bulgaria balked at the strictures imposed by the pro-Russian League and declared war on Serbia, Romania, and Greece, sparking the Second Balkan War (29 June – 10 August 1913). Ultimately, tensions between Greece, Romania, and Serbia left the latter power alone in an alliance with Russia at the start of the First World War.

Bulgaria's decision to enter the war on the side of the Central Powers was nothing if not pragmatic. Although Bulgaria's King Ferdinand and Prime Minister Vasil Radoslavov were pro-Austrian, they were in no hurry to side with one alliance over the other. Instead, they waited until military intervention might prove fruitful. With the Allies' failure to capture Constantinople and secure a direct trade route to Russia, the

³⁰⁶ Greece was also a partner in the Balkan League. Ian F. W. Beckett, *The Great War, 1914-1918* (London: Longman, 2001), 82-83. See also, Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction*, 132-133.

Dardanelles campaign was the turning point for Bulgaria in mid-1915. Joining an alliance with its erstwhile enemy (Turkey) was preferable to aligning with a more recent foe in Tsarist Russia.³⁰⁷

The Bulgarian army made great strides in rolling back Serbian troops stationed along its northwestern border. By December 1915, the combined forces of the German 11th Army, Austro-Hungarian 3rd Army, and Bulgarian 1st and 2nd Armies occupied Serbia completely.³⁰⁸ With Serbia subdued the Central Powers turned to separate geographical areas of interests – the Austro-Hungarians focused on the Italian and Russian fronts, as Germany divided its attention between the Western and Eastern Fronts, fighting for territorial control in East Africa, all the while waging a losing naval campaign in the North Sea and the Atlantic. Bulgaria, in contrast, focused its efforts exclusively on the Macedonian front for the remainder of the war.

On 28 September 1918, Bulgaria was the first Central Power to sue for peace and be granted an Armistice by the Allies. The Bulgarian army simply lost its will to fight; the country's war aims had largely been met with the occupation of Serbia in 1915 and important gains made by the Bulgarian 3rd Army in Romania in 1916-1917. The German army had already transferred most of its Eastern and Southern divisions to the Western Front in the build up to the Spring Offensive in 1918 (*Kaiserschlacht*), which left only a small German presence in the region and signaled waning support for its Balkan ally.³⁰⁹ A lack of support and communication from Berlin was one thing, but after exporting the majority of its foodstuffs to Germany and Austria-Hungary for the past two

³⁰⁷ Stevenson, *With Our Backs to the Wall*, 17.

³⁰⁸ Martin Gilbert, *The First World War: A Complete History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994), 135-136; Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, 285.

³⁰⁹ Strachan, 313-314.

years, Bulgaria was on the brink of starvation.³¹⁰

(c) Turkey

A secret member of the Central Powers prior to the outbreak of war, Ottoman Turkey formally entered the conflict on 29 October 1914.³¹¹ Turkey's contributions to the war effort were substantial, particularly against Russian and British (colonial) troops in the Caucasus region and the remote mountains of Persia (Iran) and fighting the British Expeditionary Force in the deserts of Palestine and Mesopotamia (Iraq), in addition to the Gallipoli campaign of 1915-1916. Turkey's military collapse was due more to internal pressures stemming from the Arab Revolt beginning in the summer of 1916.³¹² British and French officers stationed in Arabia, most famously T. E. Lawrence, promoted Arab nationalism as a counterpoint to despotic Ottoman rule, a story that is outside the scope of the present study. Indeed, Crewe House did not bother to circulate enemy propaganda throughout the Ottoman Empire, leaving that task to Lord Beaverbrook's Ministry of Information.³¹³

With the Central Powers overstretched both militarily and financially after three and a half years of war, it was apparent to Crewe House that progress could be made in attacking the enemy powers where they were most vulnerable. It is not surprising that

³¹⁰ Richard C. Hall, "'The Enemy is Behind Us': The Morale Crisis in the Bulgarian Army during the Summer of 1918," *War in History* 11, no. 2 (2004): 211-213.

³¹¹ Ottoman Turkey had signed a secret pact with German diplomats in early August to join forces with Austria-Hungary and Imperial Germany in a war against the Triple Entente (Great Britain, Russia, and France). Thereafter, the blockade of the Central Powers extended into the Baltic and Mediterranean Seas.

³¹² For a detailed study of Turkey's involvement in the First World War and subsequent dissolution of the Empire, see A. L. Macfie, *The End of the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1923* (London: Longman, 1998), esp. 128-160; Edward J. Erickson, *Ottoman Army Effectiveness in World War I: A Comparative Study* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2007) and Mesut Uyar and Edward J. Erickson, *A Military History of the Ottomans: from Osman to Atatürk* (Santa Barbara: Praeger Security International, 2009), 175-280.

³¹³ Sanders and Taylor, 260.

Northcliffe and his chief propaganda experts H. Wickham Steed and R. W. Seton-Watson selected Austria-Hungary, with its fragmented population and politics, as the first destination for the pamphlets of the Balloon Post.³¹⁴ The director of propaganda posed two different options to the British War Cabinet on 24 February 1918. In the first scenario or option “A,” Britain could work to secure a separate peace treaty with Austria-Hungary. This would deprive Germany of their closest ally and show Bulgaria and Turkey what would be gained by an early settlement, instead of waiting for a complete military collapse at a later date. In the second scenario or option “B,” Britain would press for the total disintegration of the Habsburg Empire.³¹⁵

After careful deliberation the War Cabinet deemed that the two proposals were not mutually exclusive. Anti-German propaganda could be used to plant the seeds of discontent by encouraging non-German subjects to support the Allied cause, thereby exacerbating ethnic tensions without promising the Southern Slavs their own state following the war. This last point was vital for politicians like Arthur Balfour, who stressed to Northcliffe the fine line between seeing an enemy vanquished and dealing with the unwanted chaos of a fallen empire.³¹⁶ Between May and October 1918 Crewe House distributed 60 million propaganda leaflets of various languages behind Austro-Hungarian lines. The method of delivery varied; either the Balloon Post distributed them

³¹⁴ Letter from H. Wickham Steed to Lord Northcliffe, 7 March 1918, *The Times* Archive, London.

³¹⁵ Letter from Lord Northcliffe to Arthur Balfour re: the benefits of a propaganda campaign directed against Austria-Hungary, 24 February 1918, TNA, CAB 24/43, 282-283. Throughout his proposal to the War Cabinet Northcliffe stressed the fact that of 31 million inhabitants in the Austrian empire proper, only one-third of the population was stridently pro-German. Most inhabitants, for instance, felt more loyalty and kinship with their cultural heritage (e.g. Magyar, Polish, Italian). Cultural affinity was even more of a factor in the Kingdom of Hungary, where Northcliffe gathered from British intelligence reports that half of their 21 million inhabitants were either “actively or passively anti-German.” Taken together, the Habsburg Empire was ripe for disintegration.

³¹⁶ TNA, CAB 23/5, 359(6).

or in a combined Franco-British-Italian effort leaflet-filled rifle grenades were shot into the enemy's camp. The campaign worked much the same way against the Bulgarians. British intelligence agents stationed in neutral Switzerland, for example, reported that Bulgarian troops were pushing for the expulsion of their king and a disassociation from German war policy.³¹⁷

Apathetic and tired from fighting the Allies on multiple fronts, "food was the most emotive aspect of the problem" for Germany's allies as a result of the intensification of the hunger blockade under the Lloyd George government.³¹⁸ Unlike Wilhelmine Germany, which was dependent on foreign imports for its economic survival, Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria were more agriculturally self-sufficient. Initially, they were able to weather the effects of the naval blockade by implementing a system of rationing, on the one hand, and through the power of the black market, on the other. Furthermore, as a result of Russian setbacks on the Eastern Front, Austria was able to regain access to its most significant agriculture province (Galicia) in June 1915.

The problem came, however, when plentiful Hungary found it difficult to supply the Dual Monarchy with sufficient grain, meat, and produce. This became apparent as early as April 1915 when, at a political protest in Vienna, the general sentiment was that "Hungary treats us like a foreign country – like a state of the triple entente!" The situation was compounded by the fact that while Hungary was Austria's largest prewar supplier of food, the Magyars were not legally bound to export goods to its imperial counterpart.³¹⁹ Shared political institutions, in short, did not necessarily make for an equal distribution of wartime resources.

³¹⁷ Sanders and Taylor, 227-228, 232.

³¹⁸ Strachan, 270.

³¹⁹ Healy, 51.

By 1917, the same predicament was occurring throughout the Central Powers – with a loss of manpower (i.e. labour), horses, and fertilizer to the war effort the home front directly felt the impact of food shortages. The situation was dire in Austria, where Viennese rations were slashed to a barely sustainable 830 calories per day in 1917.³²⁰ Similarly, the daily meat ration for Austrian troops in Italy was reduced over the course of the war from 400g in late 1914 to 100g in early 1918. It has also been estimated that 75 percent of Bulgarian troops in Macedonia were starving throughout the winter months, “[as] the sea blockade by the entente and the land blockade due to lack of railroad facilities brought this about.”³²¹

**“We Were Hypnotized... as a Rabbit by a Snake”:
The Legacy of Britain’s Propaganda Campaign**

Even before propaganda leaflets were found on German soldiers in the aftermath of Amiens (August 1918) Northcliffe received intelligence reports in May and early June, which indicated that German and Austrian POWs were regularly expressing surprise and appreciation for how well they were fed in Allied hands. Crewe House ultimately used this information to wear down the enemy’s resistance once and for all. The decision was made to distribute leaflets with the price of common foodstuffs like bread, milk, potatoes, butter, and meat in both the Pound Sterling and Reichsmark. Knowing full well the scarcity of these items on the German home front and battlefield, this strategy capitalized on soldiers’ malnourishment and exhaustion. It highlighted, for instance, the much higher cost of goods in Germany than in Britain due to the Allied blockade and rampant

³²⁰ Ibid., 50.

³²¹ Stevenson, *With Our Backs to the Wall*, 301-302; Henry Garfield Alsberg, ‘Food Conditions in the Central Powers,’ 1917, in the Ralph Haswell Lutz Papers, Box 1, HIA; Dr. Böhm, ‘Sanitary Statistics and Mortality of the Population of Vienna during the War, 1914-1918,’ 19 March 1919, in the Ralph Haswell Lutz Papers, HIA.

German inflation, and served to remind them that unrestricted submarine warfare had failed to starve England.

Letters accompanied these pamphlets from actual British and German soldiers to their loved ones on the home front.³²² Homesickness and a genuine desire for peace were common elements to both letters, so as to break down enemy stereotypes and emphasize the similarities between “Tommy” and “Jerry.” But their real purpose was to show the great disparity between Britain’s and the enemy’s food supply. References to hunger and appalling conditions populated German letters home, while they were noticeably absent in British letters. The most effective leaflets though came in pictorial format. A single image of POWs eating food or, as in the case of “*Germania*” and “*Seeherrschaft*,” two contrasting images conveyed Crewe House’s message far better than any elaborate text.³²³

Northcliffe sent a formal letter of resignation to Lloyd George on 12 November 1918 following the signing of the Armistice the previous day. Lacking his characteristic flourish the short letter contained only two paragraphs in which he thanked the prime minister for his continued “confidence” in the work of Crewe House. He made it clear, however, that the department no longer served a purpose in peacetime.³²⁴ For a man who attained great wealth and power on Fleet Street and reported directly to the prime minister for the last two years of the war, was this resignation not in some way premature? Did it not run contrary to everything the patriotic press baron had hoped for? The answer, like so many aspects of Northcliffe’s career, is a complicated one.

³²² Sanders and Taylor, 218.

³²³ *The Times History and Encyclopedia of the War: British Propaganda in Enemy Countries* (London, *The Times Publishing Company Ltd.*, 1919), 343.

³²⁴ Northcliffe’s letter of resignation to Lloyd George quoted in Stuart, 235-236.

There is no doubt that Northcliffe sought a formal role in the peace process. Both he and chief propagandist Wickham Steed stated as much in separate correspondence to the War Cabinet. Steed argued that Crewe House could easily be transformed from a propaganda department into “an agency for enlightenment” in order to procure a favourable settlement for the Allies and the German people. Northcliffe, meanwhile, brazenly requested that he “... be given, with the least possible delay, authority as Chairman of the British War Mission to undertake this peace... in the closest collaboration with the various departments of state until the final peace settlement has been concluded.”³²⁵ This cable was sent to Lloyd George only a week prior to Northcliffe’s resignation on 12 November. Highly suspicious of the propaganda director’s motives the prime minister recalled in his memoirs that, “I curtly told him to go to Hades.”³²⁶ Thus ended Northcliffe’s career in public service and, with it, his unflagging loyalty to His Majesty’s Government. Edged out from the postwar settlement Northcliffe remained disillusioned with Lloyd George’s Liberal-Conservative coalition government up until his death in 1922.³²⁷

The impact of Crewe House, however, was more enduring. Newspapermen influencing and even leading government policy was a novel concept in Britain even at the end of the nineteenth century. It took the stalemate of the First World War for politicians to truly harness the power of the British press. Their search for unconventional solutions to the problem of an ill-equipped and understaffed state

³²⁵ *The History of the Times*, 385.

³²⁶ David Lloyd George, *Memoirs of the Peace Conference, 1919-1920*, vol. 1 (New York: Fertig, 1972), 175-176.

³²⁷ Gerda Richards Crosby, *Disarmament and Peace in British Politics, 1914-1918* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1957), 88-90. See also, McEwen, “Northcliffe and Lloyd George at War,” 671. In fact, he worked to undermine Lloyd George’s reelection campaign with his influence on Fleet Street. *The Times* and the *Daily Mail* were both highly critical of the Prime Minister’s election platform.

bureaucracy led to the creation of Wellington House following the outbreak of war, followed by the Ministry of Information and Crewe House in 1917 and 1918, respectively. In the postwar period a debate sparked around the question whether propaganda actually helped or hindered the Allied war effort. Some Britons argued that it prolonged the war by playing up stereotypes of the Hun and his barbarous ways. But these sentiments were in the minority. Most contemporary British politicians and historians have since agreed with Ludendorff's assertion that his beleaguered troops "were hypnotized by enemy propaganda as a rabbit by a snake."³²⁸ Indeed, the novelty of Crewe House was that it differed in both the tone and substance from the propaganda released by its predecessors. Its sole purpose was to communicate directly with German, Austro-Hungarian, and Bulgarian soldiers in order to create doubt and dissension in the enemy's ranks. British propaganda stressing territorial setbacks, inadequate food supply, and mounting ethnic tensions undoubtedly contributed to the widespread malaise of the Central Powers.

In a 1921 open letter to Lord Northcliffe the German-American journalist Ferdinand Hansen summed up the power of the Balloon Post:

When you wished to influence the Germans you found it expedient to resort to the truth, or to some semblance of the truth... You reported the hardships borne by the German civilian population at home...

With the air black with aeroplanes and white with millions of leaflets, he was not one to shut his eyes to the desperate situation in which he found himself. When he went home on furlough he could see the woe and

³²⁸ General Ludendorff quoted in David Welch, *Germany, Propaganda, and Total War, 1914-1918* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000). 250.

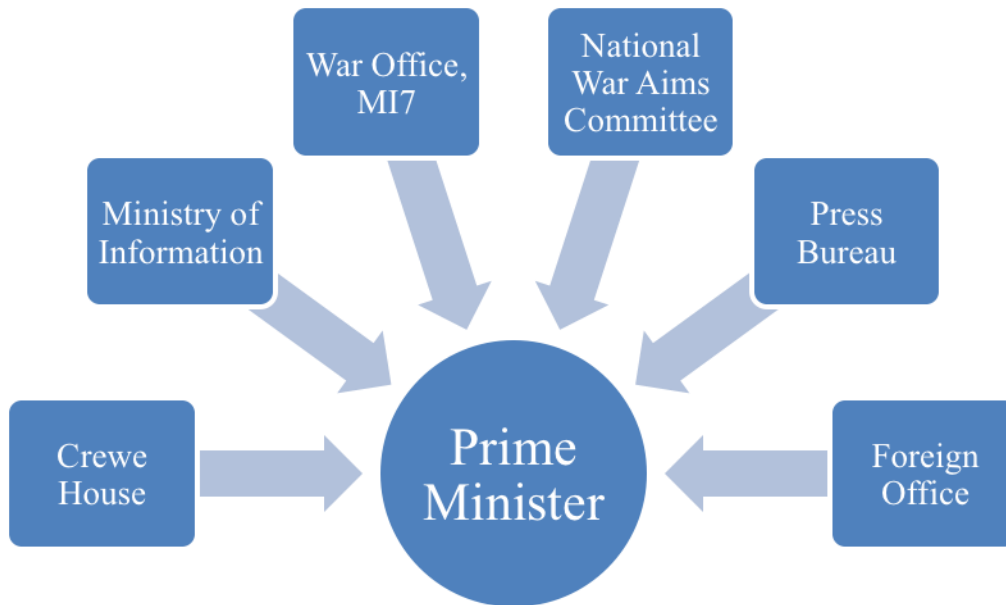
misery about him all too well. When he captured prisoners... how could he not help contrasting their strong and well-fed appearance with his own gauntness and that of his companions.”³²⁹

The propaganda of Crewe House did not cause Germany’s defeat in 1918, but rather expertly exploited pre-existing grievances – the hunger blockade chief among them – to the point that peace was seen as the only alternative to the carnage of total war.

³²⁹ Ferdinand Hansen, *The Unrepentant Northcliffe: Reply to the London Times of 19 October 1920* (Hamburg: Overseas Publishing Company, 1921), pp. 10-11, BL.

Chapter 4 Appendix

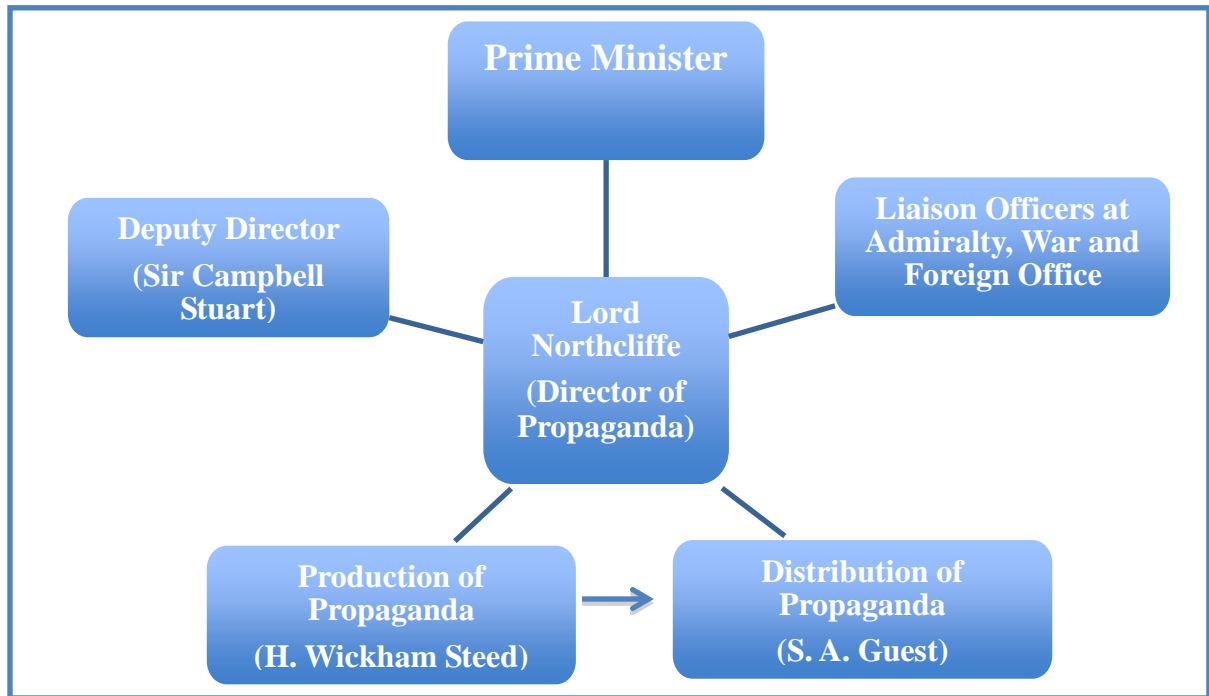
“The Organization of Official British Propaganda, 1918”



[Figure 6] Source: Sanders and Taylor, 271. The diagram is the author's own.

Chapter 4 Appendix

“The Department of Enemy Propaganda at Crewe House”



[Figure 7] Source: Sanders and Taylor, 270. The diagram is the author's own.

CHAPTER 5

“AN END BY BULLETS IS PREFERABLE TO DEATH BY STARVATION”: PEACE TALKS AND DISSENTING DIPLOMATS, NOVEMBER 1918 - MARCH 1919

An Act of Hubris

General Erich Ludendorff realized that Germany had effectively lost the war on 28 September 1918. Unaccustomed to failure the quartermaster general suffered a mental breakdown prior to admitting defeat.³³⁰ What troubled him most was the speed at which the Allies were gaining strategic ground along the Somme and Meuse-Argonne rivers in late September and the simultaneous collapse of the Bulgarian Army on the Balkan Front.³³¹ In addition to these critical military setbacks, the German Empire faced the threat of widespread revolution on the home front, where calls for an immediate Armistice came from both soldiers and citizens alike.

Rather than negotiate with France and Britain directly, the German government contacted U.S. President Woodrow Wilson on 4 October 1918 with the aim to strike a more lenient peace settlement based on the democratic principles of his recent Fourteen Points address to Congress.³³² The Germans hoped to capitalize on the perceived

³³⁰ Ludendorff consulted a psychiatrist friend in order to cope with his extreme anxiety and depression in the final days of the First World War. See, Asprey, 404.

³³¹ Wilhelm Deist, “The Military Collapse of the German Empire: The Reality Behind the Stab-in-the-Back Myth,” *War in History* 3, no. 2 (1996): 206.

³³² On 8 January 1918, Woodrow Wilson proclaimed the Fourteen Points as a model for international governance. These stipulations were intended as a guideline for postwar relations between the Great Powers and their allies. They included the following provisions: (1) to promote open covenants as opposed to secret alliances, (2) freedom of the seas, (3) removal of international trade barriers, (4) reduction in armaments to deter future conflicts, (5) rethinking prewar imperial claims to include a more equitable form of colonialism, (6) evacuation of all Russian territory, (7) restoration of Belgium, (8) evacuation of all French territory and the return of Alsace-Lorraine to France, (9) recognition of various national minorities in Italy, (10) safeguarding ethnic minorities in Austria-Hungary, (11) evacuation of the Balkan lands (e.g. territory in Serbia, Montenegro, and Romania), (12) guarantee protection for minorities in Turkey, (13) creation of an independent Polish nation-state, and (14) the establishment of a League of Nations to oversee the new global balance of power.

benevolence of Wilsonian idealism, which preached freedom of the seas and the removal of many international trade barriers – possibilities for the postwar world that would benefit Germany by curbing Britain’s naval predominance and foster a less Anglo-centric world order.³³³ A peace settlement spearheaded by the American president was ultimately the best-case scenario for German politicians looking to find their new “place in the sun” post-1918.

German Foreign Secretary Paul von Hintze argued, for example, that democratization was the key to winning over the American peace delegation and “the best way to muffle the political aftershock that followed defeat” on the home front. What he proposed to the German High Command (OHL) and the emperor was nothing short of a revolution from above. This entailed liberalizing the government by extending the franchise and amending the constitution to allow the populist Social Democrats (SPD) greater political representation in the Reichstag.³³⁴ These reforms extended to the highest ranks of government with the immediate resignation of Chancellor Georg von Hertling and even von Hintze, himself.³³⁵ In von Hintze’s place, liberal-minded diplomat Wilhelm Solf was appointed foreign minister, while known moderate Prince Maximilian of Baden became chancellor just in time to sign the ceasefire request to the Americans. The prince had grave reservations, however, about signing away Germany’s bargaining power. Instead of blindly accepting Wilson’s Fourteen Points could not the German army continue fighting until the government was in a stronger position to negotiate? By labeling Germany the “vanquished power” on paper, did it not ensure that the Allies

³³³ Herwig, *The First World War*, 382.

³³⁴ Stevenson, *Cataclysm*, 382.

³³⁵ Although, the latter resignation came at von Hintze’s insistence in order to maintain the appearance of a completely new German government.

would demand further concessions in order to halt Germany's economic progress after the war? If recent history proved anything, as Prince Max reminded the German General Staff in regard to Germany's punitive treaty with Bolshevik Russia on 18 March 1918, it was naïve to think that a victor would ever agree to a peace treaty that did not unduly punish the losing side. Indeed, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk effectively marked Russia's withdrawal from the First World War and forced the country to renounce all claims to Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Finland, as well as arable land in the Ukraine, Russian Poland, Belarus, and territory adjacent to the Black Sea in northeastern Georgia.³³⁶

The chancellor's doubts were valid but the reality was that Germany had waited too long to negotiate a better Armistice deal with the Allies. An emergency meeting on 2 October 1918 between the OHL and leaders of the interim government, including SPD head Philipp Scheidemann and Matthias Erzberger of the Catholic Centre Party, confirmed that Germany must immediately sue for peace: "[as] we can no longer win... and [need to] put an end to the struggle in order to save the German people and their allies from making further sacrifices."³³⁷ Thus from 4 to 27 October 1918, multiple communiqués were passed between Washington and Berlin to the exclusion of London, Paris, and Rome. British and French politicians looked askance at this newfound rapport between President Wilson and Prince Max. If Germany were to capitulate it ought to be France and Britain who dictated terms rather than an American-led peace initiative. This was the official attitude of Britain as its military and economic stranglehold of Germany

³³⁶ Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory: The First World War – Myths and Realities* (London: Headline Book Publishing, 2002), 73. For more information on the Bolshevik seizure of power and the political instability in the region throughout 1918-1919 refer to pp. 167-169.

³³⁷ "Statement by Baron vom dem Bussche, Representative of the Supreme Army Command, to the Party Leaders of the Reichstag," 2 October 1918, in *Fall of the German Empire*, vol. 2, edited by Haswell Lutz, 462.

continued in the final weeks of the war. Ultimately, certain events at sea helped safeguard the Allies' bargaining power at the peace table.

In a desperate bid that served no purpose other than to justify the anger of Allied policymakers and citizens, a German U-boat torpedoed a British passenger liner off the coast of Ireland on 12 October. More than 450 civilians were killed onboard the *Leinster* as the ship sank less than fifteen miles from Dublin. Any sense of optimism that Wilson might have had for the impending negotiations with Imperial Germany vanished that day. He was decidedly harsher in his next communication with Germany, condemning the act as both "illegal and inhumane."³³⁸ Moreover, in counsel with trusted adviser, Colonel Edward M. House, Wilson sought to distance himself from the Germans, believing that the only hope for an equitable peace necessitated greater Allied involvement.

The sinking of RMS *Leinster* had a diplomatic impact similar to the *Lusitania* disaster of May 1915. Both instances involved German submarines targeting civilians on the high seas. The tragedies sparked international outrage and invariably strengthened Wilson's conviction to side with the Allies. Armistice talks stalled between Washington and Berlin in late October as a direct consequence of the U-boat attack.³³⁹ Although the president was still willing to work with Prince Max, he wanted assurances that Germany was not simply paying lip service to American beneficence in order to launch an offensive at a later date. He now demanded complete German acceptance of the Fourteen Points, an admission of the military superiority of the Allies, and the promise of real constitutional change within the Reich. A nominal cabinet shake-up was not enough

³³⁸ Stevenson, *Cataclysm*, 384-385.

³³⁹ Ann B. Sides, "When Submarine UB-123 Attacked the Ferry *Leinster*, it Torpedoed Germany's Last Hope for a 'Soft Peace' in 1918," *Military History* 15, no. 4 (October 1998): 24. See also, Philip Lecane, *Torpedoed!: The R.M.S. Leinster Disaster* (Cornwall: Periscope Publishing Ltd., 2005) and Roy Stokes, *Death in the Irish Sea: The Sinking of the RMS Leinster* (Cork: Collins Press, 1998).

proof that Germany was willing to capitulate once and for all.

Perhaps the killing of British noncombatants was justified by the OHL as the best way to illustrate the unavoidable loss of civilian life during wartime. It is more likely, though, that the attack was a reprisal in response to the continued presence of the Allied naval blockade. Either way, it was an unnecessary act of violence that undermined their initial peace overture and ensured that future German promises were met with considerable Anglo-American skepticism.³⁴⁰ Foreign Secretary von Hintze was correct to assume that a ceasefire was contingent on German adherence to the rule of law. Subsequent Armistice talks with the Allies made this stipulation a definite requirement for peace.

Article XXVI of the Armistice Agreement

Less than five weeks after Germany's 4 October communiqué to President Wilson, Max von Baden appointed Secretary of State Matthias Erzberger to negotiate a ceasefire with the Allies. Erzberger was a liberal-minded politician and a longstanding critic of the war among the Great Powers. He was, in short, the ideal German diplomat to negotiate with the Allies and Associated Powers amid the chaos of war and revolution.³⁴¹ A ceasefire agreement was needed more than ever as Germany's allies capitulated one by one in the autumn of 1918. Ottoman Turkey, for instance, followed Bulgaria's lead and concluded an Armistice on 30 October, while Austria-Hungary signed a separate agreement on 3 November.³⁴² With Germany isolated and facing imminent defeat Erzberger travelled to Allied Headquarters to end the fighting that had ravaged much of Europe and the world

³⁴⁰ As was the case with the Imperial German Navy (*Kaiserliche Marine*) resuming unrestricted submarine warfare in February 1917. See, Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 172-174.

³⁴¹ Roger Shaw, "1918: A German Peace," *North American Review* 235, no. 3 (March 1933): 235.

³⁴² Stevenson, *With Our Backs to the Wall*, 528.

for the last fifty-two months.

Convened around a small table in Ferdinand Foch's railway carriage Allied and German representatives signed the Armistice agreement outside the northern French town of Compiègne at 5:00 a.m. on 11 November 1918.³⁴³ Present at the negotiations was Supreme Allied Commander Marshal Foch, French Major General Maxime Weygand, and British Admirals Rosslyn Wemyss and George Hope. Representatives from the German army, navy, and foreign ministry accompanied the secretary of state, including Major General Detlev von Winterfeldt, Captain Ernst Vanselow, and Count Alfred von Oberndorff. When General Weygand read aloud the terms to the German delegation there was a collective reluctance to agree to Article XXVI of the Armistice agreement.³⁴⁴

This controversial Article stipulated that the naval blockade would remain in place after the Compiègne agreement, but that the Allies "would contemplate the provisioning of Germany... to such an extent, as shall be found necessary."³⁴⁵ Such vague wording troubled Erzberger, who pleaded to Foch on the night of the Armistice: "Article XXVI signifies the continuation, by the Allies, of an essential part of the War during the Armistice," and concluded by asserting, "This starvation policy of England... The Allies will not derive any military success from that, yet the German people will again most gravely be hurt."³⁴⁶ Why did the Allies and Americans think it necessary to include Article XXVI in the ceasefire agreement? What impact did the blockade's continuation have on the wider peace proceedings and the German home front? Did the

³⁴³ Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 184.

³⁴⁴ Vincent, 67.

³⁴⁵ 'The Conditions of Compiègne,' Bane and Lutz, 4; "Conditions of an Armistice with Germany," *American Journal of International Law* 13, no. 2 (April 1919): 102.

³⁴⁶ 'Notations Concerning the Final Session of the Armistice Commission at Compiègne on 11 November 1918,' Bane and Lutz, 5.

Allied delegation have any moral or ethical reservations about allowing civilians to starve? This chapter addresses these questions from the signing of the Armistice in November 1918 to early March 1919 when the Allies finally began to comprehend the dangers associated with maintaining the blockade.³⁴⁷

The Continuation of the Blockade after the Armistice

The prolongation of the naval blockade of Germany after 11 November has led one historian to conclude that its retention “symbolize[s] the great lost opportunity for postwar Europe... [where] the new reality was founded not upon Wilson’s high principle but upon unnecessary starvation.”³⁴⁸ These are harsh words levelled against the Allies. They eloquently characterize the injustice of targeting civilians in war, but the statement lacks some historical context to accurately judge the Allies’ motives throughout the post-Armistice period.

It is prudent then to reconsider Admiral John Fisher’s prewar assertion that “all is fair in war.” This 1904 quote, which opened the dissertation, suggested that it would not be immoral to implement a food blockade in the event of war with Imperial Germany.³⁴⁹ He maintained, for example, that it was necessary for the Royal Navy to quickly establish command of the sea to prevent foodstuffs from being denied to a geographically isolated Britain. This is understandable given that Britain on the eve of war was forced to import more than 60 percent of its foodstuffs from overseas.³⁵⁰ Fisher’s argument does not take into account the morality of targeting Germans on the home front, but neither does it

³⁴⁷ The Armistice was first renewed in mid-December 1918. See, Bernhard Fulda, *Press and Politics in Weimar Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 45-47.

³⁴⁸ Vincent, 164.

³⁴⁹ Admiral John Fisher, ‘Submarines,’ 20 April 1904, TNA, ADM 116/942.

³⁵⁰ Arthur J. Marder, *From Dreadnought to Scapa Flow: The Royal Navy in the Fisher Era, 1914-1919*, Vol. V (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 299. For a highly readable account of the Anglo-German naval race see, Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism* and Robert K. Massie, *Dreadnought*, 630.

promote the blockade's continuance for strictly political ends. This was something of uncharted territory for Allied policymakers and their respective armed forces. The Allied naval blockade was considered a valuable instrument of war, yet how was it to be used after the guns stopped firing on the Western Front?

(a) The French Argument

The need for retribution was a significant element in French decision-making. For instance, centrist Premier Georges Clemenceau pushed for the economic sanctions to be kept in place after the Armistice as a way to settle longstanding grievances over the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871).³⁵¹ In 1871, Prussian forces annexed the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine following France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871). The Treaty of Frankfurt, which formally ended the conflict on 10 May, stipulated that Prussia would take control of this strategic land. Before the treaty there was some discussion among German policymakers about the benefits of appropriating Alsace-Lorraine. In favour of the decision was General Helmuth von Moltke the Elder, who commanded Prussian forces in the wars of German unification,³⁵² and considered Alsace-Lorraine to be more than just the requisite spoils of war.

This vast French territory, which bordered Germany and stretched from the base of Luxembourg in the north to Switzerland in the south, represented an ideal opportunity

³⁵¹ Robert McCrum, "French Rhineland Policy at the Paris Peace Conference, 1919," *Historical Journal* 21, no. 3 (September 1978): 631. Clemenceau was the leader of the Radical party; a party whose politics were not as "radical" as the name suggests. The Radicals introduced income tax and pensions to France in the late nineteenth century and typically appealed to bourgeois and/or socially progressive constituents. Francis De Tarr, *The First Radical Party: From Herriot to Mendès-France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961) is considered the standard work on the history of the political party.

³⁵² The wars of German unification were fought in quick succession between the combined forces of Prussia and Austria against Denmark in 1864, while the longstanding issue of German dualism culminated in the Austro-Prussian War of 1866, and, finally, the Franco-Prussian War in 1870-1871. See, Dennis E. Showalter, *The Wars of German Unification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); William B. Moul, "Balances of Power and European Great Power War, 1815-1939," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 18, no. 3 (September 1985): 510-511.

for the newly unified empire to consolidate power in Western Europe. The area encompassed the Vosges Mountains and a series of elaborate fortifications at Metz, and was rich in iron and coal. These geographical advantages might deter France from undertaking a war of attrition, or facilitate future military action against France.

There was also the delicate issue of nationalism to consider, as many residents in Alsace-Lorraine spoke some form of German (either an Upper Rhenish or Alsatian dialect).³⁵³ Thus the case could be made that territorial possession was simply following linguistic and ethnic traditions, much like Adolf Hitler's opaque justification for annexing the Sudetenland in September 1938.³⁵⁴ Moltke and the German General Staff ultimately wagered that the *Kaiserreich* only stood to gain from annexing the two provinces. Alsace-Lorraine officially became a German imperial territory or *Reichsland* with the ratification of the Treaty of Frankfurt on 10 May 1871. French census records reveal, in total, that nearly 500,000 inhabitants emigrated from the two provinces between 1871 and 1910.³⁵⁵ The negative impact of Frankfurt cannot be underestimated, as deep-seated revanchism underscored much of French foreign policy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The need to regain the "lost provinces" not only contributed to the deterioration of Franco-German relations prior to the First World War, it undoubtedly conditioned France's terse response to German pleas for a lenient peace settlement in November 1918.³⁵⁶

³⁵³ C. C. Eckhardt, "The Alsace-Lorraine Question," *Scientific Monthly* 6, no. 5 (May 1918): 436. See also, Michael Heffernan, "History, Geography, and the French National Space: The Question of Alsace-Lorraine, 1914-1918," *Space & Polity* 5, no. 1 (February 2001): 28-29.

³⁵⁴ Alan E. Steinweis, "German Cultural Imperialism in Czechoslovakia and Poland, 1938-1945," *International History Review* 13, no. 3 (August 1991): 469.

³⁵⁵ Eckhardt, 434.

³⁵⁶ See, Karine Varley, *Under the Shadow of Defeat: The War of 1870-1871 in French Memory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), esp. 175-202; Rachel Chraïtil, *Organizing for War: France, 1870-1914* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010); D. R. Watson, "The Makings of French

The Franco-Prussian War cast a long shadow over French diplomacy, particularly in regard to the punitive measures enforced by the German treaty (residents were forced to legally declare their allegiance to either France or Germany; those who identified themselves as “French” were forced to emigrate westward) and the escalation of violence against civilians throughout the Siege of Paris. Indeed, Prussia sought to win a war by attacking and investing the French capital in the autumn and winter of 1870-1871.³⁵⁷ Although Bismarck wryly predicted that, “eight days without a *café au lait* would suffice to break the Parisian bourgeoisie,” it took more than five months of dwindling provisions, the outbreak of tuberculosis, and bombardment of the city for Paris to surrender.³⁵⁸ Starvation was not the goal of Prussia’s attack on Paris. The siege was merely intended to hasten victory by forcing the Government of National Defense to admit defeat. Food queues were a daily inconvenience, with the young, elderly, and infirm suffering the most from malnutrition. But widespread famine did not occur, as Bismarck ensured that trainloads of food were brought in to relieve the city’s inhabitants once the peace treaty was concluded.³⁵⁹

But this is not to suggest that the French Third Republic was only motivated by long-standing revenge. Nowhere in the preliminary Armistice or peace negotiations did Clemenceau argue it was France’s “right” to starve Germany in retaliation for 1871 or, even the horrors of the last four years. The French premier maintained, however, that he would be “betray[ing]” his country if the Allies relaxed their economic stranglehold of

Foreign Policy during the First Clemenceau Ministry, 1906-1909,” *English Historical Review* 86, no. 341 (October 1971): 774-782; James Joll and Gordon Martel, *The Origins of the First World War*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: Pearson Ltd., 2007), 101-102; Hall Gardner, *The Failure to Prevent WWI: The Unexpected Armageddon* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2015), 52-57.

³⁵⁷ A military “investment” is a term that refers to the encirclement of a city or strategic area.

³⁵⁸ Alistair Horne, *The Fall of Paris: The Siege and the Commune, 1870-1* (London: Macmillan, 1965), 177.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 244.

Germany: “Towns had been destroyed; over two million [French] men had lost their lives; mines had been rendered unworkable; and yet what guarantees had France that anything would be received in payment for all this destruction?”³⁶⁰ The latent power of German militarism could not be trusted. To show mercy at this late stage could jeopardize the victory won by the Allies on the battlefield and possibly the entire peace settlement. The French, therefore, implored the British and American delegations to maintain the Allied blockade of Germany throughout the negotiation process.

(b) The British Perspective

The idea of using the naval blockade as a political weapon was not just relegated to the French delegation or the cunning propaganda of Northcliffe’s Balloon Post. It was also a strategy increasingly favoured by the British Foreign Office, Admiralty, and War Office in order to secure an early peace settlement with Germany.³⁶¹ In fact, the latter department argued throughout the negotiations:

We should retain our whip hand over Germany and obtain our peace conditions; we should save her from Bolshevism and thus enable her to be in a position to reorganize after peace... With the abolition of the Blockade, and especially its machinery, we lose our power of coercion over Germany; we run the risk of seeing Germany crumble and become unable to pay any indemnity; we lose our trade [monopoly] to the neutrals.³⁶²

³⁶⁰ Georges Clemenceau to the Supreme War Council, 13 January 1919, quoted in Bane and Lutz, 218-219.

³⁶¹ In contrast, the Treasury, Board of Trade, Department of Overseas Trade, and War Trade Department were strongly against continuing the blockade into the post-Armistice period. ‘Memorandum Respecting the Continuance of the Blockade,’ 22 January 1919, TNA, T 1/12275, 158-160.

³⁶² ‘Memorandum Embodying the Views of the General Staff Respecting the Continuance of the Blockade [Appendices B and C],’ 20 January 1919, National Archives, T 1/12275, 166-169. See also, Edward F. Willis, ‘Herbert Hoover and the Blockade of Germany, 1918-1919,’ p. 5, in the Edward Frederick Willis Papers, Box 1, HIA.

This memorandum from the General Staff is telling in that it points to the myriad socio-political issues facing a vanquished Germany and briefly outlines Britain's post-Armistice blockade strategy to combat them.

Above all, the War Office wanted to ensure that there would still be a functioning German government with which to negotiate a peace and settle on a sum of reparations. The perceived threat of Bolshevism was a motivating factor for the Allies to insist on "retain[ing] our whip hand over Germany..." until the ink had fully dried on the peace settlement.³⁶³ The political collapse of the Imperial Germany in November 1918 effectively created a power vacuum where leftists (i.e. the Social Democrats) and extreme leftists (i.e. the Independent Social Democrats) openly jockeyed for position. The impact of the German Revolution is discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, but suffice it to say that the fear of anarchy in post-Wilhelmine Germany was very much at the forefront of the British General Staff's thinking in regard to the political benefits of a post-Armistice blockade.³⁶⁴

Britain desired an end to the fighting and suffering of the Great War, but it was unwilling to see Germany as the aggrieved party for several reasons. Chief among them was the need to create a lasting peace in the spirit of the Congress of Vienna.³⁶⁵ The 1815 peace conference, which ended Napoleon's reign as Emperor of the French, established a balance of power on the Continent that lasted nearly a century. Like Napoleonic France, Wilhelmine Germany was viewed as the illiberal aggressor who needed its power corralled and political destiny shaped by a coalition of liberal-minded

³⁶³ 'Memorandum Embodying the Views of the General Staff Respecting the Continuance of the Blockade.'

³⁶⁴ Osborne, 187.

³⁶⁵ Charles G. Fenwick, "Notes on International Affairs: The Peace Treaty with Germany," *American Political Science Review* 13 no. 3 (August 1919): 468.

victors. The Allies and Associated Powers, like the nineteenth century anti-Bonapartist coalition of Prussia, Austria, Russia, and Britain, had only one chance to establish a workable peace settlement. It was a burdensome task for all involved.

At the same time, the Treaty of Versailles was intended to be a “peace of justice”³⁶⁶ – the ultimate legal proof that German provocation started the First World War and, consequently, ought to bear sole responsibility for the war’s cost. Restitution rather than retribution was the primary objective of the peace conference for the British delegation.³⁶⁷ The retention of the Allied naval blockade was one of the surest ways for Britain to realize this goal. In a report prepared by the Political Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office and circulated to the War Cabinet in August 1918, Robert Cecil noted:

Any announcement to Germany must convey a threat as well as an offer, and it is an elementary principle that a threat should consist in facts rather than words. What is the average German most afraid of? There can be no question as to the answer. It is the economic predominance of the Allies... on the other hand, what does the average thinking German hope for? The answer follows from what we have already said and can be given in two words – peace and plenty – and he is more and more beginning to realise that the restoration of that domestic comfort after which his soul still hankers depends upon the use made by the Allies of their economic control.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁶ George A. Finch, “The Peace Negotiations with Germany,” *American Journal of International Law* 13, no. 3 (July 1919): 537. See also, Catherine Lu, “Justice and Moral Regeneration: Lessons for the Treaty of Versailles,” *International Studies Review* 4, no. 3 (Fall 2002): 4.

³⁶⁷ “‘The Great Reckoning’: Victors Impose Terms on Defeated Germany: Treaty Principles Revealed on ‘Lusitania’ Day,” *Advocate of Peace* 81, no. 5 (May 1919): 148-149.

³⁶⁸ Lord Robert Cecil, ‘Economic Defence and Development Committee Memorandum re: Northcliffe’s 10 June Letter to Balfour,’ 1 August 1918, TNA, MUN 4/6615.

Although Cecil's words left little room for doubt, a subsequent memorandum on 22 January 1919 listed the key advantages of continuing the blockade:

- (1) The Blockade is the most effective weapon left to the Associated Powers for speedily obtaining our peace terms;
- (2) The continuance of the Blockade is calculated to secure an early peace;
- (3) If the Blockade is discontinued, even for a short period, it will be impossible again to bring its machinery into operation;
- (4) The Blockade means co-operation; its abolition means the most fierce trade competition among the Associated Powers.³⁶⁹

It was ultimately the official opinion of the Foreign Office, in consultation with the Admiralty, War Office, and Lord Northcliffe's Crewe House, that the Allies should leave the blockade in place for fear of jeopardizing their leverage at the peace table.

Lloyd George and the General Election of 1918

Political considerations similarly accounted for David Lloyd George's decision to announce an election in Britain twenty-four hours after signing the Armistice with Germany. Lloyd George came to office in December 1916 when the Liberal party was deeply divided over the war leadership of H. H. Asquith.³⁷⁰ Endorsed by the Fleet Street press, including Northcliffe's numerous publications, as "the man to win the war,"³⁷¹ Lloyd George more or less managed the interests of Liberals, Labour, and Conservatives while the war was ongoing and hoped to capitalize on the Allied victory with another term in office.³⁷² This election, however, was radically different than the last general

³⁶⁹ 'Memorandum Respecting the Continuance of the Blockade,' No. 11214/x/1150, 22 January 1919, TNA, T 1/12275.

³⁷⁰ Edward David, "The Liberal Party Divided, 1916-1918," *Historical Journal* 13, no. 3 (September 1970): 510-512.

³⁷¹ J. M. McEwen, "Northcliffe and Lloyd George at War," 655.

³⁷² This is not to suggest that the pacifism of the Labour party went totally unheard, however, the party never posed a serious threat to Lloyd George's coalition (Liberal-Conservative) government. In fact,

election held in Britain in 1910.

Political allegiances had shifted during the war years to create a dynamic coalition between the Liberals, led by Lloyd George, and Andrew Bonar Law's Conservative (Unionist) party. Liberal-Tory partisanship, in contrast, had not been an option for Asquith in 1910. Locked in a fiery election battle with the Conservatives, Asquith had been forced to rely instead on the fleeting support of the Irish Nationals and Labour in order to win the vote. Conversely, the divisive issue of Irish Home Rule – compounded by the violence of the 1916 Easter Rising and recent conscription crisis – precluded any chance of Irish Republican support for Lloyd George's 1918 election bid.³⁷³ The prime minister, then, had two options open to him – align further with the Conservative party or attempt to solidify his Liberal base by wooing back the disgruntled Asquithians.³⁷⁴ The latter strategy was more uncertain because it involved appealing to estranged former allies or, in some cases, enemies for their support. Thus, Lloyd George courted the favour of Bonar Law and the Conservatives, albeit cautiously and with some hesitation. But one question remained regardless of his political alliances: would the momentum of the Armistice be enough to clinch the P. M. a victory at the polls?

Indeed, the social and political composition of the British electorate had changed.

Labour's perennial anti-war stance was used by the coalition Liberals and Conservatives to discredit the likes of prominent Labour members such as Arthur Henderson, Ramsay Macdonald, and Philip Snowden as either "Bolsheviks" on the one hand, or "pro-German" sympathizers on the other. See, Bernadotte E. Schmitt, "The Peace Treaties, 1919-1920," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 104, no. 1 (February 1960): 101; J. A. Turner, "The British Commonwealth Union and the General Election of 1918," *English Historical Review* 93, no. 368 (July 1978): 528; Erik Goldstein, "Great Britain: The Home Front," in *The Treaty of Versailles: A Reassessment after 75 Years*, eds. Manfred Boemeke, Gerald D. Feldman, and Elisabeth Glasner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 154-156.

³⁷³ McGill, 110-111. See also, Keith Jeffrey, "The First World War and the Rising: Mode, Moment, and Memory," in *1916: The Long Revolution*, eds. Gabriel Doherty and Dermot Keogh (Cork: Mercier Press, 2007), 86-101; Fred D. Schneider, "British Labour and Ireland, 1918-1921: The Retreat to Houndsditch," *Review of Politics* 40, no. 3 (July 1978): 370-371.

³⁷⁴ Trevor Wilson, "The Coupon and the British General Election of 1918," *Journal of Modern History* 36, no. 1 (March 1964): 28.

No longer was it possible to deny women the vote when many proved themselves capable of labour-intensive factory work, courageous nursing efforts, and volunteer work with the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) and various other agencies. "My good lady, go home and sit still," was the advice of the War Office to women in late 1914.³⁷⁵ That paternalistic mindset did not hold during the war and would not suffice when it came to the postwar vote either. To reflect these changing social mores Parliament granted women over the age of 30 the right to vote with the Representation of the People Act on 6 February 1918. The Act also enfranchised all men over the age of 21 and even allowed 19 and 20-year-old men to vote if they were servicemen. Overnight the franchise in Britain nearly tripled in size from 8 million eligible voters to 21 million.³⁷⁶

Permitting women and young men to vote in the general election ensured that voters' concerns needed to be addressed more than ever. Labeled the "Khaki Election" because of the government's preoccupation with securing the veteran vote, the issues that dominated the campaign logically focused on British postwar stability and security. What assurances did voters have that the war would not resume at some point, and what actions were being taken to combat the forces of German militarism and Bolshevism? These questions were of paramount concern to Britons in the nine months following the signing of the Armistice. The majority of Britons ultimately did not want a "soft" peace. When voters headed to the polls on 14 December 1918 an overwhelming 47.14 percent were willing to let Lloyd George and the Conservative wartime coalition represent their

³⁷⁵ Beckett, 324.

³⁷⁶ McGill, 111. See also, "The Coming General Election," *British Medical Journal* 2, no. 3008 (August 1918): 193; Mary Hilson, "Women Voters and the Rhetoric of Patriotism in the British General Election of 1918," *Women's History Review* 10, no. 2 (2001): 327, 340.

interests at Versailles.³⁷⁷

Marxist historian Arno J. Mayer has been quick to point out the groundswell of nationalism that bookended the war years in Europe. Strident Balkan nationalism and German autocracy sparked the initial outbreak of war. But Mayer is equally convinced that the Allies contributed to a postwar atmosphere of self-interest and distrust by cloaking their conservative rhetoric in the patriotism of the flag: “The British government became the prisoner of this far from unorganized and undirected super-nationalist impulse which packed Parliament with a majority of ‘hard-faced men.’ At the Peace Conference Lloyd George never really dared relent on indemnities....”³⁷⁸ This depiction of the prime minister’s campaign is somewhat unfair; calls to “hang the Kaiser!” did not come exclusively from Whitehall. The coalition government merely vowed to prosecute the peace with the same diligence and vigour that allowed the Allies to win the war. Continuity and moral certainty was what the Lloyd George ballot represented to many voters who saw Britain as the natural arbiter between “the punitive attitude[s] of the French... [and] the more conciliatory approach of Wilson’s Fourteen Points.”³⁷⁹

Initial Relief Efforts

The Allies refused to lift the blockade of Germany for political reasons. That much is plain. But the decision was not unanimously reached. Politicians and military personnel

³⁷⁷ Schmitt, 102. The real winners in the general election of 1918 were the Conservative party, claiming 33 percent of the vote. Lloyd George, as the “architect of victory” and leader of the wartime coalition, would remain prime minister regardless of whether the Liberals garnered fewer seats in the House of Commons. See, Stephen R. Ward, “The British Veterans’ Ticket of 1918,” *Journal of British Studies* 8, no. 1 (November 1968): 155; J. M. McEwen, “The Coupon Election of 1918 and Unionist Members of Parliament,” *Journal of Modern History* 34, no. 3 (September 1962): 295.

³⁷⁸ Arno J. Mayer, “Post-War Nationalisms, 1918-1919,” *Past & Present*, no. 34 (July 1966): 117; idem, *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking: Containment and Counterrevolution at Versailles, 1918-1919* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), Chapter 5. See also, Nigel Keohane, *The Party of Patriotism: The Conservative Party and the First World War* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010), esp. Chapters 4 and 5.

³⁷⁹ Kenneth Calkins, “Review of Douglas Newton’s *British Policy and the Weimar Republic, 1918-1919*,” *Journal of Modern History* 71, no. 4 (December 1999): 939.

on both sides of the Atlantic questioned the morality of denying food to a country that had already admitted defeat.³⁸⁰ Herbert Hoover, more than any other Allied official, recognized the need to revictual Europe in a timely manner. As head of the American Relief Administration and member of the Supreme Economic Council at the peace conference, Hoover outlined the gravity of the “new world situation in food” in a widely publicized address to the United States Food Administration on 12 November 1918: “The war has been brought to an end in no small measure by starvation itself and it cannot be our business to maintain starvation after peace.”³⁸¹

He knew all too well the difficulty of provisioning war-ravaged countries as he was Chairman of Relief Operations in Northern France and Belgium from 1914 to 1917.³⁸² But the task of provisioning an entire continent was an enormous administrative feat that seemed almost insurmountable to him. The population of Europe was 420 million in 1918. Denmark, Hungary, and Southern Russia had sufficient supplies to last the winter without the help of Allied aid. That, nevertheless, still left him with 380 million mouths to feed. The population of Britain, France, and Italy stood at 125 million; however, steps had been taken to ensure that the Allies would not go hungry. Thus, when Hoover and his capable team of administrators set sail for Europe on 16 November 1918, they were faced with the immediate prospect of feeding 255 million people.³⁸³

(a) The Hoover Plan

How does one begin to combat hunger on such a grand scale? Hoover’s answer was to

³⁸⁰ ‘Memoranda from the Foreign Office, Admiralty, War Office, Restriction of Enemy Supplies Department to Treasury, Board of Trade, and Department of Overseas Trade,’ 21 January 1919, TNA, TI 12275, f. no. 3398.

³⁸¹ ‘Mr. Hoover Address to the Special Conference of Federal Food Administrators,’ 12 November 1918, Bane and Lutz, 15.

³⁸² Willis, pp. 15, in the Edward Frederick Willis Papers, Box 1, HIA.

³⁸³ ‘European Food Situation: Mr. Hoover’s Analysis,’ Official Statement, United States Food Administration, 1 December 1918, Bane and Lutz, 16-17.

prioritize aid based on political, rather than physiological necessity. In his opinion, the Allies' first concern must be to provision the 75 million inhabitants languishing under the "German yoke" – Belgians, Greeks, Serbians, Yugoslavs, Czechs, and Romanians. These people were sympathetic to the Allied cause and, as a result, ought to be helped first in order to prevent starvation and further political dislocation. Next on the list of those to feed were the 40 million people living in neutral countries – Sweden, Norway, Switzerland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Spain, to a lesser extent.³⁸⁴ Neutrals had traded informally with both the Central Powers and the Entente; however, overwhelming pressure from the Allies and America's entry into the war eventually compelled neutral governments to deny foodstuffs to Germany as well. Hoover ensured that these countries would be rewarded for their loyalty with food and essential matériel at the earliest possible date.

His next priority involved significant aid to 50 million people in Northern Russia, including an Allied contingent of British marines and U.S. soldiers sent to take North Russia from the Bolsheviks in mid-1918.³⁸⁵ Transportation links were virtually nonexistent in Russia due to heavy fighting on the Eastern Front.³⁸⁶ The rapid approach of winter also meant "these groups are the ones that must enlist the sympathy of the

³⁸⁴ 'Arrival of Mr. Hoover – European Food Problem,' 18 November 1918, *The Daily Telegraph*; idem, 'Feeding Germany,' 27 November 1918.

³⁸⁵ For a closer look at the Allied military and economic intervention in North Russia c. 1918-1920 see, Leonid I. Strakhovsky, *Intervention at Archangel: The Story of Allied Intervention and Russian Counter-Revolution in North Russia, 1918-1920* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1944); Norbert H. Gaworek, "Allied Economic Warfare against Soviet Russia from November 1917 to March 1921," PhD Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1970; John W. Long, "American Intervention in Russia: The North Russia Expedition, 1918-1919," *Diplomatic History* 6, no. 1 (January 1982): 45-68.

³⁸⁶ For a detailed analysis at life on the Eastern Front see Norman Stone, *The Eastern Front, 1914-1917* (New York: Scribner, 1975); Vejas G. Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity, and German Occupation in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Ward Rutherford, *The Russian Army in World War I* (London: Gordon Cresmonesi, 1975).

American people and for whom we are prepared to make any necessary sacrifice.”³⁸⁷

Where did the Central Powers factor into Hoover’s relief plan? In his first official statement after arriving in Europe on 1 December 1918, he detailed the plight of Germans suffering from hunger and malnutrition under “a watertight blockade” and urged Allied delegates to remember that although “justice requires [Germany] to make amends for wrongs done, it cannot be accomplished through the spread of anarchy.”³⁸⁸ The German civilian death rate had long overtaken the birth rate by 1918 and the looming threat of a socialist revolution did little to inspire confidence and stability in the new provisional government. The installation of prominent socialists in Max von Baden’s government, for example, along with the growing threat of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg’s radical left-wing Spartacus movement, was proof enough for many Anglo-American politicians that postwar Germany was rife with Bolshevism.³⁸⁹ Hoover, in short, believed that this was neither the time nor place to use food as a weapon. The key to feeding these people was quite obvious to him – the Allies needed to lift the blockade of the Central Powers in order to free up more American supplies for the rest of Europe.³⁹⁰ He worked throughout January 1919 to convince the Allies that the German merchant marine could be used to transport American foodstuffs and, thereby, speed up postwar reconstruction and the peace negotiations.

(b) Allied Obstructionism

But France and Britain were not as amenable to the Hoover plan. The French delegation

³⁸⁷ Refer to Chapter 5 Appendix, Figure 8, “Hunger Map of Europe,” for an illustration released by the U.S. Food Administration detailing the widespread hunger throughout the Continent. See also, ‘European Food Situation: Mr. Hoover’s Analysis,’ Bane and Lutz, 17.

³⁸⁸ Ibid., 18.

³⁸⁹ Roesle, 164-166. See also, Ralph Haswell Lutz, *German Revolution, 1918-1919* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1922).

³⁹⁰ Herbert Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover: Years of Adventure, 1874-1920* (New York: Macmillan, 1951), 335.

refused to even consider Hoover's proposal to lift the blockade, choosing, instead, to cite the vague and debatable wording of Article XXVI of the Armistice agreement on the need to provision the enemy.³⁹¹ A certain amount of French recalcitrance was expected after fifty-two months of fighting that resulted in 1.4 million French combat deaths. Yet France's apprehension had less to do with feeding Germany than how the enemy would pay for these provisions.³⁹² Would a line of credit be extended to Germany? If so, who would provide the loan? Why should war-torn France offer any concessions when it was Germany who ought to pay reparations? These were valid questions, to be sure. But they effectively stalled Hoover's reconstruction efforts in Central Europe until mid-March 1919.

"First one excuse after another has been found by one government after another amongst the Allies... The uses to which the blockade on foodstuffs is being placed are absolutely immoral," wrote an irate Hoover to President Woodrow Wilson on 19 February 1919.³⁹³ These frustrations with the Allies are noted time and again throughout his correspondence with Washington and professional dealings with the Supreme Economic Council and Allied Blockade Committee.³⁹⁴ The American Relief Administration particularly objected to the stalling tactics of Sir John Beale, head of the British Food Ministry, who warned Hoover to not speak to the British press about the

³⁹¹ 'The Fundamentals of Reconstruction,' Book II, p.13-14, American Relief Administration, HIA. Clemenceau insisted throughout late 1918 "... the blockade shall cease at the same moment as the state of war, and that legally what brings a state of war to an end is the exchange of ratifications." See, Vincent, 115.

³⁹² French Foreign Minister Lucien Klotz was particularly vocal in his opposition to Hoover's economic relief plan. Willis, 23.

³⁹³ Willis, 46.

³⁹⁴ They were accompanied by similar doubts from Vance McCormick, Chairman of the Supreme Allied Blockade Committee, and U.S. Board of Trade liaison Robert Anderson. See, Vance McCormick, *Diaries of Vance McCormick*, 20-23 January, 1 February 1919, in the Edward Frederick Willis Papers, Box 2, HIA. The Supreme Allied Blockade Committee was the successor of the wartime Allied Blockade Committee, chaired by Lord Robert Cecil.

blockade's relaxation "until the Germans [have] learned a few things."³⁹⁵ Ultimately, Hoover balked at Beale's suggestion, which was followed up with a dubious offer to lift the blockade if, and only if, the U.S. agreed to lower the prices of its food exports to Britain.³⁹⁶

There is little doubt that Allied obstructionism made the revictualling of Europe much harder for Herbert Hoover and the American Relief Administration. Undercutting their relief efforts in the hope of negotiating cheaper food for domestic consumption was just one example. Perhaps the most unscrupulous incident involved the sale of 45,000 tons of rotten fish to Germany in return for \$40 million in gold. The Allies initially bought the fish from the Northern Neutrals as part of their preclusive purchase strategy in 1917. By mid-February 1919, though, the stockpiled shipment lay rotting in a Scandinavian warehouse. It was the Allies' intention to trick the German delegation into making this tainted purchase. Fortunately, as Hoover recounts in his memoir, the Germans notified him of the impending sale and he put an end to the "rotten" deal.³⁹⁷

Conditions in Germany

After representing Britain at the Armistice agreement Admiral Rosslyn Wemyss informed Lloyd George "that the term that causes the greatest consternation among the German delegates is the blockade, as they fear famine and sickness... Conditions in Germany are far worse than we thought."³⁹⁸ Most Britons, the War Cabinet included, gave little thought to the daily struggle of the average German woman and her family on

³⁹⁵ Hoover, 335.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 290.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 346. See also, Herbert Hoover, 'Memorandum for the American Peace Commission on Relief Negotiations with the Allied Governments,' 19 February 1919, Bane and Lutz, 130-131.

³⁹⁸ [Admiral Wemyss to David Lloyd George re: the Continuation of the Blockade], 11 November 1918, TNA, CAB 23/14. For example, German delegate Matthias Erzberger argued that continuing Britain's "starvation policy" was tantamount to continuing the war by other means. Willis, 13.

the home front. The prime minister was nevertheless compelled to send teams of British army officers to Germany in order to assess the real health and wellbeing of its citizens. Was Germany truly starving or were these cries for aid just clever propaganda? The War Office's fact finding mission began in mid-December 1918 and concluded in late February/early March 1919 with some startling revelations that forced the Allies to rethink the political necessity of their post-Armistice blockade.³⁹⁹

The first reports on the socio-economic conditions in Germany came from Brigadier General H. C. Rees and Lieutenant A. Campbell. Stationed in Berlin between 12 and 15 December 1918, the officers declared that: "Germany appears to be completely beaten and disorganized... The nation as a whole is on the verge of starvation... They are hungry, very hungry... The one question in Berlin is: 'when are the American or English troops coming, and will they give us food?'"⁴⁰⁰ Each subsequent report from British army officers confirmed Rees and Campbell's initial assessment of the harsh living conditions in Germany. For instance, the food situation was just as appalling in Saxony, particularly in Leipzig in early January 1919, where officers were shocked by the gaunt and sallow appearance of people walking the streets. Two weeks later, in Munich, Captains J. E. Broad and J. R. Sommerville and Lieutenant D. Pease made three observations to the War Office: (1) the region of Bavaria was dreadfully undernourished (2) existing food supplies would not last more than two months and, as such, (3) Germany needed to be provisioned by April in order to prevent the onset of famine. Speaking broadly, "from conversation with all classes of Bavarians," the officers reported

³⁹⁹ Ernest H. Starling and C. W. Guillebaud, *Report on Food Conditions in Germany* (London: HMSO, 1919).

⁴⁰⁰ *Reports from British Officers on the Economic Conditions Prevailing in Germany: December 1918-March 1919* (London: HMSO, 1919), 4-6.

that public opinion believed “the present situation would be greatly minimized by the raising of the blockade.”⁴⁰¹

On 2 February 1919, Captains E. Christie-Miller and E. B. Trafford spoke from firsthand experience on the deteriorating conditions in Hanover. Both men had spent nearly a year in the German city as prisoners of war. Thus, neither soldier was inclined to exaggerate the plight of their former captor, which makes their analysis of the German food situation all the more sobering. Their report focused specifically on the lack of milk in Hanover; no one over the age of six was permitted a milk ration and dairy cows were being systematically slaughtered for food. Desperation reached new levels when even cows suffering from tuberculosis were eaten. The officers implored the War Office to revictual Hanover immediately. It was their heart-felt opinion that humanitarian considerations ought to trump short-term political gains. The blockade of Germany needed to be lifted at once.⁴⁰²

General Foch, however, held the opposite view. In correspondence with the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Stephen Pichon, Foch argued that “the strict maintenance of the rules of the blockade is imperative from a military point of view... The blockade, the severity of which can be increased or diminished according to circumstances, will remain the best and most rapid means of obtaining respect for the Armistice agreement...”⁴⁰³ Foch’s letter is significant for two reasons. First, it is dated February 3rd – the day after the latest report from the British Expeditionary Force officers detailing the widespread hunger and sickness of the German civilian population.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 10-12, .

⁴⁰² *Report from British Officers*, 58.

⁴⁰³ Fifth Meeting of Permanent Committee, 3 February, American Relief Administration, Document 20, quoted in Willis, 35.

This gives some insight into the difficulty of Allied decision-making c. 1914-1919. The French firmly believed that the post-Armistice blockade would expedite the peace process and lay the groundwork for a postwar economic alliance or, in the words of the French Minister of Commerce, Etienne Clémentel, “an economic union of free peoples” that did not include the Germans.⁴⁰⁴ As French historian Marc Trachtenberg has shown, French economic policy c. 1918-1919 focused on promoting the political and monetary benefits of inter-Allied cooperation after the war. Call it safety in numbers or a precursor to the “corporatism” of the 1920s in the U.S. and Europe, Clémentel argued that France would greatly benefit from price fixing and sharing resources with the other Allies by reconstructing the French economy more quickly.⁴⁰⁵

Secondly, it reiterates the fact that most Allied diplomats viewed the naval blockade as a control mechanism – akin to a light switch – that could be turned on and off at the Allies’ will. But the problem with this line of thinking was that it did not take into account the long and short-term implications of denying food to a country that had already surrendered. After all, the terms of Article XXVI promised that the Allies would “contemplate the provisioning of Germany...” after 11 November 1918.⁴⁰⁶ Four months had already elapsed since the signing of the Armistice and the Allies were no closer to contemplating any serious relief efforts in Germany. “I wish to preface my report on my visit to Leipzig,” wrote Captain W. S. Roddie on 14 February 1919, “to those who have had the opportunity of studying Germany from the inside, the policy of continuing the

⁴⁰⁴ Marc Trachtenberg, “‘A New Economic Order’: Etienne Clémentel and French Economic Diplomacy during the First World War,” *French Historical Studies* 10, no. 2 (Autumn 1977): 331. See also, Stevenson, “French War Aims and the American Challenge, 1914-1918,” *Historical Journal* 22, no. 4 (December 1979): 891-894.

⁴⁰⁵ Trachtenberg, “‘A New Economic Order,’” 316-318.

⁴⁰⁶ “Conditions of an Armistice with Germany,” 102. For more information on Article XXVI of the Armistice with Germany see pp. 127-129.

starvation of that country must appear not only senseless but utterly harmful to ourselves.”⁴⁰⁷ At this crucial stage in the negotiations the post-Armistice blockade proved more a hindrance to peace than anything else.

The Turn of the Tide

The flood of health reports from British officers stationed in Germany coincided with the third and final renewal of the Armistice. German and Allied diplomats reconvened to discuss the terms of the ceasefire at Trier in the Rhineland from 14 to 16 February. Just as he had negotiated the initial agreement on 11 November 1918, Matthias Erzberger headed the German delegation once more. This time, however, the Allies were met with hostility from an embittered Erzberger who condemned their obstructionist tactics in delaying the arrival of food to Germany:

Gentlemen... in wide circles of the German people I am asked quite rightly: what is it the Allies want of us? We are making sacrifice after sacrifice, and in the surrender of our resources we are going even to the length of impoverishment. We do not want you to give us the foodstuffs we need [for free], as we are ready to pay for them. Despite this[,] deliveries have been postponed again and again, and we are going hungry. If the Entente wishes to destroy us, it should at least not expect us to dig our own graves.⁴⁰⁸

Erzberger's words convey the atmosphere of distrust and suspicion that was clearly mutual on the part of the Allies toward Germany and Germany toward the Allies. Delegates on both sides left the Trier conference wondering what it would take to end

⁴⁰⁷ *Reports from British Officers*, 82-83.

⁴⁰⁸ Minutes of the Meeting of the Supreme War Council, 17 February 1919, Appendix A, 40, quoted in Willis, 42.

this political stalemate. But two developments occurred in late February and early March 1919 that helped to turn the tide.

After pleading with the Allies to let them get on with the business of feeding Europe, Hoover and the American delegation decided to approach the problem of food relief in an entirely different manner. In a 20 February meeting of the Superior Blockade Council,⁴⁰⁹ U.S. Chairman Vance McCormick chose to appear indifferent to Allied requests for aid. He reminded the American Relief Administration beforehand that it held the upper hand in any dealings with the Allies regarding food and finance, as the Entente was heavily dependent on American aid. He wagered that it would only be a matter of weeks before their feigned apathy compelled the Allies to relent. “[It] worked like a charm,” revealed McCormick in his diary five days later, “... our policy of indifference on the relaxation of the blockade is having the desired effect and the Allies are now coming to us.”⁴¹⁰ This was an important lesson for the United States to demonstrate and an even more valuable lesson for the Allies to remember – U.S. aid to European allies must not be taken for granted. France and Britain would ultimately need to abandon their fixed notions of justice if they wanted to create a lasting peace.

The British delegation came to a similar conclusion based on the myriad reports from army officers witnessing the level of deprivation on the German home front. The officers wrote their findings independently of one another and were repeatedly left with the same conclusion: “hunger is at the bottom of a good deal of the unrest.”⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁹ The Superior Blockade Council was an Allied sub-committee of the Supreme Economic Council. The council was created in early February 1919 to “... compel Germany to observe the terms of the existing armistice and to accept the new terms of the armistice which is to be signed on February 17th....” Minutes of the Superior Blockade Council, 11 February 1919,” Bane and Lutz, 109-110.

⁴¹⁰ Vincent, 107. See also, McCormick, 18 February 1919.

⁴¹¹ *Reports from British Officers*, 85-86.

The tipping point came when the British Second Army, sent to occupy the left bank of the Rhine in March 1919, was staggered at the level of chaos around them. These soldiers fought at Ypres and contributed to the success of the Italian campaign. Indeed, they were by no means inexperienced of the horrors of war. Their commander was Herbert Plumer, a no-nonsense yet paternalistic general who distinguished himself as a gifted administrator and patriotic soldier during the First World War. He commanded equally the respect of his troops and Lloyd George's War Cabinet. Therefore, Plumer's criticism of the appalling conditions in Germany could not be dismissed as simply German alarmism or American interference in European politics.

Plumer submitted a damning report to Lloyd George by the end of his first week in Germany: "In my opinion food must be sent into this area [Cologne] by the Allies without delay... The mortality amongst women, children, and [the] sick is most grave and sickness due to hunger is spreading. The attitude of the population is becoming one of despair and the people feel that an end by bullets is preferable to death by starvation."⁴¹² The general went on to say that his soldiers were parting with their rations in order to provide food to the severely malnourished civilian population. Revolutionary turmoil was spreading throughout Germany and a deciding factor was the elusive food promised under Article XXVI of the Armistice agreement. Furthermore, Plumer expressed his opinion that British soldiers would either revolt or their resolve crumble, "if children were allowed to wander the streets, half starving."⁴¹³

David Lloyd George had been reelected on a conservative pro-Versailles/German

⁴¹² Minutes of the Supreme War Council, 8 March 1919. See, Bane and Lutz, 214.

⁴¹³ Willis, 54. The U.S. Army reported similar unrest in Germany from March to May 1919. See, 'Summaries Intelligence Reports,' U.S. Army, Third Army General Staff, in the Ralph Haswell Lutz Papers, Boxes 1-2, f. 11, HIA.

war guilt platform in the Khaki Election of December 1918.⁴¹⁴ Yet he was now faced with irrefutable proof that the post-Armistice blockade was morally questionable and contrary to the Allies' proposed reconstruction of Germany. After all, the aim of a postwar peace settlement was to define new international laws and boundaries and acclimate the vanquished power to their new, albeit checked, role in global politics. This, as German historian Avner Offer explains, "helps to reconcile the loser to his defeat, to accept its legitimacy and to acquiesce in his own punishment... [But] the blockade policy after the Armistice deprived the Allies of such legitimacy."⁴¹⁵

For all the talk of "Allied" policy, the naval blockade of Germany was first and foremost a British venture, and it ultimately took *British* intervention to lift the economic sanctions.⁴¹⁶ Secretary of State for War Winston Churchill wrote that these reports of starvation in Germany were a "sudden punch"⁴¹⁷ in the gut to Allied integrity. So much of Allied strategy in the post-Armistice period involved the corralling of German industry and its armed services. Yet, in doing so, the Allies were unnecessarily hindering the postwar reconstruction of Europe. General Plumer's report, corroborated by the findings of other army officers, forced the British to confront the inhumanity of the blockade's prolongation. Subsequent meetings with delegates proved more fruitful once discussions turned from sanctions and political leverage to talk of relaxing the blockade. One thing became clear to all parties involved – death by starvation could not continue.

⁴¹⁴ Eric Geddes, "Until the Pips Squeak: German Indemnities in 1918, An Election Phrase Explained," 13 December 1933, Letter to the Editor of *The Times*, 2/15, LHCMA.

⁴¹⁵ Offer, "Morality and Admiralty," 115.

⁴¹⁶ For a detailed look at the often acrimonious relations between London and Washington over naval policy c. 1917-1919 see, David F. Trask, *Captains and Cabinets: Anglo-American Naval Relations, 1917-1918* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1972) and Stephen Roskill, *Naval Policy between the Wars: The Period of Anglo-American Antagonism, 1919-1929*, Vol. I (London: Collins, 1968).

⁴¹⁷ Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis*, Vol. V: *The Aftermath* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), 55-56.

Chapter 5 Appendix

“Hunger Map of Europe, U.S. Food Administration, 1 December 1918”



[Figure 8] Source: *New York Times Current History: A Monthly Magazine, The European War*, Vol. 10 (April-June 1919): 52.

CHAPTER 6

“FAMINE IS THE MOTHER OF ANARCHY”: PEACEMAKING, HERBERT HOOVER, AND THE END OF ECONOMIC WARFARE, MARCH - JULY 1919

A Troubling Realization

At the start of the Armistice negotiations in November 1918 Herbert Hoover, member of the Supreme Economic Council and head of the American Relief Administration, estimated the cost of provisioning the “liberated populations” of the Central Powers at \$200 million.⁴¹⁸ Aid was to be divided evenly per capita between Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, Turkey, and Serbia. Germany, however, was left to fend for itself. Never mind that Kaiser Wilhelm II had abdicated the throne on 9 November, seeking refuge in the Netherlands as his empire collapsed. The abdication of the Kaiser merely confirmed to the Allies that a major power shift had occurred in Germany. Key members of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) moved to replace the old authoritarian guard. Socialist politicians such as Friedrich Ebert and Philipp Scheidemann, for instance, headed the provisional government that negotiated the Armistice with the Allies at Compiègne on 11 November 1918.⁴¹⁹

Although the majority of the SPD members were essentially left-leaning moderates,⁴²⁰ who were content to work within the bounds of a parliamentary system, the

⁴¹⁸ Letter from Herbert Hoover to U.S. President Woodrow Wilson re: Feeding Austria-Hungary, Turkey, Bulgaria, and Serbia, 9 November 1918, in the Herbert Hoover Papers, 1918-1919, HIA.

⁴¹⁹ Standard works on the German Revolution include: A. J. Ryder, *German Revolution of 1918: A Study of German Socialism in War and Revolt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967); Richard M. Watt, *The Kings Depart: The Tragedy of Germany; Versailles, and the German Revolution* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968); Scott Stephenson, *The Final Battle: Soldiers of the Western Front and the German Revolution of 1918* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁴²⁰ This was primarily because the old SPD had splintered into various factions by late 1918; some members identified with the pacifism of the USPD (Independent Social Democrats), while others joined the

Allies could not easily classify them as traditional “liberals” or “democrats.” This distinction caused Allied politicians to pejoratively lump the Socialists together with the German Communist Party (KPD) and even the radical socialist splinter group – the Independent Social Democratic Party or USPD. Together, these political parties epitomized the dangers of “Bolshevism” in Allied eyes. Like a virus, one could try to inoculate against its spread, but there was no cure for Bolshevism once the host became infected.⁴²¹ The virus could appear benign at first, yet it could easily mutate into a more virulent strain as time progressed. In the words of British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, revolutionary Germany was a “cholera area” to be avoided at all costs.⁴²²

In place of troops on the ground the Allied naval blockade was continued after the Armistice in order to force the German delegation to sign the Treaty of Versailles.⁴²³ This chapter traces the fallout from the prolongation of the blockade once the Allies became aware of the level of malnutrition and starvation on the German home front. Official reports from British and American intelligence officers in December 1918 explicitly revealed the precariousness of the German situation. News of revolutionary fervour and poor living conditions reached London and Washington in late February - early March 1919, causing the Big Four Powers at Versailles – Britain, France, Italy, and

KPD (Communist Party) or the Spartacus League in an effort to violently overthrow Germany’s “staid” political system.

⁴²¹ Norbert H. Gaworek, “From Blockade to Trade: Allied Economic Warfare against Soviet Russia, June 1919 to January 1920,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 23, no. 1 (1975): 39. See also, D. K. Buse, “Ebert and the German Crisis, 1917-1920,” *Central European History* 5, no. 3 (September 1972): 240-242; Dietrich Orlow, “1918/19: A German Revolution,” *German Studies Review* 5, no. 2 (May 1982): 191; Stevenson, *Cataclysm*, 402.

⁴²² This explains the reluctance of Allied politicians to insist on pushing the Germans back to Berlin in November 1918. There were certain advantages to demanding an unconditional surrender – including indisputable bragging rights that the Allies won the war and, of course, greater bargaining power at the peace table. Yet there were just as many downsides to invading German territory, as well. The fear and contamination of Bolshevism was a real concern for the Allies. See, Bullitt Lowry, *Armistice 1918* (Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1996), 160-163.

⁴²³ ‘Memorandum Respecting the Continuance of the Blockade,’ 22 January 1919, TNA, T 1/12275.

the United States – to reevaluate their surefire strategy to win the peace.

If the Allies could not maintain this economic stranglehold due to mounting public health concerns and issues of morality, how could they be sure that Germany would not resume military action once the blockade was lifted? This question confronted the peacemakers as they sought to achieve justice for the 22 million Allied casualties of the First World War.⁴²⁴ Indeed, faced with the prospect that the blockade's retention might be jeopardizing the viability of a stable European peace settlement, the Allies were forced to admit that their great weapon of war proved too harsh for the intricacies of diplomacy.

The opening paragraph of a U.S. Army report concerning the political situation in Germany in March 1919 reads: "Germany appears to be marking time. The people are waiting for peace, waiting for food and waiting for a constitution."⁴²⁵ But how long could Germany realistically wait for the reconstruction process to begin? After years of protracted warfare, where many Germans lost family members on the battlefield and suffered chronic deprivation and illness on the home front, there was not much left for civilians to give in terms of collective strength and fortitude.

"The Government that could to-day promise the people food could impose almost any form of Government upon [the German] Empire which it desired."⁴²⁶ That was the assessment of Stephen Miles Bouton, an American journalist and foreign correspondent stationed in Berlin throughout the post-Armistice period. His analysis on the necessity of

⁴²⁴ Stevenson, *Cataclysm*, 442; Lu, 5-6.

⁴²⁵ 'Summaries Intelligence, Part I, Subsection V: Political Situation,' U.S. Army, Third Army. General Staff, Second Section. Box 1, f. 12, 17-26 March 1919, HIA. See also, Leo Grebler and Wilhelm Winkler, *The Cost of the World War to Germany and Austria-Hungary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), 96-102.

⁴²⁶ 'Report by Mr. S. Miles Bouton Concerning the Conditions in Germany,' 31 December 1918, in the Ralph Haswell Lutz Papers, Box 11, f. 10, HIA.

filling the power vacuum in revolutionary Germany supports the findings of British and American intelligence officers sent to assess the German food situation in the wake of the Armistice. Both studies, for example, recount the daily struggle of civilians to feed themselves and their families. Political rallies, devalued currency, long food queues, and meager rations of little nutritional value – that was the reality of everyday life in Germany c. 1917-1919.⁴²⁷ In fact, in the final year of the war and throughout the post-Armistice period, it was not uncommon for residents in urban centres to slaughter a horse in the streets or, worse still, eat meat from a cow infected with bacterial diseases like tuberculosis or typhoid.⁴²⁸



[Figure 9] A photograph of Berliners standing over the carcass of a horse. By 1918-1919, desperate and hungry Germans would eat virtually any protein they could find, including horses and other sick or dead animals. Source: Imperial War Museum. Catalogue number: Q110883

⁴²⁷ Cory Brant Warnick, “The Food Crisis in Germany and Its Consequences, 1918-1924,” MA Thesis, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2007, 9.

⁴²⁸ Davis, 224.

It is little wonder then that mortality rates in Germany skyrocketed even prior to the global influenza pandemic of 1918-1919, which claimed an estimated 50 million lives worldwide.⁴²⁹

Bouton and the Allied officers innately understood that the fragility of the nation was determined by both its physical and political health. “I talked with very many Germans of all classes,” stated Lieutenant A. Campbell, a British soldier in his mid-December 1918 report to the War Office. “They are hungry, very hungry; that is, all except the superrich... They fear that food will not be given to them until all danger of a Bolshevik movement is past.”⁴³⁰ Campbell was shocked by the physical deterioration of civilians on the German home front and became convinced that the only way to contain Bolshevism was to lift the naval blockade and allow Germany to re-enter the global marketplace.⁴³¹ It is significant to note that this recommendation was virtually identical to the plan proposed by Herbert Hoover to the U.S. Food Administration on 12 November 1918. Yet, whereas Hoover’s initial attitude towards the German government was reproachful in nature, even calling them “[a] group of gamblers in human life,”⁴³² those on the ground were focused more on the immediate welfare of the civilian population.

Despite his harsh words for the political and military leadership in Germany, Hoover still advocated feeding the masses in order to bring stability to an ailing nation in

⁴²⁹ For a more comprehensive analysis on the impact of the global pandemic as it affected the Allies and Central Powers, see Chapter 3, “Beyond a ‘Needless Sacrifice’: Total War and the Tightening of the Blockade, 1916-1918.” See also, Price-Smith, *Contagion and Chaos*, esp. 57-87.

⁴³⁰ ‘Recent Reports Regarding the Situation in Germany,’ December 12-15 1918, TNA, CAB 24/73; Vincent, 80-81.

⁴³¹ *Reports by British Officers on the Economic Conditions Prevailing in Germany*, 5-6. See also, David G. Williamson, *The British in Germany, 1918-1930: The Reluctant Occupiers* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991), esp. 32-38.

⁴³² ‘Mr. Hoover’s Address to the Special Conference of Federal Food Administrator,’ 12 November 1918, Bane and Lutz, 15.

the heart of Europe:

Unless anarchy can be put down and stability of government can be obtained in these enemy states, there will be nobody to make peace with and nobody to pay the bill to France and Belgium for the fearful destruction that has been done. I would certainly approach this matter with mixed feelings, having been witness to the long robbery of food from women and children and the destruction of millions of tons of food at sea and to the misery under which the millions amongst the big and little Allies have suffered under the German yoke... [But] if we value the preservation of civilization itself, we cannot sit idly by and see the growth of this cancer in the world's vitals. Famine is the mother of anarchy.⁴³³

Here was an extraordinary opportunity for the victorious democratic powers to shape authoritarian Germany into a fledging democracy. The Allies had already committed themselves on paper with Article XXVI of the Armistice, which agreed to “contemplate” provisioning Germany throughout the peace process.⁴³⁴ Surely, a genuine offer from the Allies to relax trade restrictions would be preferable to watching the most dominant power in Western Europe “turn” Bolshevik.⁴³⁵

It was the opinion of those whose job it was to study the European food crisis that the time had come to shelve political differences for the sake of global stability. After

⁴³³ Ibid, 16; idem, ‘European Food Situation: Mr. Hoover’s Analysis,’ 16 November 1918, 18. See also, Richard V. Oulahan, “Allies Oppose Lifting the Economic Blockade of Germany Yet.: Americans Favor Action,” 21 January 1919, *New York Times*.

⁴³⁴ “Conditions of an Armistice with Germany,” 102.

⁴³⁵ Mayer, *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking*, 386-387. Although the Allies’ fear of pan-European Bolshevism persisted even after the failed January uprising of 1919, Ebert’s crackdown of the Spartacists demonstrated that the SPD were far more moderate in their “socialist” outlook. See, A. J. P. Taylor, *The Course of German History: A Survey in the Development of German History since 1815* (London: Routledge, 2001), 213-215.

several weeks in Germany it was abundantly obvious to Hoover that, “there is no longer any military or naval value attached to the maintenance of the blockade of enemy territory. Its retention has political value... but these latter features require immediate consideration because the political values may be entirely destroyed by its present harsh condition.”⁴³⁶ This was a troubling realization for the leading authority on food relief to admit. Hoover was, after all, the driving force behind the Commission for Relief in Belgium (CRB), which supplied foodstuffs and matériel to nearly 10 million people living in German-occupied territories in Belgium and northern France throughout 1914-1918.⁴³⁷ The CRB’s mandate was to offset the brutality and social and political upheavals attendant with life under the “German yoke.” Therefore, it was not his first instinct to supply the enemy with precious Allied resources. Moreover, although Hoover realized that Germany was in desperate need of provisions, the peacemakers at Versailles still needed some convincing.

Crafting the Peace: A Case of History Repeating Itself?

When the Allied delegates met at the French Foreign Ministry in Paris to craft the peace settlement on 12 January 1919, they did so with the understanding that it would be a long and divisive process. Their first order of business was to assemble the Supreme War Council that would decide the fate of the former Central Powers. This led to the creation of the Council of Ten, which consisted of David Lloyd George, Georges Clemenceau, Woodrow Wilson, Vittorio Orlando, Japanese Prime Minister Hara Takashi, and their respective foreign ministers: Arthur Balfour, Stéphane Pichon, Robert Lansing, Sidney

⁴³⁶ Memorandum on Blockade Submitted to the President by Herbert Hoover, 10 December 1918, in the Herbert Hoover Papers, 1918-1919, HIA.

⁴³⁷ Johan den Hertog, “The Commission for Relief in Belgium and the Political Diplomatic History of the First World War,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 21 (December 2010): 597-600.

Sonnino, and Uchida Kosai. The council meetings occurred daily throughout January and February and were conducted primarily in English due to Clemenceau's command of the language and the Italian foreign secretary's ability to speak it relatively well. Orlando and Takashi, however, had to rely almost exclusively on the English-French translations of the council interpreter Dr. Paul Mantoux.⁴³⁸

The peace negotiations officially commenced six days later in order to coincide with the forty-eighth anniversary of the unification of Germany in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War. In a symbolic act of power Wilhelm I, King of Prussia, was crowned German Emperor in the Hall of Mirrors at the French Palace of Versailles on 18 January 1871.⁴³⁹ The Council of Ten, therefore, began the process to see Germany stripped of its imperial glory on the historic date of the Reich's creation. Clemenceau and the French delegation thought it only fitting to pay back in kind the stinging humiliation of defeat. The timing of the peace conference also reveals some significant facts about the state of Great Power relations in 1919.

The European state system established by Napoleon's conquerors at the Congress of Vienna (1815) created a balance of power on the Continent that limited conflicts between the Great Powers of Russia, Britain, France, Prussia, and Austria. Each power acted as a counterweight to the expansionist designs of a rival power in the hopes of mitigating territorial disputes or more general confrontation. Throughout the nineteenth century this "Concert of Europe" aimed at preserving the status quo, that is, the existing

⁴³⁸ David Lloyd George, *Memoirs of the Peace Conference*, vol. 1, 164.

⁴³⁹ Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2003), 474.

power structure with Great Britain firmly at the top.⁴⁴⁰ Although *Pax Britannica* spanned the century from the end of Napoleon's reign in 1815 to the outbreak of the First World War, British hegemony was increasingly challenged by the early 1880s.

Competition was fierce among the Great Powers over the "Scramble for Africa"⁴⁴¹ – the renewed push for colonial possessions that reignited imperial rivalries in the last two decades of the century. "[In order] to remain a great nation, or to become one, you must colonize," argued French Prime Minister Léon Gambetta in a rousing 1881 speech.⁴⁴² Gambetta's nationalist outlook was indicative of the colonial aspirations of many contemporary European politicians. The period was overwhelmingly characterized by Germany's bid for a greater imperial presence, as evidenced by Wilhelm II's aggressive program of *Weltpolitik* or "world policy."⁴⁴³ There is little doubt that this constant jockeying worsened Great Power relations prior to 1914. Indeed, the war's outbreak merely crystallized the previous half-century of unbridled nationalism.

Five years later the peacemakers at Versailles not only had to restore order in Europe, they also had to create a new balance of power. The nineteenth century Great Power system simply could not be re-imposed on the post-1918 world. Russia, for example, was plunged into civil war with the October Revolution of 1917. Caught between the moderate yet ineffectual leadership of Alexander Kerensky's Provisional

⁴⁴⁰ Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 159-160.

⁴⁴¹ See, M. E. Chamberlain, *The Scramble for Africa*, 3rd edition (New York: Longman, 2010); Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa, 1876 to 1912* (New York: Random House, 1991); Barbara Harlow and Mia Carter, eds., *Archives of Empire, vol. 2: The Scramble for Africa* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003).

⁴⁴² James Joll and Gordon Martel, 219.

⁴⁴³ *Weltpolitik* was a deliberate move away from the cautious foreign policy of Bismarck's years, as evidenced by his successor's (Leo von Caprivi) charted "new course," in order to "catch up" with the other Great Powers both militarily and politically. This mindset extended to Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz's plan to challenge British naval supremacy and the hawkish foreign policy of Bernhard von Bülow and Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg c. 1897-1914.

Government, on the one hand, and the Bolshevik-dominated Soviet councils, on the other, the war on the Eastern Front took a backseat to the country's bitter internal struggles. The Bolsheviks wrested control of the government in Petrograd on 7 November (or 25 October according to the Julian calendar) with an assault on the Winter Palace led by Vladimir Lenin and his Red Guards.⁴⁴⁴

Lenin finally broke with the Allies in early December 1917 by suing for a separate peace treaty with Germany. Yet the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Leon Trotsky, was reluctant to accept Germany's "annexationist" demands without attempting to negotiate a more favourable peace. In a bold move that surprised even others in the Bolshevik delegation, Trotsky abruptly broke off communication with the Germans on 10 February 1918, declaring that the two countries were in a state of limbo with "no war, no peace."⁴⁴⁵ The Germans did not take kindly to Trotsky's diplomatic antics. In order to convince the Bolsheviks to submit to their more stringent demands, Kaiser Wilhelm ordered his troops to march eastward on 18 February. Germany's hardline approach ultimately worked. As First World War historian and international relations scholar David Stevenson notes:

When it appeared that the Central Powers were no longer willing to make peace the Bolshevik leaders were prepared *in extremis* to seek assistance from the Allies, and the latter, for all their ideological distaste, would probably have given it; but as soon as the Germans communicated their terms the Russians accepted them, not bothering to negotiate in detail but preferring to

⁴⁴⁴ Stevenson, *Cataclysm*, 287-288.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 316.

swallow the medicine whole.⁴⁴⁶

Russian territorial losses notwithstanding, including Finland and the Baltic lands of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Russian Poland, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk allowed Lenin and the Bolsheviks to consolidate domestic power, culminating in the creation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.) in December 1922.⁴⁴⁷

The transformation of Tsarist Russia into an upstart Socialist republic was just one of the major issues facing the Council of Ten. The disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire also challenged Allied diplomats to juggle the needs of various ethnic groups without inadvertently pitting them against one another. The Balkan region was a veritable powder keg of competing national interests even prior to the Russian Revolution and the collapse of the Dual Monarchy in the final stages of the war. Thus, how were the peacemakers to reconcile the democratic Wilsonian principal of national self-determination without sparking revolutionary fervour across Central and Eastern Europe?⁴⁴⁸

The rise of the United States was another development that signaled the dawn of a new era in international relations. It would have been inconceivable for a British delegate at the Congress of Vienna to heed the advice of a U.S. president on European

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 321.

⁴⁴⁷ Gaworek, "From Blockade to Trade," 41. See also, Paul Preston, "The Great Civil War: European Politics, 1914-1945," in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Modern Europe*, ed. T. C. W Blanning (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 151-152. For a more detailed look at the Russia Revolution see, Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: A History of the Russian Revolution, 1891-1924* (London: J. Cape, 1996), esp. 406-554; Ronald Kowalski, *The Russia Revolution, 1917-1921* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Rex A. Wade, *The Russian Revolution, 1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Christopher Read, *War and Revolution in Russia, 1914-1922: The Collapse of Tsarism and the Establishment of Soviet Power* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

⁴⁴⁸ Lloyd George addressed this question by noting the important distinction between Allied sanctioned "national self-determination" and an entirely self-imposed form of national determination: "The task of the Parisian peacemakers was not to decide what in fairness should be given to the liberated nationalities, but what in common honesty should be freed from their clutches when they had overstepped the bounds of self-determination." See, John Grigg, *Lloyd George: The People's Champion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 125.

affairs. But the spectacular growth of the American economy over the next four to five decades could not be denied. Average household wages in 1800 were one-third higher in the United States than Western Europe. Furthermore, American industrial output in 1861 exceeded Russia and Prussia and was poised to out produce France on the eve of the American Civil War. The United States, in short, was an undisputed economic juggernaut by the end of the nineteenth century.⁴⁴⁹

The country had secured an enviable position in international affairs through a shrewd combination of industrial might, strong financial markets, and a bit of geographical luck. America's distance from Europe meant that Woodrow Wilson could even entertain the possibility of neutrality in August 1914 and, unlike the British dominions, political and economic independence allowed the U.S. to remain neutral for the majority of the war. Moreover, as the world's preeminent financial power, American credit largely funded the conflict, and thus American input at the peace conference would be on par with the Great Powers.⁴⁵⁰

Yet President Wilson found it incredibly difficult to mount an effective peace campaign once in Europe. The initial meetings of the Supreme War Council struck him as overly formal and, at times, even frivolous. As historian Margaret MacMillan writes, "every afternoon the doors opened and footmen carried in tea and macaroons. Wilson was surprised and somewhat shocked that they should interrupt discussing the future of the world for such a trivial event."⁴⁵¹ Beyond the obvious cultural differences, the U.S.

⁴⁴⁹ Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, 178-179.

⁴⁵⁰ Britain, alone, received credit in excess of \$5 billion from American financiers like J. P. Morgan over the course of the war. See, Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, 328-329; Kathleen Burk, "The Diplomacy of Finance: British Financial Missions to the United States, 1914-1918," *Historical Journal* 22 no. 2 (June 1979): 371-372; Martin Horn, "A Private Bank at War: J. P. Morgan & Co. and France at War, 1914-1918," *Business History Review* (Spring 2000): 86, 111.

⁴⁵¹ MacMillan, 53-54.

president also had to overcome his own unpreparedness.

Secretary of State Robert Lansing, like many in the American delegation, was particularly critical of Wilson's performance at Versailles. Lansing depicts the president in his memoirs as a high-minded, fish-out-of-water politician who failed to take charge of the negotiations and was simply outmanoeuvred by his peers. Ultimately, despite Wilson's best intentions, what transpired was a series of peace talks that lacked focus and an overall American influence:

He [Wilson] was inclined to let matters drift, relying apparently on his own quickness of perception and his own sagacity to defeat or amend terms proposed by members of other delegations. From first to last there was no teamwork, no common counsel, and no concerted action. It was discouraging to witness this utter lack of system, when system was so essential. The reason was manifest. There was no directing head to the American Commission to formulate a plan, to organize the work and to issue definite instructions.⁴⁵²

The conference might have proceeded very differently had Wilson arrived in Paris with a clearly defined peace agenda. But the president chose instead to tout the League of Nations as a panacea to global strife.

The League was Wilson's attempt to craft a sweeping solution to the major diplomatic issues facing the Allies in a postwar world; its mandate was to resolve inter-state conflicts peacefully in order to promote collective security and stability. The organization was intended to reestablish a balance of power within a post-1918

⁴⁵² Robert Lansing, *The Big Four and Others at the Peace Conference* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921), 40-44.

framework. This last point was essential to the League's survival, as four years of world war had clearly supplanted the nineteenth century Great Power system.⁴⁵³ If a new political order was to emerge from the devastation of war, however, it needed to move beyond generalities and good intentions. Lansing's critique was harsh but it spoke to the difficulty of conducting talks on a scale that would have confounded even the peacemakers at the Congress of Vienna. Vienna was the historical model by which the Allied and Associated Powers crafted the framework for the Paris Peace Conference.⁴⁵⁴ Peacemaking, unfortunately, is not an exact science and the study of the past could only reveal so much to the Supreme War Council in their early meetings. The sheer scope of Versailles – what its outcome meant for Germany's role in postwar Europe – dictated that the Allies look beyond a century old blueprint in order to achieve something of a lasting peace.

The Humanitarian Argument To Feed Germany

One of the ways in which the peacemakers dealt with the broad scope of the conference was to consolidate power in the hands of a select few. This concentration of power occurred most sharply with the drastic restructuring of the Supreme Council when the Council of Ten became the Council of Four in March 1919. First, the Japanese delegation was dropped from the day-to-day proceedings. Then, the Big Four dispensed with their foreign ministers to create a power dynamic that firmly centred on Lloyd George, Wilson, Clemenceau, and Orlando. Dissatisfaction and resentments are naturally

⁴⁵³ Woodrow Wilson, 'The League of Nations: Address at Boston, Mass., on 24 February 1919, on the Plan for the League of Nations,' (Washington D.C.: Government Press Office, 1919). See also, Marc Trachtenberg, "Versailles after Sixty Years," *Journal of Contemporary History* 17, no. 3 (July 1982): 492; Gary B. Ostrower, *The League of Nations: from 1919-1929* (New York: Avery Publishing Group, 1996), esp. 27-43; John Milton Cooper, *Breaking the Heart of the World: Woodrow Wilson and the Fight for the League of Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁴⁵⁴ MacMillan, 22, 145.

part of any negotiation process that involves the victor determining the fate of the vanquished.⁴⁵⁵ But one issue that brought many German and Allied delegates together was the controversy over the maintenance of the post-Armistice blockade.

The Council of Four was at a total impasse when Allied representatives met with German delegates in the picturesque Belgian town of Spa on 4 March 1919. The emergency meeting was called following the publication on 28 February of British army reports in the *London Times Weekly*. It is still unknown who leaked the War Office files to the press, but the article included this sobering observation made by Captain W. S. Roddie in mid-February: "I believe that Germany at the present moment is on the brink of a volcano[,] which may burst forth at any moment. It would be folly to suppose that the ensuing disaster would be confined to Germany."⁴⁵⁶ The "ensuing disaster" was, of course, the spread of Bolshevism on the Continent in the wake of the Russian and German Revolutions.

Roddie also highlighted the direct link between dwindling food supply and political unrest in Germany since 11 November 1918. Although the Allies had promised to modestly provision Germany throughout the peace process, he saw firsthand that "... there has been no increase in the milk or fat rations since the Armistice." The scarcity of these everyday items placed the local authorities in a precarious situation. It could either dole out these already meager rations on a "starvation basis" to avoid running out or, "overapportion the supplies" in order to boost civic morale and thus avoid violence on the streets. Both scenarios, however, presupposed that the Allies intended to fulfill their

⁴⁵⁵ William R. Keylor, "Versailles and International Diplomacy," in *The Treaty of Versailles: A Reassessment after 75 Years*, 481-482.

⁴⁵⁶ "Present Day Germany – Food, Raw Materials and Coal Needed," 28 February 1919, *London Times Weekly*, quoted in Vincent, 102.

obligation to the Germans.⁴⁵⁷ The *London Times Weekly* article made it plain to British civilians that it was in Britain's best interest to furnish the enemy.

The British delegation finally took notice. After reading these documents it was the opinion of Henry Wilson, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (C.I.G.S.), that the post-Armistice blockade "seems to me barbarous [because] we have no right to go on starving the great mass of German women and children." As Lloyd George's top military advisor at Versailles, he understood the desire to see Germany brought to justice, but was not willing to achieve peace at the cost of human decency. "I am not prepared personally to make myself responsible for defending the continuance of this system indefinitely," he persuasively argued in a memorandum to King George V and the British War Cabinet after reading the full and, at the time, unpublished version of Roddie's report. "Things must be brought to a head, and either the war must be resumed, or conditions of peace must be reached which are satisfactory for us and give the German people some chance of life and work."⁴⁵⁸

The fear of Germany plunging into a civil war like Bolshevik Russia was reason enough for Hoover and Vance McCormick, Chairman of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace, to advocate relaxing trade restrictions on Germany as early as December 1918.⁴⁵⁹ Yet they would have to wait for the British to come to this realization on their own. Ultimately, it took four months and the release of multiple army intelligence reports to reveal that the post-Armistice blockade was an impediment to peace. General Wilson's memorandum was more than just an acknowledgement of this

⁴⁵⁷ Vincent, 103.

⁴⁵⁸ 'Memorandum from Henry Wilson to the King and War Cabinet re: Germany – Raising the Blockade in Certain Eventualities,' 20 February 1919, TNA, WO 32/5382.

⁴⁵⁹ McCormick was also the Chairman of the U.S. War Trade Board and head of the Superior Blockade Council.

fact; it also put forth a compelling argument to lift the naval blockade based on humanitarian considerations.

Within two days of the public release of the War Office files, Lord Robert Cecil, in consultation with Hoover and McCormick, organized the Spa Conference for 4 March 1919. The conference began with an opening statement from Admiral George Hope, whom the Germans regarded as a formidable negotiator at the initial Armistice talks at Compiègne and, later, at the renewal of the Armistice terms at Trèves in January and February 1919.⁴⁶⁰ He took the opportunity to warn the German delegation that no food would enter German ports without the government first handing over all cargo and passenger ships to the Allies.

Admiral Hope, in effect, demanded the use of the entire German merchant fleet for the purpose of transporting American foodstuffs to German ports. The Allies were prepared to give 270,000 tons of foodstuffs to the Germans. The country could also import an additional 100,000 tons of grain from Argentina. The German delegation expressed a willingness to relinquish the merchant fleet, but with the proviso that the Allies agree to provision Germany until the next harvest. The Germans, after all, could not surrender the only leverage they had at the peace table. Therefore, unless the Allies signed an agreement to provision Germany monthly, the delegates would simply have to agree to disagree.⁴⁶¹

If the Germans were not ready to “bargain ships for food,” why did busy Allied

⁴⁶⁰ ‘Renewal of the Armistice at Trèves, 16 February 1919,’ 18 February, TNA, ADM 1/8551/46; The Papers of Brockdorff-Rantzau TNA, GFM 33/3309.

⁴⁶¹ ‘Preliminary Report of Meetings held at Spa on 4th and 5th March 1919 between Delegates of the Associated Governments and Delegates of the German Government with Regard to the Financial, Shipping, and Food Supply Arrangements for Carrying out the Revictualment of Germany, Presented to the Supreme Economic Council at its Meeting of March 7, 1919,’ in Bane and Lutz, 190-191.

representatives continue to meet with them?⁴⁶² The diary of Samuel Shartle, a member of the American delegation at Spa, provides a compelling answer. On the evening of 4 March, for example, he wrote: “Perhaps the League of Nations can cure Bolshevism, perhaps not. While the League has been formulating, anarchy has spread – due to lack of food and lack of peace. It is not an answer to say, let Germany suffer. Not only Germany is involved... food won the war and food may win the peace – if the hungry had more food and less promises.”⁴⁶³ Shartle’s assessment of the German food situation closely mirrored that of Herbert Hoover. Both men believed that a stable, prosperous, and well-fed Germany was a necessary bulwark against the spread of Bolshevism in Europe.

Hoover and the American peace delegation took a practical approach to feeding Germany by arguing that the Allies needed to rethink their strategy to win the peace. It was in the Allies’ best interest to break with the recommendation of press baron Lord Northcliffe and discontinue “... a ruthless policy of commercial blockade.”⁴⁶⁴ Northcliffe, of course, advocated continuing the blockade after the Armistice as a way to highlight the “economic predominance of the Allies... [by] accentuating German fears and hopes.” This strategy was seen as an extension of Allied propaganda released by Crewe House in the final year of the war, when British intelligence revealed that the

⁴⁶² British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour first used the phrase “bargaining ships for food” in a 12 January 1919 meeting of the Supreme War Council. See, Edward Frederick Willis, ‘Herbert Hoover and the Blockade of Germany, 1918-1919,’ in the Edward Frederick Willis Papers, Box 1, HIA, 22.

⁴⁶³ Samuel G. Shartle, *Spa, Versailles, and Munich: An Account of the Armistice Commission* (Philadelphia: Dorrance and Company, 1941), 74.

⁴⁶⁴ ‘Letter from Lord Northcliffe to Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour, dated 10 June 1918,’ presented at the Economic Defence and Development Committee Meeting, 18 September 1918, TNA, MUN 4/6615.

average German yearned for two things above all else: “peace and plenty.”⁴⁶⁵

The Northcliffe plan was predicated on the assumption that the Allies could exert more control over Germany at the peace table by exploiting the fragility of its domestic situation. Perhaps greater concessions could be extracted from the German delegation – higher reparations, German disarmament, and more territory – if they truly believed that “Germany might be excluded from a future economic bloc... [because] she is excluded from an existing bloc at the present moment... Having our club in our hands we should be absolved from the necessity of flourishing it in print.”⁴⁶⁶ Northcliffe regarded the post-Armistice blockade as a powerful weapon that could be used for great political and propagandistic effect at the peace table.

This bold strategy first appealed to the Foreign Office and War Cabinet when it received Northcliffe’s memorandum in mid-1918, and was still touted by Allied Commander-in-Chief Ferdinand Foch in February 1919 as, “... the best and quickest means of securing respect for the Armistice convention.”⁴⁶⁷ Yet serious problems arose because the plan blithely treated the provisioning of Germany as a carrot that could be dangled in front of the enemy. Although the conference failed to ratify an agreement that satisfied both the Allies and the Germans, British and American representatives left Spa more determined than ever to break the stalemate and lift the food blockade.

The Supreme War Council’s Response

British peace delegate and polemicist, John Maynard Keynes, viewed the deadlock at Spa

⁴⁶⁵ Northcliffe’s Memorandum to Balfour, ‘Report on the Work of the Department of Propaganda in Enemy Countries,’ 1918-1919, circulated by Lord Robert Cecil to the War Cabinet, 1 August 1918, TNA, BT/13/74.

⁴⁶⁶ Northcliffe’s Memorandum to Balfour, 1 August 1918.

⁴⁶⁷ ‘Letter from Ferdinand Foch to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs re: Blockade of Germany,’ 22 February 1919, TNA, MT 25/32.

as an opportunity to “bring matters to a head and attract the attention of the Great Ones [at Versailles].” He suggested to Admiral Hope that the British representatives immediately break off food talks with the Germans “and order our trains to return to Paris that night [5 March]... so that when the Germans woke in the morning it would be to find us flitted.” This highly “public rupture” was intended to send a message to the Big Four politicians – and, of course, the Germans – that global access to food was a necessary precondition of peace.⁴⁶⁸ Germany needed to relinquish its fleet and the Allies, in turn, needed to facilitate the provisioning of Germany before any more time elapsed.

Having read in the press of Britain’s “dramatic adjournment” at Spa, Lloyd George summoned Hoover, Cecil, and British Second Army Commander Herbert Plumer to his office in Paris on 7 March 1919.⁴⁶⁹ The Supreme War Council was set to meet the following day at the French Foreign Ministry and the British prime minister wanted answers. He talked first with Plumer to see if the food conditions in Germany were as dire as the army intelligence reports suggested. The general was not one to mince words. Hoover vividly recounts the exchange between Plumer and Lloyd George in his multivolume work on famine relief published in the last years of his life. As the Allied Food Administrator tells it, the general impressed upon the prime minister that food supplies were so scarce that “[everywhere] hordes of skinny and bloated children were pawing over the offal of British cantonments.”⁴⁷⁰

Plumer feared for the wellbeing of the occupied civilian population, as lack of food and Bolshevik uprisings tested the Germans’ resolve on a daily basis. He feared

⁴⁶⁸ John Maynard Keynes, *Two Memoirs: Dr. Melchior; A Defeated Enemy and My Early Beliefs* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1949), 56. See also, Cline, 43-44; R. B. McCallum, *Public Opinion and the Last Peace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1944).

⁴⁶⁹ Vincent, 109.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 110.

also for the wellbeing of his troops, who were torn between serving their King and country and saving innocent people from suffering and starvation. Plumer's main argument to Lloyd George was that his soldiers should not have to decide which path to follow; feeding the Germans and patrolling the Rhineland were not mutually exclusive because the reconstruction of Germany depended on both developments occurring simultaneously.⁴⁷¹

Hoover was in complete agreement with Plumer that the post-Armistice blockade was now "a constant plague to relief and reconstruction [efforts]."⁴⁷² The clock was ticking to transport American foodstuffs to European shores and any delay in the process only risked more illness, unnecessary death, and political turmoil for Europeans. The reality was that there were more mouths to feed than shipments of food available, which explains why Hoover encouraged the Allies to relax the naval blockade on Germany as soon as possible.⁴⁷³ Permitting the Germans access to food was not just a humanitarian decision; it was the most prudent course of action because it would have allowed the Allies to focus solely on crafting the Versailles settlement.

The role of food – both Germany's access to it and the Allies' control of it – took on more importance than it otherwise should have during the negotiation process. The Germans were desperate for supplies and thus highly motivated to cast off the burden of economic sanctions, but the delegation was reluctant to give up the nation's merchant fleet in the event the negotiations continued into 1920. The German delegates stubbornly

⁴⁷¹ Herbert Hoover, *An American Epic, vol. 2: Famine in Forty-Five Nations, Organization Behind the Front, 1914-1923* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1960), 337-338.

⁴⁷² 'Supplies for Germany, Presented to the Supreme Economic Council at its Meeting of March 7 March, 1919,' in Bane and Lutz, 196-197.

⁴⁷³ 'European Food Situation: Mr. Hoover's Analysis,' Official Statement, United States Food Administration, 1 December 1918, in Bane and Lutz, 16-17.

believed that possession of Germany's merchant fleet was an insurance policy if the peace talks stalled and the country needed to venture into blockaded waters in order to feed the beleaguered masses. As the German Secretary of State Matthias Erzberger noted, "... deliveries [of food] have been postponed again and again, and we are going hungry. If the Entente wishes to destroy us, it should not at least expect us to dig our own graves."⁴⁷⁴ The Allies, meanwhile, regarded the naval blockade as an insurance policy in the event that hawkish elements in the German government decided to resume the war or refuse to sign the peace treaty.⁴⁷⁵ Either way, both decisions were motivated by a desire to control the flow of foodstuffs into Germany as a way of leveraging the peace. But recklessly gambling on the power of the blockade only hindered the peace talks and bred unnecessary distrust between Germany and the Allies and even among the Allies themselves.

Hoover informed Lloyd George "that, with the exception of Lord Cecil's assistance, [he] had received little cooperation since his arrival in Europe."⁴⁷⁶ He was stymied at every turn by the obstructionist tactics of the French, who brokered a side deal to sell rotten fish to the Germans in February 1919 and repeatedly stalled American relief efforts by clinging to the vague wording of Article XXVI of the Armistice agreement.⁴⁷⁷ He was equally dismayed at Britain's extraordinary lack of foresight in continuing to blockade Germany after the Armistice. Hoover reminded the prime minister that the Allies blockaded Austria-Hungary, Turkey, and Bulgaria throughout the war, yet the bulk of trade restrictions were lifted once each country signed a ceasefire agreement with the

⁴⁷⁴ Vincent, 104-105.

⁴⁷⁵ 'Memorandum re: Reasons for Continuance of the Blockade,' 22 January 1919, TNA, T 1/12275, No. 11214/x/1150.

⁴⁷⁶ Vincent, 110.

⁴⁷⁷ Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover*, 336.

Allies in the autumn of 1918.⁴⁷⁸ What made the German case so radically different? Should the country not be regarded in the same way as its wartime allies? Combat had ended five months earlier and Allied politicians were still debating the merits of feeding Germany. At this rate, if the French had their way, another five months would elapse and there would still be no consensus on how to proceed.

Hoover illustrated the point by highlighting the issue of German fishing rights. This was an issue of bitter contention for the Germans throughout 1919.⁴⁷⁹ The British Admiralty unilaterally extended the naval blockade into the Baltic Sea on 28 December 1918. This move severed Germany's remaining supply chain with the Northern Neutrals and prohibited the country from even fishing for small amounts of food for domestic consumption. The extension of the Allied blockade into the Baltic marked a line that Hoover was uncomfortable crossing in light of Germany's well-publicized plight. Both he and U.S. Admiral William S. Benson thought it was an entirely "stupid strategy made by admirals ignorant of food supply."⁴⁸⁰ At this point in the discussion Lloyd George asked Hoover to deliver a similar speech to the Council the next day. Hoover was taken aback at Lloyd George's suggestion, as he was inclined to think that the prime minister, like Clemenceau and Foch before him, still regarded the post-Armistice blockade as an effective weapon to ensure peace.⁴⁸¹ Startled and "delighted" by Lloyd George's

⁴⁷⁸ 'Financial Constitution of the Supreme Council of Supply and Relief,' 15 January 1919, TNA, T 1/12275; idem, 'Memorandum re: Relief of Allied, Neutral, and Enemy Countries – Financial Arrangements,' 20 January 1919. See also, Minutes of the Meeting of the Superior Blockade Council, 24 February 1919, TNA, BT 13/74.

⁴⁷⁹ 'Letter from Mr. Hoover to Admiral Benson Urging the Removal of Restrictions on German Traffic in the Baltic or North Seas, and the Admiral's Reply,' 12 March 1919, in Bane and Lutz, 230.

⁴⁸⁰ 'A Protest to Admiral Benson on the Limitation of German Fishing for Food Purposes,' 25 December 1918; 'General Bliss Urges the Relaxation of the Blockade Measures,' 30 December 1918, in Bane and Lutz, 22.

⁴⁸¹ 'Note by Marshal Foch, Preliminaries of Peace with Germany, Allied G.H.Q.,' 18 February 1919, TNA, WO 158/109/3107.

reaction, Hoover ultimately agreed to attend the meeting but thought it “would carry much more weight if it came [directly] from him.”⁴⁸²

Shortly after 3:00 p.m. on Saturday, 8 March David Lloyd George addressed the Supreme War Council in the crowded office of the French Minister of Foreign Affairs. Fifty-nine council members attended the meeting, including the Japanese delegation, as well as the foreign ministers of the Big Four. In addition to Hoover, Marshal Foch, John Maynard Keynes, Étienne Clémentel, the French Minister of Commerce and Industry, and Louis Klotz, the French Minister of Finance, were in attendance.⁴⁸³ The issue on everyone’s mind was the outcome of the food talks at Spa. The abruptness of Britain’s departure hinted at yet another breakdown in the negotiations with Germany. Lloyd George confirmed that the trip failed to yield better results for the Allies. But what the Supreme War Council did not know was that Britain’s hasty exit was not conducted merely in a fit of pique. It was designed to elicit a strong reaction from the Council – be it good or bad – to news of Germany’s plight.⁴⁸⁴

The Council members listened attentively as the prime minister described the turmoil and despair witnessed by many Allied soldiers in Germany since the signing of the Armistice. These publicized reports of widespread malnutrition and political instability clearly indicated that the problems associated with blockading the Germans far outweighed any short-term political gains. The reason for this was very simple:

The honour of the Allies was involved... the Germans had accepted our armistice conditions, which were sufficiently severe, and they had complied

⁴⁸² Hoover, *An American Epic*, 338-339.

⁴⁸³ ‘Extracts from Minutes of the Meeting of the Supreme War Council,’ 8 March 1919, in Bane and Lutz, 200-201.

⁴⁸⁴ Vincent, 109.

with the majority of those conditions. But so far, not a single ton of food had been sent into Germany. The fishing fleet had even been prevented from going out to catch a few herrings. The Allies were on top now, but the memories of starvation might one day turn against them... These incidents constituted far more formidable weapons for use against the Allies than any of the armaments it was sought to limit. The Allies were sowing hatred for the future: they were piling up agony, not for the Germans but for themselves. As long as the people were starving they would listen to the arguments of the Spartacists [Bolsheviks], and the Allies by their action were simply encouraging elements of disruption and anarchism. It was like stirring up an influenza puddle, just next door to one's self.⁴⁸⁵

Lloyd George invoked the imagery of Bolshevism as a contagious disease that had infected Germany, as he had previously done in the War Cabinet.⁴⁸⁶ The aim was to appeal to the overwhelming sense of fear among Council members that political turmoil in key pockets of Eastern and Central Europe would spread to the rest of the Continent.

Conditions in Germany mattered a great deal to neighbouring war-torn states like France and Italy. Their proximity to the “disease” dictated as much. But, as the British prime minister learned, not all Allied delegates believed that the German situation was so desperate as to warrant the removal of the naval blockade. Clemenceau, for example, wondered why, “if the Germans were starving, as General Plumer and others said they were, did they continue to refuse to surrender their fleet?” Could it be that “the Germans

⁴⁸⁵ Minutes of the Supreme War Council, Paris, 8 March 1919, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, Paris Peace Conference*, Volume IV (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1943) 280-281.

⁴⁸⁶ ‘Western and General Report No. 102, re: Bolshevism,’ 15 January 1919, TNA, CAB 24/150. See also, N. P. Howard, 182.

were simply trying to blackmail the Allies[?]”⁴⁸⁷ His first reaction was that Germany’s refusal to hand over its merchant fleet indicated that their food supply was more than adequate. Beggars, after all, cannot afford to be choosers under any circumstance.

Besides, as the French Minister of Finance reminded him, there was the all-important issue of money to consider. It was one thing for the Allies to talk of provisioning Germany in broad terms, but it was quite another to agree to supply the enemy indefinitely with food transported and paid for by the Allies themselves.

Clemenceau instead recommended that:

the Germans should be made thoroughly to understand that the Allies allow no nonsense in regard to the minute observance of the terms of the Armistice.

As soon as the Germans recognized this fact, [he] felt sure his colleagues, M. Loucheur [the French Minister of Industrial Reconstruction], M. Klotz, and M. Clémentel, who were ready to be guided by the feelings of humanity, would easily arrive at an agreement in regard to the supply of food to Germany, and the payment therefor.⁴⁸⁸

From the French perspective there was a compelling case to be made that the Allies ought to move forward with the peace terms and worry about the reconstruction of Germany at a later date.

Lloyd George, however, vehemently opposed the cavalier “wait and see” attitude of the French and took the opportunity to thoroughly dismiss Clemenceau’s reservations. Taking the floor once again, he noted: “General Plumer’s [report] disclosed a very serious state of affairs... [which] the [Peace] Conference did not wish to create sympathy

⁴⁸⁷ ‘Views of French Representatives on Supreme Economic Council: Clause 7(c), M. Clemenceau’s Criticisms of Mr. Lloyd George’s Proposal, 8 March 1919,’ in Bane and Lutz, 209.

⁴⁸⁸ ‘M. Clemenceau’s Criticisms of Mr. Lloyd George’s Proposal,’ in Bane and Lutz, 211.

with Germany by a continuance of a system of starvation.”⁴⁸⁹ Finally, he called on the French prime minister to “stop these obstructive tactics, otherwise M. Klotz would rank with Lenin and Trotzky [sic] among those who spread Bolshevism in Europe.”⁴⁹⁰ The room fell silent. Clemenceau was rarely at a loss for words, but this was one of those occasions. The meeting ended after two and a half hours with the French delegation utterly chastened and the British having gained the upper hand in the food talks with Germany.⁴⁹¹

Brussels Food Agreement and the Relaxation of the Blockade

On 13 March 1919, representatives from the United States, Britain, France, Italy, and Belgium (including Hoover, Admiral Wemyss, and European unionist Jean Monnet) met with German diplomats in Brussels to discuss the ongoing food crisis.⁴⁹² Lord Robert Cecil, as Minister of the Blockade, used the intervening six days between the dramatic events at the French Foreign Ministry and the opening session of the conference to devise a payment plan in order for the Germans to receive food. Working closely with the Supreme Economic Council, he presented a solution to the delegates right as they departed for the Belgian capital.

Gold, Cecil believed, would break the deadlock. He informed the Allies that Germany had not converted its gold supply into currency since before the outbreak of the

⁴⁸⁹ ‘Supplies for Germany, Presented to the Supreme Economic Council at its Meeting of March 7 March, 1919,’ in Bane and Lutz, 196. See also, Minutes of the Meeting of the Superior Blockade Council, 1 March 1919, TNA, BT 13/74; Hoover, *An American Epic*, 318, 338.

⁴⁹⁰ Willis, 55.

⁴⁹¹ John Maynard Keynes even asserts that the British prime minister viciously lashed out at Klotz over his perceived love of money: “He [Lloyd George] leant forward and with a gesture of his hands indicated to everyone the image of a hideous Jew clutching his money bag... The anti-Semitism, not far below the surface in such an assemblage as that one, was up in the heart of everyone.” See, Keynes, 61.

⁴⁹² ‘Memorandum of the Conference held at Brussels on March 13 and 14, 1919,’ in Bane and Lutz, 246-248. The Brussels agreement only pertained to the importation of foodstuffs; it did nothing to alleviate the ban on raw materials or clothing etc.

war. Therefore, while the value of the paper mark was steadily declining, the country's gold reserves were still intact. The Germans had begged the Allies at Spa to provision the country until the next harvest. What they were essentially asking for was a six-month guaranteed food supply. The Allies had been prepared to give a single shipment of 270,000 tons of food and permit access to 100,000 tons of grain from Argentina. Yet a thirty-day food supply was not nearly enough to eradicate hunger in Germany. There was no way around it. The Allies would need to provision the enemy at least until 1 September 1919. A loan of £200 million would adequately cover the cost and shipment of foodstuffs and, in turn, German gold would act as collateral for the loan.⁴⁹³

Admiral Wemyss presented this new financial arrangement to the Germans on 14 March. Reading the terms aloud, Wemyss informed the German representatives that the Allies would allow Germany to import up to 370,000 tons of food per month from any country. Germany, of course, still had to pay for the food. But now it could do so in the following ways:

- (a) by exporting commodities to neutral countries
- (b) via credit in neutral countries
- (c) through the sale of foreign securities or properties
- (d) using foreign securities or properties as collateral
- (e) by the hire of ships
- (f) through the sale of gold if all other methods failed and providing that the Allies agreed to the terms of sale ⁴⁹⁴

The signing of the Brussels accord marked a vital signpost in the overall relaxation of the naval blockade. American delegate Samuel Shartle even went so far as to conclude, “...the wings of the French seem to be clipped. They were when the English took charge at Brussels in the negotiations about food. The results will have a good effect on order in

⁴⁹³ Willis, 56-57.

⁴⁹⁴ ‘The Brussels Convention,’ Peace Conference British Delegation Archives, Supreme Economic Council, Private Papers of Sir P. Waterlow, 1919-1920, TNA, FO 608/281.

Germany.”⁴⁹⁵ Within two days the German government handed over its merchant fleet and the first of two instalments of £100 million in gold marks to the bank of a British consul in Rotterdam as per the agreement. The Allies, in return, reinstated Germany’s fishing privileges in the Baltic and formally began to revictual the country on 19 March 1919.⁴⁹⁶

Realizing that some critics would still object to feeding the Germans before the Allies had even ratified the peace, Hoover released a pre-emptive bulletin worldwide on 1 April 1919. Entitled “Why We Are Feeding Germany,” the Allied Food Director wanted to categorically dispel any doubts in the minds of naysayers. The future of Europe mattered more to Hoover than a show of force or small victory at the peace table. He believed that access to food was a basic human necessity, not a political promise to be taken away or leveraged with the stroke of a pen:

From the point of view of my Western up-bringing, I would say at once,
because we do not kick a man in the stomach after we have licked him.

From the point of view of an economist, I would say that it is because there
are seventy millions of people who must either produce or die, [and] that their
production is essential to the world’s future and that they cannot produce
unless they are fed... no matter how deeply we feel at the present, our vision
must stretch over the next hundred years and we must write now into history
such acts as will stand creditably in the minds of our grandchildren.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁵ Shartle, 61-62.

⁴⁹⁶ ‘Minutes of a Conference held at Brussels on March 13-14, 1919, between the Financial Representatives of the American, British, French and Italian Governments and the Delegates of the German Government, Appendix III,’ in Bane and Lutz, 249-254; ‘Letter from James A. Logan to Commander A. P. Carter, Aide to Admiral Benson re: Fishing Restrictions in the Baltic Removed,’ 19 March 1919, 265.

The efforts of the American Relief Administration aimed to breath new life into stagnant economies and facilitate the postwar reconstruction of Europe. But the peacemakers needed first to step aside and allow the process to occur. Hoover feared that the Allies were bypassing this crucial stage in the reconstruction of Germany in order to see justice served.

His suspicions were ultimately warranted. The Brussels food agreement was the culmination of five months of constant prodding and warnings from Hoover and various intelligence officers detailing the famine conditions in Germany. Five months of discussion as to whether to remove the blockade entirely or relax certain restrictions piecemeal could have been five months better spent revictualling the country in the first place. By early April, the British were fully aware of this miscalculation. Foreign Secretary Balfour even sent a telegram to Second Army Headquarters asking General Plumer to “preserve censorship” in the region over news of the partial relaxation of the blockade. This was a last minute attempt to court the favour of the German people by reminding them that it was Britain – not just the United States – who provided them with food and an out-stretched hand when they were hungry: “Americans will claim that they have been responsible for this raising of the blockade and are likely to take full advantage of it in the Press. [But it is] desirable that H.M.G. should get equal benefit and that the German Press should be given [the] idea that concessions are mainly due to [the] policy of the British Government.”⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁷ American Relief Administration Bulletin, no. 3, 1 April 1919, 2-3. See also, “The Guilt of the Famine,” 22 March 1919, *The Nation*; “Huns Seek to Bargain: Haggling over Food Delivers Results Only in Extending German Hunger,” 23 March 1919, *The Washington Post*.

⁴⁹⁸ ‘Telegram from Arthur Balfour to Second Army Headquarters re: Trading with Firms in Germany,’ 25 March 1919, TNA, FO 608/221/29; idem, ‘Partial Raising of German Blockade,’ 29 March 1919.

The task of convincing the Germans was left to the British Chief of the Armistice Commission, Richard Haking. An often-maligned figure in the historiography of the First World War,⁴⁹⁹ General Haking agreed with Balfour that it was crucial for Britain to take credit as a “prime mover” in the relaxation of the food blockade. He gained valuable insight after discussing the matter further with German delegates General Kurt von Hammerstein and Kurt von Lersner at the German Headquarters in Spa. Hammerstein was especially quick to point out the extraordinary level of praise heaped on the Americans by the German press; they were continually portrayed as “saviours” of the German people. Yet the attitude of the German press towards the British government was less clearly defined. Britain was not seen as outwardly conniving, but it certainly was not viewed alongside Hoover and the American delegation as stalwartly internationalist and humanitarian. But all of that could change, remarked the German delegates, if Britain were to remove the remaining trade restrictions and honour the Brussels agreement to provision the country until the autumn of 1919.⁵⁰⁰ It would have undoubtedly benefitted the Allies to foster goodwill and amity with a new German government that was both figuratively and literally indebted to it. In the end, however, the peacemakers deemed it too risky to remove the blockade at this late stage in the peace negotiations.

Both the diary of Vance McCormick (Chairman of the Superior Blockade Council) and the minutes of the Supreme Economic Council reveal that the Allies, in fact, formulated plans for the re-imposition of the blockade even after concluding the Brussels

⁴⁹⁹ Particularly for the high casualty rates sustained by the BEF’s XI Corp at Loos in September 1915, the Battle of Fromelles in July 1916, and on the Italian Front at the Battle of Caporetto from November 1917 to March 1918.

⁵⁰⁰ ‘Attitude of German Press towards Great Britain,’ 29 March 1919, TNA, FO 608/221/29.

agreement. Spearheaded by the French economist Jacques Seydoux, the Big Four agreed in mid-May to revoke the Brussels accord and reintroduce all trade restrictions in the event that Germany refused to sign the preliminary peace terms.⁵⁰¹ President Wilson later described these council meetings as a series of “struggles with Clemenceau and Lloyd George [in order] to hold them down to justice and reason.”⁵⁰²

Indeed, Wilson’s first preference was for a military occupation of Germany, as he believed that the threat alone was enough to convince the Germans to sign the peace treaty. What real harm would it have done to exert pressure that did not involve leveraging the promise of food? When presented with this other option, Lloyd George dismissed the idea as a costly and time-consuming gamble, while Clemenceau argued that a military occupation was an insult to the Allied forces who legitimately won the war.⁵⁰³ Clemenceau, unlike Lloyd George, was less concerned with the overall financial cost in bringing Germany to justice. The Big Four could not put a price tag on achieving the peace when honour and principle were at stake. Convinced of his moral certitude, Clemenceau viewed the post-Armistice period as a Clauswitzian continuation of war by other means. Why the Allies would ever consider dispensing with the blockade until the war was truly over was beyond him. Speaking candidly to his Allied counterparts, he thought “it may be useful to remind the Germans of the fact that the blockade shall cease at the same moment as the state of war, and that what legally brings a state of war to an

⁵⁰¹ ‘Memorandum from Jacques Seydoux to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Department of Blockade re: Plans for the Blockade of Germany,’ 17 April 1919, TNA, BT 13/74. See also, “All Steps Ready for New Blockade: Allied Council Completes Preparations for Action if Germany Rejects Treaty,” 29 May 1919, *New York Times*.

⁵⁰² Vance McCormick’s Diaries, 15 May 1919, in the Edward Frederick Willis Papers, Box 2, pp. 87, HIA.

⁵⁰³ ‘Minutes of the Twenty-Second Meeting of the Superior Blockade Council, 15 May 1919,’ in Bane and Lutz, 467-472.

end is the exchange of ratifications.”⁵⁰⁴

Wilson, in his private correspondence with McCormick and Hoover, denounced this “survival of the fittest” mentality that motivated the French delegation. He “felt great pity for them,”⁵⁰⁵ but was resigned to the fact that there was little use in discouraging their methods when the Allies were so close to ratifying the Treaty of Versailles. Lloyd George felt much the same as Wilson. The most pressing issue facing the peacemakers was to ensure that the hostilities did not resume. Their next priority was to contain the spread of Bolshevism within Germany’s borders – steps were also being taken to combat the Bolsheviks in Russia – before it threatened the very fabric of European democracy. It was essential to postwar stability that these issues were resolved as soon as possible. Then, and only then, was it time to settle the score.

The Allied and Associated Powers spent six months taking into consideration the new role of Germany in postwar Europe. The peacemakers agreed that the country should be stripped of its overseas possessions in Africa and the Pacific (Article 119) and undergo a drastic reduction in its military and naval power (Article 160 and 181).⁵⁰⁶ Article 231, the so-called “War Guilt clause,” blamed Germany and her allies for starting the war, while the reparations clause (Article 235) set the first sum of payments at 20 billion gold marks to be paid in full by April 1921.⁵⁰⁷ As short-sighted and implacable as the treaty may seem, the peacemakers wanted to craft a system of checks and balances

⁵⁰⁴ Vincent, 115. See also, ‘Minutes of the Twenty-Eighth Meeting of the Superior Blockade Council, 11 June 1919’ in Bane and Lutz, 519; ‘Minutes of the Twenty-Third Meeting of the Supreme Economic Council re: Re-imposition of the Blockade on Germany, 16 June 1919,’ 528-529.

⁵⁰⁵ Vance McCormick’s Diaries.

⁵⁰⁶ Article 160 stipulated that the German army could consist of no more than 7 divisions of infantry and 3 divisions of cavalry, while Article 181 reduced the German fleet to a maximum strength of 6 battleships, 6 light destroyers, 12 destroyers, and 12 torpedo boats. See, *The Treaty of Peace with Germany Signed at Versailles, June 28, 1919* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1921), 13, 20-21.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

whereby Germany was held accountable for its reckless and continued aggression. But did the peacemakers do the exact opposite in their haste to formalize a treaty? According to many Allied participants in the peace negotiations, they certainly did.

John Maynard Keynes' indictment of the Treaty of Versailles as a "Carthaginian Peace" is the most obvious example. Less quoted, but equally evocative of the interwar air of disillusionment with the peace settlement is South African general and Imperial War Cabinet member, Jan Smuts, and his remark to Lloyd George that "such a chance comes but once in a whole era of history – and we missed it."⁵⁰⁸ British diplomat and Middle Eastern expert, Harold Nicolson shared Smuts' misgivings. In his memoir entitled *Peacemaking, 1919* (1933), Nicolson lamented the disorganization and lack of serious political foresight by the Allied diplomats at Versailles.⁵⁰⁹

These negative perceptions of the peacemakers persisted after the Second World War and continued until the late 1960s.⁵¹⁰ It was only when historians gained access to private French archives in the early 1970s (i.e. records concealed from the Nazis during the Second World War) that a cogent revisionist argument emerged. Historians such as Stephen A. Schuker, Sally Marks, and Marc Trachtenberg have used French documents

⁵⁰⁸ Smuts, like Keynes, was in favour of a more lenient peace. He argued throughout the negotiations that the Allies needed to work towards reconciliation with Germany. Alan Sharp, *Consequences of the Peace: The Versailles Settlement; aftermath and legacy, 1919-2010* (London: Haus, 2010), 1.

⁵⁰⁹ Published in 1933 on the heels of Adolf Hitler's rise, Nicolson's work aligned with the period's emphasis on Versailles as flawed settlement, as well as the futility of constructing a lasting peace. William R. Keylor, *The Legacy of the Great War: Peacemaking, 1919* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), 4.

⁵¹⁰ Principally, John M. Thompson, *Russia, Bolshevism, and the Versailles Settlement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966) and Mayer, *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking*. These works viewed the Treaty of Versailles through the lens of the Cold War. Both books argued that that American democracy was offset by the leftist authoritarianism of the Russians even then, but Mayer suggested that the structure of the peace (i.e. the preponderance of the Big Four) was outdated and inherently antagonistic towards the rest of Europe.

to construct a more balanced narrative of the peace process.⁵¹¹ They argue that it was a remarkably hard task to redraw national borders and create a new balance of power in Europe following the war. The Big Four fared relatively well in their historical assessment given these high stakes. There is a great deal of merit to this revisionist trend, but one of the more significant mistakes the Allies made throughout the peace process was in assuming that the retention of the naval blockade would hasten the peace settlement and combat revolutionary upheaval.

In the short-term, the post-Armistice blockade made it difficult for the Germans to refuse the Allies' demands at the peace table, but at what cost to postwar credibility? Herbert Hoover pondered as much in a letter to President Wilson: "I seriously doubt whether when the world has recovered its moral equilibrium that it would consider a [peace] obtained upon such a device as the starving of women and children as being binding upon the German people."⁵¹² After all, how could it be? Accepting the terms of the Treaty of Versailles was the only means by which the Germans could guarantee unrestricted access to food. It took five months after the signing of the Armistice for the peacemakers to even begin to revictual the country.

The Brussels food agreement (14 March 1919) promised Germany the ability to import up to 370,000 tons of food per month, but not a single shipment reached German ports until the second week of July 1919 when the Treaty of Versailles was eventually ratified. By then, hunger and disease had exacted a further toll on the civilian

⁵¹¹ See, Stephen A. Schuker, *American Reparations to Germany, 1919-1933* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); Sally Marks, "Reparations Reconsidered: A Rejoinder," *Central European History* 5, no. 4 (1972): 358-361; Marc Trachtenberg, "Versailles Revisited," *Security Studies* 9, no. 3 (2000): 191-205. See also, Keylor, *The Legacy of the Great War*, 7-8.

⁵¹² Memorandum from Herbert Hoover to President Wilson, 14 May 1919, in the Herbert Hoover Subject Collection, HIA.

population.⁵¹³ Approximately 800 civilians died from hunger each day the post-Armistice blockade was maintained,⁵¹⁴ which prompted German delegates to allege at the peace table: “the hundreds of thousands of non-combatants who have perished since November 11, because of the blockade, were destroyed coolly and deliberately after our opponents had won a certain and assured victory. Remember that when you speak of guilt and atonement.”⁵¹⁵ This speech from Germany’s principal negotiator at Versailles, Ulrich von Brockdorff-Rantzau, clearly illustrates the counter-intuitiveness of bargaining food for peace.

On several occasions David Lloyd George aptly likened the spread of Bolshevism in Germany to a festering disease – the problem needed containing before it subverted the Allies’ genuine attempt to heal war-torn Europe. Yet how could Germany withstand the threat of revolution when its people were waging a daily battle for survival on the home front? The Allies ultimately realized too late in the peace process that Germany’s fragile political state was closely tied to the overall health of the nation. The relaxation of the naval blockade following the signing of the Armistice would not only have ameliorated the plight of many Germans, it might also have improved Allied-German relations in the interwar period. The ramifications associated with prolonging the hunger and suffering of Germany would take years, even decades, to manifest. When they did, however, their social and political impact was wide-ranging.

⁵¹³ “Blockade of Germany to be Raised To-day,” 12 July 1919, *The Times*; Parmalee, 186-187.

⁵¹⁴ Willis, 49. See also, ‘Inter-Allied Scientific Food Commission,’ in the Graham Lusk Papers, Box 1, f. 1, HIA.

⁵¹⁵ Speech of Count Brockdorff-Rantzau on 7 May 1919 at Versailles quoted in Alma Luckau, *The German Delegation at the Paris Peace Conference* (New York: Fertig, 1941), 221.

CHAPTER 7

THE POSTWAR LEGACY OF THE HUNGER BLOCKADE

The Long Shadow of War

When asked after returning from the Paris Peace Conference if he was satisfied with its overall outcome, David Lloyd George replied that, “I did as well as might be expected... considering I was seated between Jesus Christ [Woodrow Wilson] and Napoleon Bonaparte [Georges Clemenceau].”⁵¹⁶ Beyond his usual withering critique of others at the peace table, Lloyd George’s remark highlights the challenge of creating a lasting settlement when strong personalities representing competing national interests were forced to work together to build a new international order that could scarcely be imagined amid the destruction of four years of war. Wilson, of course, was no New World messiah and Clemenceau, although fiercely patriotic, was certainly not militaristic or tyrannical in nature. Both statesmen wanted nothing less than to ratify a treaty that would guarantee peace in Europe for the next one hundred years.

Lloyd George and the British peace delegation had a similar hope for postwar Europe when they arrived in Paris in January 1919. But the reality of the Versailles settlement was that no one left the peace table entirely satisfied. Alfred Zimmern, the German-born classicist who represented Britain at the Paris Peace Conference, aptly summed up the difficulty of constructing such a lasting and comprehensive settlement. “Paris disgusted and depressed me more than I can say,” he revealed in a conversation with fellow delegates Arnold Toynbee and James Headlam-Morley. “The Majestic and

⁵¹⁶ Sean Dennis Cashman, *America in the Age of the Titans: The Progressive Era and World War I* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 526. See also, Martin Kitchen, *Europe Between the Wars*, Second Edition (New York: Routledge, 2006), 33.

Crillion [the two hotels that housed the British and American representatives] were full of unease and heartbroken men.”⁵¹⁷ Headlam-Morley, who was the assistant director of the Political Intelligence Department in the Foreign Office and author of the wartime pamphlet, *The Starvation of Germany* (1917), expressed similar reservations about the entire process: “I have not found one single person here who approves of it as a whole... the total effect is, I am sure, quite indefensible and in fact is, totally unworkable.”⁵¹⁸

The fact that the Allies were finally at peace with Germany – and, later, Austria, Hungary, and Turkey upon signing separate treaties – meant that the naval blockade of the Central Powers could be raised once and for all.⁵¹⁹ The lifting of the economic sanctions, however, offered no assurances that international trade and diplomatic relations would resume along prewar lines for either the Allies or the Central Powers. Indeed, the total cost of the war stood at \$180 billion US. That staggering figure, in conjunction with the 8.5 million soldiers killed in action, 21 million wounded, and more than 8 million civilian casualties, clearly shows how the First World War cast a long shadow over the twentieth century.⁵²⁰

France unquestionably fared the worst over the course of the war in terms of economic strife, number of war dead, and the physical destruction of its territory.⁵²¹ Although it is difficult to compile a definitive balance sheet of the war’s physical and financial toll, the chart below, Table 4, illustrates the comparative “destruction of human

⁵¹⁷ Sharp, 3-4. See also, Agnes Headlam-Morley and Russell Bryant eds., *Sir James Headlam-Morley: A Memoir of the Paris Peace Conference, 1919* (London: Methuen, 1972), 161.

⁵¹⁸ James Headlam-Morley, *The Starvation of Germany* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1917).

⁵¹⁹ ‘Extracts from Minutes of Twenty-Fourth Meeting of the Supreme Economic Council,’ 23 June 1919, in Bane and Lutz, 540; idem, ‘Termination of Restrictions upon Trade with Germany,’ 25 June 1919, 547. See also, Vance McCormick’s Diaries, 24 June 1919, pp. 112, HIA.

⁵²⁰ Stevenson, *Cataclysm*, 410, 442; Herwig, *The First World War*, 446.

⁵²¹ Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert, *Capital Cities at War: Paris, London, Berlin, 1914-1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 102-103.

and financial capital”⁵²² based on prewar figures. In total, France’s war dead (1.3 million soldiers and 350,000 civilians) accounted for just over 7 percent of the country’s population between the ages of 15 and 49. Britain, meanwhile, lost over 3 percent of its population ages 15 to 49 (723,000 troops and approximately 17,000 civilians),⁵²³ while the United States suffered far fewer casualties (100,000 soldiers and 750 civilians) due to its late entry into the war in April 1917.

Loss of Human and Financial Capital (% Prewar Assets)

Countries	Human Capital		Financial Capital
Allies:			
Britain	3.6		14.9
France	7.2		54.7
Russia	2.3		-----
Italy	3.8		-----
United States	0.3		-----
Central Powers:			
Germany	6.3		54.7*
Austria-Hungary	4.5		-----
Turkey and Bulgaria	6.8		-----

[Table 4] Source: Stephen Broadberry and Mark Harrison, “The Economics of World War I: A Comparative Analysis,” *Annual Meeting of the Economic History Association*, Toronto, Canada (August 2005), 17, 31.

* This figure includes the German reparation bill and, in the case of human capital, does not include civilian deaths attributable to the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918.

In comparison to the Allies, however, the Central Powers lost a greater percentage of their population to the war. When these military and civilian casualties are compared with prewar figures, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Turkey, and Bulgaria experienced a combined loss of nearly 6 percent of their population ages 15 to 49, while Britain, France, Italy, Russia, and the U.S. lost roughly 3 percent. As for the total financial burden, the

⁵²² Broadberry and Harrison, “The Economics of World War I,” 31.

⁵²³ Stevenson, *Cataclysm*, 442; Kramer, 40; British War Office, *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War, 1914-1920* (London: H.M.S.O., 1922), 339, 674-676.

First World War cost France more than 50 percent of its prewar assets, which persuaded the peacemakers to offset some of the expense through German reparation payments in the sum of 132 billion marks.⁵²⁴ Equalizing the monetary burden of the war was entirely understandable. Most historians of the peace treaty have judged that John Maynard Keynes reacted too harshly when he accused the Allies of “[not] making the future of Europe their concern.”⁵²⁵

On the contrary, the Allies were concerned with the future of Europe; the possibility that Germany would resume fighting on the Western Front and Bolshevism would spread westward throughout Europe. But there were instances where fear trumped other political and moral considerations. The decision to continue blockading Germany after signing the Armistice was a prime example. In their attempt to stave off further bloodshed and revolution, the peacemakers ultimately gave little thought to the long-term implications of using food as a weapon against Germany.

The blockade’s retention allowed the Allies to craft a treaty that Germany had to accept regardless of its objection to certain clauses. Hunger was, of course, a powerful motivator that compelled the German delegation to sign the Treaty of Versailles on 28 June 1919.⁵²⁶ The British Admiralty, Foreign and War Office gambled that the blockade’s continuance after 11 November 1918 would have “a hastening effect upon the

⁵²⁴ Broadberry and Harrison, 31. See also, Marc Trachtenberg, “Reparations at the Paris Peace Conference,” *Journal of Modern History* 51, no. 1 (March 1979): 32-34; Lu, 6-7, 23; Harold Glenn Moulton, *The Reparation Plan: An Interpretation of the Reports of the Expert Committees appointed by the Reparation Committee, 30 November 1923* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1970); David Felix, *Walther Rathenau and the Weimar Republic: The Politics of Reparations* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971); Bruce Kent, *The Spoils of War: The Politics, Economics, and Diplomacy of Reparations, 1918-1932* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

⁵²⁵ Instead, Keynes charged that the Big Four blindly crafted a peace settlement that prioritized “revenge” and “imperial aggrandizements” over prudent financial policy. See John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (London: MacMillan, 1919), 56; Catherine Ann Cline, “British Historians and the Treaty of Versailles,” *Albion* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 43-44.

⁵²⁶ Keegan, 420; Donson, 136.

[peace] negotiations” by forcing the Germans to summarily agree to the Allies’ peace terms.⁵²⁷ Yet they clearly misjudged how the blockade’s strategic use throughout the war and post-Armistice period would affect the peace in the years to come.

This chapter traces the postwar legacy of the Allied naval blockade and argues that its destructive effects spurred two significant developments in international relations over the course of the next thirty years. One major consequence of the Allies’ decision to use food as a weapon during the First World War was a new prominence for international relief organizations and their role in providing assistance to fragile, war-torn nations. Several charitable organizations in Britain and America, for example, were either created to combat hunger in Germany once the naval blockade was raised or lent their support to the relief effort. Their initial attempts to send aid, however, were somewhat controversial. With the economic sanctions lifted, many argued that the Central Powers ought to take care of themselves. Although raising money for enemy children was not regarded as an especially patriotic activity, the thought of “watching children starve to death without making an attempt to save them”⁵²⁸ proved powerful enough for organizations such as Save the Children and the Quakers to override the bitterness of the war years.

Malnutrition was rampant throughout Europe in 1919, but Germany and Austria were particularly affected because of the continuation of the Allied naval blockade. In fact, more German civilians died of hunger during the eight months after the Armistice was signed until the ratification of the Treaty of Versailles than in any single year of the

⁵²⁷ ‘Memorandum re: Reasons for Continuance of the Blockade,’ 22 January 1919, TNA, T 1/12275.

⁵²⁸ Eglantyne Jebb, “A History of the Save the Child Fund,” *Records of the Save the Children Fund* 3, no. 1 (1922): 2.

war. A brief look at German casualty statistics over the course of the conflict shows that nearly 350,000 civilians died from the effects of malnutrition from January 1918 to June 1919. It is remarkable to note that 40 percent of those deaths (or 140,000 civilian casualties) occurred in the month of November 1918.⁵²⁹

Civilian Deaths in Germany Per Annum Since 1914-1919

* Total civilian deaths in Germany in 1913 = 945,835

Year	Military Deaths	Civilian Deaths	Excess Deaths
1914	241,343	988,204	42,369
1915	434,034	954,706	8,871
1916	320,468	957,586	11,571
1917	281,905	1,000,433	68,598
1918	379,777	1,216,882	271,047
1919	14,314	1,017,284	71,449
Totals:	1,671,841	6,135,095	473,905

[Table 5] Source: N. P. Howard, "The Social and Political Consequences of the Allied Food Blockade of Germany, 1918-1919," *German History* 11, no. 2 (1993): 166.

The second major legacy or consequence of the Allied naval blockade was the political and psychological impact it had on German military and economic thought in the interwar period. Access to food – either through domestic production and/or the forcible requisitioning of goods – became an obsession with Nazi economists and military planners in the years leading up to the Second World War. Their aim was to ensure that Germany would never again endure the starvation, agony, and defeat of 1914-1919. Food experts such as the agronomist Herbert Backe, for instance, advocated that the Third Reich should pursue living space (*Lebensraum*) in the East by starving millions

⁵²⁹ N. P. Howard, 166.

of ethnic Slavs and appropriating their lands.⁵³⁰ Backe's ruthless "Hunger Plan" ultimately provided a powerful economic and racial justification for Germany to invade the Soviet Union in June 1941.

Food and war invariably went hand-in-hand for many Nazis who had experienced the effects of the Allied blockade as either hungry, demoralized soldiers or malnourished children on the home front. As Adolf Hitler privately told a Swiss diplomat in early 1939, "I need the Ukraine, in order that no one is able to starve us again, as in the last war."⁵³¹ Avoiding a repeat of the First World War, however, meant that other "less desirable" races would have to starve in the next war. Although the Allies continued to blockade Germany after the Armistice as a way to safeguard against renewed fighting and the spread of Bolshevism by speeding the conclusion of peace, the political impact of the prolonged sanctions was quite different and much longer-lived than intended.

Fight the Famine

Social activists in Britain and the United States regarded famine relief in postwar Germany as a moral obligation. Many of them came from privileged backgrounds, were well educated, and had a history of commitment to social reform in their own country. In Britain, these activists had either worked or volunteered in army hospitals during the war or were privy to the famine conditions in Europe as Members of Parliament, while ethnic background (i.e. German heritage) and religious affiliation (the Quakers) were more influential factors for anti-blockade activists in America. Other defining features of the movement include the prominent role of women in famine relief work and the

⁵³⁰ Gesine Gerhard, "Food and Genocide: Nazi Agrarian Politics in the Occupied Territories of the Soviet Union," *Contemporary European History* 18, no. 1 (2009): 45-46.

⁵³¹ Alex J. Kay, *Exploitation, Resettlement, and Mass Murder: Political and Economic Planning for German Occupation Policy in the Soviet Union, 1940-1941* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 89.

emphasis on helping children to overcome the hardships of war.

No civilian exemplified the relentless desire to feed the starving children of Europe quite like Eglantyne Jebb. Born in Shropshire, England to a well-off Anglican family in 1876, Jebb studied History at the first all-female college at Oxford and trained as a primary school teacher in the late 1890s.⁵³² Her first exposure to international relief work came on the eve of the Second Balkan War (the spring of 1913) after learning of the plight of Christians living in war-torn Macedonia from her brother-in-law Charles Buxton. “Charlie” Buxton, a lawyer and former Liberal MP, had established the Balkan Committee in 1902 with the help of Irish playwright and social activist George Bernard Shaw, political theorist Leonard Hobhouse, and journalist and, later, government propagandist Charles Masterman. The Committee’s objective was to draw attention to the political instability in the Balkan region, an area that Buxton continually referred to as “the danger point of Europe.”⁵³³

In 1903, the Committee expanded to include a charitable organization, the Macedonian Relief Fund.⁵³⁴ As tensions rose again in the Balkans in 1912, Buxton approached Jebb to personally supervise the distribution of Balkan aid. She eagerly obliged and took up the cause, raising additional funds until her departure in February 1913.⁵³⁵ Her travels to Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria, and Serbia brought her face-to-face with strident nationalists whose religious and political zeal she found deeply troubling.

⁵³² Clare Mulley, *The Woman Who Saved the Children: A Biography of Eglantyne Jebb, Founder of Save The Children* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2009), 9, 30.

⁵³³ Patrick Wright, *Iron Curtain: From Stage to Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 167-168

⁵³⁴ For a more detailed discussion of Macedonian politics at the turn of the twentieth century see; Duncan M. Perry, *The Politics of Terror: The Macedonian Liberation Movements, 1893-1903* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1988); F. R. Bridge, ed., *Austro-Hungarian documents relating to the Macedonian Struggle, 1896-1912* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1976).

⁵³⁵ Linda Mahood, “Eglantyne Jebb: Remembering, Representing and Writing a Rebel Daughter,” *Women’s History Review* 17, no. 1 (February 2008): 12.

She could not understand, for instance, why Catholic Albanians (a religious minority in the region) were being massacred by Serbians simply on account of their religion.

At first, she thought the reports from British officials exaggerated the tensions between the various ethnic groups, yet she later discovered that the Serbian military went to great lengths to conceal the murders. Jebb's time in the Balkans confirmed for her that the prewar "distinctions of nationality and race had permanently lost their importance." What mattered more to her was an "insistence upon the unity of mankind."⁵³⁶ She approached famine relief in postwar Europe with a similar desire to rebuild the trust between erstwhile enemies – this time, the Allies and the Central Powers.⁵³⁷ Jebb knew firsthand from volunteering in the Balkans that children (and the elderly) were often the first to suffer from the effects of war.⁵³⁸ The protracted and truly global nature of the First World War meant that many more civilians fell victim to hunger, sickness, and disease.

Both Jebb and her younger sister Dorothy, Charlie Buxton's wife, were acutely aware of the famine conditions in postwar Europe. In August 1915, Dorothy Buxton began translating and publishing excerpts from French and German newspapers in order to provide the British public with a more balanced view of the war. Readership of the pamphlets skyrocketed and she hired additional linguists in Italian, Russian, Hungarian, and Romanian to keep up with the public demand. Buxton's excerpts were later serialized in the *Cambridge Magazine* – a prominent intellectual publication with anti-

⁵³⁶ Mulley, 148.

⁵³⁷ See Francesca Mary Wilson, *A Rebel Daughter of a Country House: The Life of Eglantyne Jebb, Founder of Save The Children* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1967); Linda Mahood, *Feminism and Voluntary Action; Eglantyne Jebb and Save the Children, 1876-1928* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 101; Lynne M. Healy, *International Social Work: Professional Action in an Independent World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 169-170; Helen Jones, *Women in British Public Life, 1914-1950: Gender, Power, and Social Policy* (New York: Longman, 2000), 108.

⁵³⁸ Mulley, 1.

war leanings.

It was obvious to the Jebbs that Britain's blockade of the Central Powers posed a great health risk to the people of Europe, as even countries allied with Britain experienced serious hunger and deprivation. By early 1917, for example, reports from the Romanian press told of the harsh home front conditions in which many froze to death in their homes due to a shortage of coal. Meanwhile, it was not uncommon to see children in the streets of Belgium and Luxembourg "searching dustbins [for food] like starved dogs."⁵³⁹ News that the Allies had signed a ceasefire agreement with Germany therefore gave Jebb, Dorothy Buxton, and Buxton's husband a sense of hope that the worst of the famine was over. They believed that the conclusion of the Armistice was the first step to restore peace and thereby save one more family from hunger and misery. In the days that followed, however, Charlie Buxton's secretary noted, "I shall never forget the sense of crisis which pervaded the household," when the family learned that the Allies were continuing the blockade of Germany after the Armistice.⁵⁴⁰

The Jebb sisters were irate that the Allies would knowingly prolong the suffering of millions for the sake of a signature on a peace treaty. Jebb, in particular, struggled to reconcile her love of King and country with the continuance of a policy that she found extraordinarily cruel. She further explored these themes of guilt and morality in a poem on the post-Armistice blockade:

Now over our afternoon tea, dear friend,
Let's consult together why
We're starving sixty million people, between us,
You and I...

⁵³⁹ Ibid., 214.

⁵⁴⁰ Mulley, 219-220. See also, "Reports from the Field," June 1919, Box A413, Reel 32, Papers of Eglantyne Jebb, Save the Children Fund Archive, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, England.

Is it to make them accept terms of peace, which they otherwise wouldn't?
 Or is it to get hold of markets we otherwise couldn't?
 Do we want the food – though it's more than
 We could eat – for our own poor nations?
 Or do we simply want to reduce the enemy population?
 ...The fact is I want to know what to say
 When asked what my motives exactly were, by God, at the Judgment Day.
 For I've an increasing suspicion,
 Although hitherto I have hid it.
 God will not let us off scot[-]free
 When we say that the Government did it.⁵⁴¹

Jebb wrote the piece in late November 1918 amidst the groundswell of British patriotism that accompanied the defeat of the Central Powers and Lloyd George's call for a general election.⁵⁴² Although the poem was never published, it clearly articulated her disgust for the continued suffering of millions and explored the idea of personal guilt for the "sins" or actions of a government.

Typical of both their social status and political outlook, Jebb and Buxton were active members of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) – a vibrant non-profit organization created in 1915 to promote a peaceful end to the war. At a December 1918 meeting of the London chapter, the sisters decided to form a political pressure group to raise awareness of the famine conditions in Central Europe. Soon Marian Ellis, a founding member of WILPF and the wife of Liberal MP Lord Parmoor, joined the cause and enlisted the help of her husband and his influential friends.⁵⁴³ Parmoor's political connections included Labour party leader Ramsay MacDonald, G. B. Shaw, and author H. G. Wells. It was their vocal support and financial

⁵⁴¹ Mulley, 225-226.

⁵⁴² There had not been a general election in Britain for eight years. Therefore, Lloyd George hoped to capitalize on the Allied victory over the Central Powers by promising the British people a peace treaty that would hold Germany accountable for the war. For more information on the British general election and its impact on the continuation of the naval blockade of Germany after 11 November 1918 see pp. 136-139.

⁵⁴³ Mulley, 228.

backing that led to the creation of the Fight the Famine Council on 1 January 1919. The immediate goal of the Council was to convince Lloyd George's government to raise the post-Armistice blockade. The second and longer-term aim was to secure international loans in order to purchase and transport food to famine stricken areas in Germany, Austria, and Russia.⁵⁴⁴

Parallels can certainly be drawn between the monumental relief efforts of Herbert Hoover's American Relief Administration (ARA) and the aims of the Fight the Famine Council in Britain. Both organizations recognized the doubly destructive nature of the continued blockade; it possessed no military value after 11 November and forced Hoover to divert precious foodstuffs intended for Allied, neutral, and liberated countries in order to prevent further starvation in Germany.⁵⁴⁵ Hoover particularly resented how the Allies – blinded by the power of the hunger blockade – repeatedly interfered with the ARA's ability to revictual Europe. He warned them against the long-term implications of starving the Germans, arguing that famine-stricken areas were far more prone to political extremism and violence than an adequately fed and well-cared-for population.⁵⁴⁶ Both the ARA and the Fight the Famine Council knew that the only real cure for hunger and disaffection was a massive dose of humanitarian aid administered closely by the Allies.

Save the Children

As the founder and general secretary of the Fight the Famine Council, Jebb wanted to alert the British public to the fact that their government was starving the enemy after the Armistice. She believed that the most compelling way to illustrate the devastating impact

⁵⁴⁴ Lord Parmoor, *The Policy and the Work of the Fight the Famine Council* (London: Swarthmore Press Ltd., 1920), 1-3.

⁵⁴⁵ Hoover, *Memoirs*, 335. See also, Bullitt Lowry, *Armistice 1918*, 174.

⁵⁴⁶ Bane and Lutz, 'European Food Situation: Mr. Hoover's Analysis,' 16 November 1918, 16-18.

of the blockade was to graphically show the damage caused by chronic malnutrition. Using photographs of German and Austrian children obtained by Allied medical doctors, and given to Buxton in late 1918, Jebb distributed leaflets with a picture of a starving baby to passersby in Trafalgar Square on 15 April 1919. The leaflets showed a small female child in Vienna with a disproportionately large head supported by tiny limbs and a shrunken torso (Figure 10). At first glance, the child's body resembled that of a three to five month old infant weighing just over 12 lbs. The leaflet stated, however, that the child was actually two and a half years old, at least 16 lbs. underweight for her age, and had failed to reach proper growth milestones because of severe malnutrition.⁵⁴⁷

There were millions of innocent children who were directly impacted by the Allies' decision to continue blockading the Central Powers. Conservative estimates, like those listed in Table 5, suggest that Germany suffered nearly 500,000 "excess" civilian casualties from August 1914 to June 1919. Meanwhile, Britons went about their usual business – they shopped, went to work, raised their children, worried about their loved ones at the front, and, of course, were grateful that the Allies finally defeated the Germans.⁵⁴⁸

Jebb knew that she faced an uphill battle in convincing her country to look beyond its grief and sadness in order to "save the children." Public support would go a long way into pressuring the government to raise the blockade, but she realized that others either did not care what happened to the children of the enemy or simply would

⁵⁴⁷ Francesca Mary Wilson, 174. See also, Jones, 79-82.

⁵⁴⁸ In comparison to Imperial Germany, standard of living actually improved in wartime Britain, especially for lower socio-economic classes, due to gaping holes in the labour market left by soldiers at the front. Access to adequate rations also ensured that Britain did not go hungry during the First World War. Jay Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), 279; Bryder, 142.



[Figure 10] A leaflet distributed by the Fight the Famine Council in Trafalgar Square in April 1919. Its purpose was to raise awareness of the blockade's devastating impact on the starving children of Europe, especially those in enemy countries like Germany and Austria. Source: Clare Mulley, *The Woman Who Saved the Children: A Biography of Eglantyne Jebb, Founder of Save the Children* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009), Plate 16.

not take the time to educate themselves. Either way, she persisted in educating the masses, wholeheartedly believing that "... every tin of babies' food which private effort can send out comes as a token of sympathy and a message of new hope to some despairing mother."⁵⁴⁹ Thus the Fight the Famine Council tried to appeal to the kindness and decency of most Britons, arguing it was a lack of public knowledge – not genuine hatred of the enemy – that allowed the blockade to continue unchecked.⁵⁵⁰

Trafalgar Square, apart from being a very visible area in central London, was a known site for public protests dating back to 1848 when the working class Chartists took over the Square to protest parliamentary corruption. For both reasons Jebb selected the site and she chose well, as thousands of leaflets were distributed that April afternoon. It can be assumed that some passersby disposed of the leaflet without ever looking at its contents, while others may have glanced at the image of the starving baby and given it no further thought. Others, still, might have been outraged that they were being unfairly asked to provide for the wellbeing of enemy children who "will only grow up to kill us again in twenty-five years."⁵⁵¹ She nevertheless wanted to let people in Britain know that widespread starvation was occurring at the hands of the Allies.

One particular group whose attention Jebb caught was the Metropolitan Police. Although public protesting was not an illegal act, the distribution of "seditious" material (i.e. the "Starving Baby" leaflets) was enough to arrest her under the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA).⁵⁵² There is no doubt that the arrest was excessive, yet it actually

⁵⁴⁹ Mulley, 245.

⁵⁵⁰ Lord Parmoor, *The Famine in Europe, the Facts and Suggested Remedies* (London: Swarthmore Press Ltd., 1920), 14.

⁵⁵¹ This quote came from Fight the Famine Council member Lady Norah Bentnick, who described a common sentiment among Britons who thought it futile to provide the Germans with famine relief following the war. See, Mulley, 252.

⁵⁵² Mulley, 241-242.

aided the Fight the Famine cause in a way that the Jebb sisters could never have imagined possible. For instance, Jebb could have been fined £5 per pamphlet under the Defence of the Realm Act. Several thousand were handed out in Trafalgar Square, but given that the court could not determine exactly how many leaflets were distributed, she was only fined £5 for the initial offense. The value of the fine was, of course, more symbolic than punitive. Yet she still had to stand trial for sedition the following month. In front of a packed courtroom at Mansion House, the official residence of the Lord Mayor of London, Jebb maintained that she was innocent, brazenly telling the judge: “it never occurred to me that a purely humanitarian plea had anything to do with the defence of the realm.”⁵⁵³

The judge, however, was unmoved by Jebb’s testimony and found her guilty of distributing political propaganda on 15 May 1919. In recounting the verdict to her family, Jebb viewed the outcome of the trial as “equivalent to victory.” Indeed, upon exiting the courtroom the prosecuting attorney felt compelled to reimburse Jebb the £5 and insisted she use the money for famine relief in Germany. That small yet symbolic donation was the first of many that Jebb collected in an effort to ameliorate the suffering of millions starving under the Allied blockade.

Capitalizing on the publicity of Jebb’s recent trial, Buxton used her husband’s contacts to book the Royal Albert Hall as the venue to launch the creation of the Save the Children Fund (SCF) four days later.⁵⁵⁴ “Save the children!” was the phrase Jebb yelled to passersby as she distributed leaflets in Trafalgar Square; the name of the fund conveyed the urgency of the cause by focusing on a large segment of the enemy

⁵⁵³ ‘Raise The Blockade Leaflets,’ *The Times*, 16 May 1919; ‘Blockade Poster Fines,’ *Daily Mail*, 16 May 1919.

⁵⁵⁴ Mulley, 242-243.

population – young children – who were clearly not responsible for their government’s misdeeds. The gathering at the Royal Albert Hall raised more than £30,000 for famine relief in Central Europe. Furthermore, it brought national attention and political legitimacy to a cause that hitherto had been considered unpatriotic in Britain.⁵⁵⁵

The next step was to bring international awareness to the humanitarian efforts of the SCF.

Undoubtedly, Jebb’s “greatest fundraising coup” occurred in the winter of 1919 when Pope Benedict XV lent his support to the Save the Children Fund with a donation of £25,000. He had received a letter from the SCF several months before detailing the extent of the famine and agreed to meet with Jebb in Rome. In addition to the private donation, Pope Benedict vowed that he would write an encyclical letter to Catholic bishops around the world asking that they take up a collection for the SCF in their dioceses on Holy Innocents’ Day.⁵⁵⁶ Benedict’s letter marked the first time in the history of the Catholic Church that the Vatican officially supported a non-denominational (and humanitarian) cause. The result was impressive. Catholic parishioners worldwide gave £400,000 – the contemporary equivalent of £13 million – to the Save the Children Fund by the end of December 1919. As international awareness of the movement grew, so too, did the donations. The SCF reached a landmark £1 million (more than £29 million by today’s standards) by its first anniversary and even counted David Lloyd George’s wife

⁵⁵⁵ Siân Roberts, “Exhibiting Children at Risk: Child Art, International Exhibitions, and the Save the Children Fund in Vienna, 1919-1923,” *Paedagogica Historica* 45, no. 1 (February- April 2009): 172. See also, Johannes-Dieter Steinert, “British Humanitarian Assistance: Wartime Planning and Postwar Realities” *Journal of Contemporary History* 43, no. 3 (July 2008): 422-424.

⁵⁵⁶ Holy Innocents’ Day is a Christian day of remembrance on 28 December for the massacre of all male children in Bethlehem by Herod the Great, the Roman client king of Judea. Pope Benedict’s encyclical letter read: “Not only are they completely innocent and even ignorant of the sanguine struggle which has saddened the whole world, but they are the seed of future generations which cannot but suffer from their debilitation... In our grief we have been not a little comforted to learn that some humane persons have inaugurated a society to ‘Save the Children.’” Mulley, 267-268. See also, Mary M. Doyle Roche, *Children, Consumerism, and the Common Good* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2009), 54; John F. Pollard, *Benedict XV: The Unknown Pope and the Pursuit of Peace* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 2000).

among its more active members.⁵⁵⁷

Jebb and Buxton's history with the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, helped inspire the League's founder, Jane Addams, to work with Hoover in organizing a joint Quaker-ARA drive in the United States for famine relief. The relationship with Addams sparked a very fruitful partnership with the American Friends Service Committee (a Quaker based organization established to help civilian victims of the First World War), which assumed the actual responsibility for feeding enemy children.⁵⁵⁸ By late 1920, the Quakers had built more than 3,300 child-feeding centres in 88 cities throughout Germany. These centres were essentially small soup kitchens/nutritional clinics that aimed to feed as many sick and undernourished children as possible. Based on records from the American Relief Administration, the Quaker-SCF child-feeding program served 293 million meals to more than 1 million hungry German children by December 1921.⁵⁵⁹ Although the American Friends Service Committee halted countrywide operations in 1922, the program continued for another two years under the direction of Major General Henry T. Allen, the Commander of U.S. Army troops in the Rhineland.⁵⁶⁰

Several conclusions can be drawn from the humanitarian relief work of organizations such as the Fight the Famine Council, Save the Children Fund, and the

⁵⁵⁷ In fact, Margaret Lloyd George served as the Vice President of the Save the Children Fund.

⁵⁵⁸ 'Ebert Welcomes Agents of Hoover,' *New York Times*, 5 June 1920; Charles E. Strickland, "American Aid to Germany, 1919-1921," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 45, no. 4 (Summer 1962): 256; Dominique Marshall, "Children's Rights and Children's Action in International Relief and Domestic Welfare: The Work of Herbert Hoover between 1914 and 1950," *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* (Fall 2008): 355-356, 369.

⁵⁵⁹ Sidney Brooks, *American Relief Administration Abroad, A Series of Occasional Papers, no. 12: American Aid to Germany, 1918-1925* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1943), in the Sidney Brooks Papers, HIA, 15-19. See also, 'Germans Try To Get Hoover Food Prizes,' *New York Times*, 9 May 1920.

⁵⁶⁰ Herbert Hoover re: German Child Relief, 16 November 1923 - 25 March 1924, in the Herbert Hoover Papers, HIA. See also, 'General Allen Starts Food To Germany,' *New York Times*, 13 December 1923.

American Friends Service Committee in the wake of the Allied decision to continue the blockade after 11 November 1918. First, it points to the fact that knowledge of the famine in Central Europe was enough to convince many high profile social activists to protest its continuance. Time and again, they publicly risked appearing unpatriotic in order to raise awareness of the ongoing starvation of the enemy. Second, it was their emphasis on the needless suffering of children that struck a universal chord. Thousands worldwide generously opened their wallets (and hearts) to a cause far greater than vengeance or retribution. Morality was the overwhelming factor that motivated these non-governmental organizations to feed and clothe the children of the enemy. In doing so, they established an international tradition of postwar relief work that continues to this day.⁵⁶¹

But that is only part of the historical narrative. Charity was given to the Germans primarily out of guilt over the death of civilians. Indeed, speaking as the newly appointed Secretary of State for War, Winston Churchill was quoted in *The Times* as stating: “it is repugnant to the British nation to use this weapon of starvation which falls mainly upon the women and children, upon the old, the weak, and the poor, after all the fighting has stopped.”⁵⁶² Famine relief was too little, too late to help the elderly and infirm. Humanitarian organizations had to prioritize which mouths to feed. Although German children were fed first in almost every instance of postwar famine relief, memories of the endemic hunger lingered long after the blockade was raised.

⁵⁶¹ Bruno Cabanes, *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism, 1918-1924* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁵⁶² ‘Speedy Enforcement of Peace,’ *The Times*, 4 March 1919; Great Britain, House of Lords Debate, Food Situation in Central Europe, vol. 33, cc575-88, 6 March 1919. See also, Antony Lentin, *Guilt at Versailles: Lloyd George and the Pre-history of Appeasement* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1985).

National Socialism and the Push for German Autarky

The Allied naval blockade remained a potent “weapon of starvation” in German eyes for years to come. Ultimately, it confirmed for German leaders how important it was to avoid starvation in the event of another European war and catalyzed the push for economic self-sufficiency in the 1920s and 1930s. Similar to Britain and the U.S. in the years following the First World War, Germany turned inward after 1919 and focused on domestic politics. This political shift – eschewing *Realpolitik* in favour of social and economic concerns – reflected urgent necessity.

The Weimar Republic formally came into being after its first president, Social Democratic Party (SPD) leader, Friedrich Ebert, quashed a series of uprisings by the far right and the radical left.⁵⁶³ Ending the violence through the use of state sanctioned paramilitary groups,⁵⁶⁴ signing the peace treaty, and a new democratic constitution, were intended to bring much-needed stability to postwar Germany. These actions, although well intended, nevertheless plagued the Republic with a sense of illegitimacy and reputation for unpopular compromises.⁵⁶⁵ The new republic was also isolated within the community of nations.

Unlike the Congress of Vienna, where the victors sat around the peace table with the vanquished after Napoleon’s defeat, the Central Powers had deliberately been excluded from the peace talks. Moreover, the Versailles settlement stipulated that Germany should be denied entry to the League of Nations, the newly formed

⁵⁶³ Roger B. Myerson, “Political Economics and the Weimar Disaster” *Journal of Institutional and Theoretical Economics* 160, no. 2 (June 2004): 192.

⁵⁶⁴ These paramilitary groups, namely, the right-wing *Freikorps*, acted as a reserve army for Ebert throughout the German Revolution.

⁵⁶⁵ Detlev J. K. Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*, trans. Richard Deveson (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 49.

intergovernmental organization for collective security. Although the League later overturned the decision in 1926 as part of a larger rapprochement with Germany, the Republic was born of defeat and, consequently, spent the next four to five years sidelined from international affairs.⁵⁶⁶

It took Germany until late 1925 for industrial production to function at 83 percent of its prewar rate. The interests of German agriculture and heavy industry, as in most countries, did not typically align.⁵⁶⁷ Prewar agricultural interests groups, such as the conservative-minded Agrarian League, competed with the titans of German industry – e.g. the steel company Krupp, chemical giant IG Farben, and electric company AEG – for political favour and a greater share of gross national product. Yet the collapse of the *Kaiserreich* and the inherent constraints of a fragile postwar economy provided a rare opportunity for rural interests to finally align with the aims of big business.⁵⁶⁸ Both groups wanted the Weimar Republic to institute protectionist tariffs to promote the consumption of domestic goods over foreign imports.

President Ebert and the Social Democrats, however, had already made it their priority to reintegrate Germany into the global postwar economy. This meant promoting free trade and pan-European cooperation; in essence, a complete reversal of the protectionist policies of Imperial Germany and those espoused by the old Agrarian League.⁵⁶⁹ Ultimately, two political parties were able to capitalize on the economic and political uncertainty. Both emerged out of the rubble of the First World War and

⁵⁶⁶ Christoph M. Kimmich, *Germany and the League of Nations* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1977).

⁵⁶⁷ This figure is slightly misleading, as hyperinflation and a grossly devalued Papiermark largely accounted for the jump in productivity. Peukert, 120. See also, Albrecht Ritschl, “Spurious Growth in German Output Data, 1913-1938,” *European Review of Economic History* 8, no. 2 (August 2004): 201-223.

⁵⁶⁸ Robert Millward, *The State and Business in the Major Powers: An Economic History, 1815-1939* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 84-85.

⁵⁶⁹ The “new course” of Chancellor Leo von Caprivi c. 1890-1894, notwithstanding.

espoused similar extreme right-wing views on anti-Semitism, the Treaty of Versailles, and national or *völkisch* pride.⁵⁷⁰

The first organization founded in 1918 was the German National People's Party (DNVP), who garnered much of the rural conservative vote in the 1925 Reichstag elections.⁵⁷¹ The second political party founded in 1920 was the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP, more commonly abbreviated as the Nazis), who presented themselves as a "dynamic, modern totalitarian" movement compared to the flagging influence and popularity of the old elites.⁵⁷² Here were two clear alternatives to the German Democratic Party (the moderate liberals), the Social Democrats, and even the resolute Catholic Centre. Both the DNVP and the National Socialists appealed to the more ardent of German conservatives, but only one party actually translated the people's discontent – both urban and rural and male and female concerns – into more electoral votes.

The National Socialists were particularly able to capitalize on the widespread economic and political uncertainty after the stock market crash of October 1929. They won more than 18 percent of the popular vote in the watershed federal election of September 1930 and became the second largest party in the Reichstag next to the SPD. Under the fanatical leadership of Adolf Hitler, party membership rose dramatically from

⁵⁷⁰ Dieter Gessner, "Agrarian Protectionism in the Weimar Republic," *Journal of Contemporary History* 12, no. 4 (October 1977): 759-778. The most complete English-language analysis of German hyperinflation is Gerald Feldman, *The Great Disorder: Politics, Economics, and Society in the German Inflation, 1914-1924* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), esp. Parts IV and V. See also, Carl-Ludwig Holtfrerich, *The German Inflation, 1914-1923: Causes and Effects in International Perspective* (New York: De Gruyter, 1986).

⁵⁷¹ The DNVP was formed in December 1918 through a merger of the German Conservative Party (DKP) and the Free Conservative Party (FKP). Members of the recently dissolved Fatherland Party and the National Liberals also gravitated towards the DNVP in the wake of the German Revolution.

⁵⁷² Peukert, 279-280.

3,000 Germans in 1921 to 1.6 million in 1933.⁵⁷³ The appeal of National Socialism was exceptionally broad-based; what started out as a primarily urban phenomenon quickly developed into a full-fledged political ideology that attracted a wide cross section of voters and devout party members.⁵⁷⁴

In his insightful study of the Weimar Republic, the late German historian Detlev Peukert came to the conclusion that Germany's defeat in the First World War was the greatest factor that contributed to the nation's "reversion to authoritarianism" in the early 1930s. Unlike previous historians of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Germany, Peukert believed that there was no continuity in German history leading directly from Otto von Bismarck to Hitler.⁵⁷⁵ The key to understanding the Nazis' seizure of power (*Machtergreifung*), then, was in realizing that demography played a significant and undeniable role in shaping Germany's worldview.

⁵⁷³ Richard Overy, *The Dictators: Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 135.

⁵⁷⁴ William Sheridan Allen, *The Nazi Seizure of Power: The Experience of a Single German Town, 1922-1945*, rev. edition (New York: Franklin Watts, 1984); Dee R. Wernette, "Explaining the Nazi Vote: The Findings and Limits of Ecological Analysis," Working Paper no. 134, Center for Research on Social Organizations, University of Michigan (July 1976): 1-27. This is not to suggest that the German Communist Party (KPD) did not appeal to many voters on the opposite end of the political spectrum. See, Timothy S. Brown, *Weimar Radicals: Nazis and Communists Between Authenticity and Performance* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), esp. 90-119.

⁵⁷⁵ Peukert's work is part of a larger historiographical debate on the *Sonderweg* or "special path" of German history. Those who argued in favour of the continuity of German authoritarianism include: Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*; idem, *War of Illusions: German Policies from 1911 to 1914*, trans. Marian Jackson (London: Chatto & Windus, 1975); *From Kaiserreich to Third Reich: Elements of Continuity in German History, 1871-1945*, trans. Roger Fletcher (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986); Sebastian Haffner, *Germany's Self-Destruction: Germany from Bismarck to Hitler*, trans. Jean Steinberg (London: Simon & Schuster, 1989); Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *The German Empire, 1871-1918*, trans. Kim Traynor (New York: Berg Publishers, 1985). Scholars who repudiated the *Sonderweg* thesis include: David Blackburn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); James J. Sheehan, *German Liberalism in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); Konrad H. Jarausch, "From the Second to Third Reich: The Problem of Continuity in German Foreign Policy," *Central European History* 12, no. 1 (March 1979): 68-82; Larry Eugene Jones, *German Liberalism and the Dissolution of the Weimar Party System, 1918-1933* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988). For a more comprehensive overview of the historiographical debate see, James N. Retallack, "Social History with a Vengeance? Some Reactions to Hans-Ulrich Wehler's *Das Deutsche Kaiserreich*," *German Studies Review* 7, no. 3 (October 1984): 423-450; idem, *Imperial Germany, 1871-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Peukert identified four separate generations who wielded power throughout the Republic's lifespan. First was what he referred to as the "Wilhelmine" generation. These were contemporaries of the Kaiser and felt most akin to the Prussian conservatism of Bismarck. President Paul von Hindenburg (b. 1847) and Foreign Minister Walter Rathenau (b. 1867) were typical of this older generation. Next came the "*Gründerzeit*" generation or those who were born in the era of unification (c. 1870). These men often rose to positions of prominence in Weimar politics (e.g. President Ebert and Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann), and were unlikely to share the reactionary views of National Socialism. Instead, Peukert maintained that it was the "wartime" generation who had participated in the conflict (e.g. Hitler and Hermann Göring) or the "superfluous" generation, who grew up during those years, like Heinrich Himmler (b. 1900), that were most affected by the postwar turmoil⁵⁷⁶ and most receptive to National Socialist authoritarianism.⁵⁷⁷

Peukert's demographic theory is by no means indisputable. The vast majority of young German males and demobilized soldiers did not belong to violent paramilitary organizations like the anti-communist *Freikorps* or *Stahlhelm*. Yet there is a definite correlation between what he termed the "superfluous" generation born around 1900 and a political tendency to align with revanchist views of Nazism. More than half of all party members in 1933, in fact, belonged to this age category, while the next largest cohort belonged to the "wartime" generation who "served only a limited and usually bloodless

⁵⁷⁶ All four of these generational labels are Peukert's own. See, Peukert, 14-18.

⁵⁷⁷ Historians Ian Kershaw, Peter Loewenberg, and Tom Taylor all agree that the appeal of Nazism was not a class-based, but rather generational, phenomenon. See Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (London: Arnold, 1985), 145-147; Peter Loewenberg, "The Psychohistorical Origins of the Nazi Youth Cohort," *American Historical Review* 76, no. 5 (December 1971): 1457-1502; Tom Taylor, "Images of Youth and the Family in Wilhelmine Germany: Toward a Reconsideration of the German *Sonderweg*," *German Studies Review* 15 (Winter 1992): 55-73.

tour” of combat. These generations wanted to right the “wrongs” of 1918-1919 and, unlike the postwar youth in Britain, America, and even France, only in Germany and Austria had this generation endured mass starvation on the home front.⁵⁷⁸

The First World War had a profound impact on these impressionable youths who formed the backbone of the Nazi Party. It was not a coincidence that they prioritized German food supply after standing in long breadlines for small and tasteless quantities of rations during the war:

Food shortages among soldiers on the front and civilians at home had deeply demoralized Germany towards capitulation in 1918. It was both fear of a repeat of the disastrous decline in civilian morale and a powerful sense of the German people’s superior entitlement to food[,] which made the National Socialists determined that the German population would not go hungry during the [next] war.⁵⁷⁹

In his never published 700-page follow up to *Mein Kampf* (1928), Hitler envisioned that portions of the Soviet Union would serve as the German version of the American West.⁵⁸⁰ Although the concept of “living space” was not a Nazi invention, it was certainly a longstanding component of Nazi ideology. *Lebensraum*, as a form of cultural imperialism, entailed the confiscation of millions of acres of farmland in Eastern Europe.

⁵⁷⁸ Donson, 153, 237. See also, Benjamin Ziemann, *Contested Commemorations: Republican War Veterans and Weimar Political Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), esp. 198-234; Karl Mannheim, “The Problem of Generations,” in *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952); Adelheid von Saldern, *The Challenge of Modernity: German Social and Cultural Studies, 1890-1960* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 69-70; David D. Roberts, *The Totalitarian Experiment in Twentieth Century Europe: Understanding the Poverty of Great Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 203-205; Maurice Hankey, ‘Memorandum on Blockade and the Laws of War re: Extracts from the Writings of German Leaders bearing its Results,’ 31 October 1927, TNA, ADM 116/3619.

⁵⁷⁹ Lizzie Collingham, *The Taste of War: World War Two and the Battle for Food* (New York: Allen Lane, 2011) 4-5.

⁵⁸⁰ Tooze, 658.

Hitler often spoke of the opportunities that awaited ethnic Germans who “heroically” colonized the East through farming. The reality of attaining this living space, however, was far less noble.⁵⁸¹ In the end, it was not German farmers who secured more territory for the Reich, but rather elite units of *Wehrmacht* soldiers tasked with the physical destruction of an “undesirable” race. Once again, as in the First World War, food was used as a powerful weapon to disarm the enemy.

Herbert Backe and the Nazi Hunger Plan

The Germany that went to war in September 1939 was a nation far more prepared to feed its soldiers and civilians than the Germany of Kaiser Wilhelm. German military planners correctly predicted that Britain would implement a naval blockade in the event of war with the Reich.⁵⁸² Thus, they brainstormed ways to overcome the inevitable loss, as they saw it, of global markets and access to foodstuffs. As early as October 1936, for example, the office of the Four Year Plan was created to oversee the systematic planning and implementation of Germany’s bid for living space in the East.⁵⁸³ As Agriculture Commissioner of the Four Year Plan and State Secretary of the Reich Ministry of Food and Agriculture, forty-year-old Herbert Backe was one of the chief architects of the Nazis’ plan to economically exploit the Soviet Union.

Backe, like so many high-ranking Nazi technocrats, was part of the “superfluous” generation born around the turn of the twentieth century. Too young to participate in the

⁵⁸¹ Anna Bramwell, *Blood and Soil: Richard Walther Darré and Hitler’s Green Party* (Buckinghamshire: Kensal Press, 1985) 159.

⁵⁸² Britain implemented its naval blockade against Nazi Germany on 4 September 1939. Between 1941 and 1942, only 12 ships managed to break through the Allied blockade. Collingham, 35. For a more detailed analysis of British naval strategy during the Second World War see, Stephen Roskill, *The War at Sea, 1939-1945*, 4 vols. (London: H. M. Stationary Office, 1954-1961); idem, *Naval Policy between the Wars*; Middlebrook, *Convoy*; Beveridge, *The Blockade and the Civilian Population*, pp. 2-31, LHCMA.

⁵⁸³ Joachim Lund, “Denmark and the New European Order, 1940-1942,” *Contemporary European History* 13, no. 3 (August 2004): 305-306; Woodruff D. Smith, *The Ideological Origins of Nazi Imperialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), esp. 127-167.

war, yet old enough to remember the stain of defeat and the Treaty of Versailles, this generation of disaffected German youth often turned to political extremism in their twenties. Backe first joined the SA or Stormtroopers (*Sturmabteilung*)⁵⁸⁴ in 1922 and then formally joined the Nazi Party three years later. His formative years, however, were not spent on the German home front. Instead, he was in the unique position of being born to a German family who lived in Russia since at least the 1890s.⁵⁸⁵ As successful German émigrés, his family found themselves the target of Russian distrust when the war broke out in August 1914. They were immediately ostracized by the townspeople and Backe spent the next four years in an internment camp deep in the Ural Mountains.⁵⁸⁶ His imprisonment in a country in which he had spent his entire life completely disabused him of any loyalty towards the Russian people.

After the war, Backe's family settled in Göttingen, Germany, where he studied agriculture at the local university and later attended graduate school in Hanover. His dissertation on the Russian peasantry and international grain market was considered too radical by the deans at Hanover Technical University. They ultimately rejected his thesis for its racially pejorative stance on the "inferiority" of the Soviet Union and denied him his doctorate.⁵⁸⁷ Yet his views on Russian society closely mirrored those espoused by Hitler and the Nazi Party. Backe believed that Russia, as the breadbasket of Europe, had failed to live up to its economic potential because of inherent "Slavic backwardness" and a parochial outlook on the world.⁵⁸⁸ He thought that Germany, in contrast, was far more

⁵⁸⁴ The SA, known colloquially as the "Brownshirts," was a right-wing paramilitary group instrumental in the Nazis' rise to power.

⁵⁸⁵ Though very little is known about Backe's family prior to the First World War.

⁵⁸⁶ Gerhard, 48.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., 49.

⁵⁸⁸ Gesine Gerhard, "Food as a Weapon: Agricultural Sciences and the Building of a Greater German Empire," *Food, Culture & Society* 14, no. 3 (September 2011): 337-338.

innovative and racially “deserving” of territory presently squandered by the Russians.⁵⁸⁹

In the months before the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 (Operation Barbarossa), Backe self-published his dissertation and copies were distributed to the highest-ranking party members on the orders of the *Führer*.⁵⁹⁰ On the strength of his Russian “expertise,” he devised a ruthless plan to secure adequate food for the invading *Wehrmacht* troops and took measures to prevent Germans on the home front from going hungry. The aptly entitled “Hunger Plan” was unveiled to senior Nazi officials at a secret meeting in Berlin on 2 May. The plan called for the division of the Soviet Union into smaller, separate territories based on their economic productivity (i.e. the potential for economic exploitation).

The various regions of the U.S.S.R. were classified as follows; Belarus and northern and central Russia were considered “deficit territories,” while southern Russia, the Caucasus, and Ukraine were labeled “surplus territories.” The first category, as the name implied, encompassed less profitable areas – farmland was either scarce and/or urban centres were few and far between. The surplus zone, however, was considered the crown jewel of the Soviet Union. These regions formed the agricultural heartland of Eastern Europe and it was from this area that the Reich would establish an economic stronghold powerful enough to withstand the enemy blockade.⁵⁹¹ What was to become of the deficit zone and how exactly did the Nazis intend to take over agricultural production in the East?

⁵⁸⁹ Michael Burleigh, *The Third Reich: A New History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 512-515; Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 160-161.

⁵⁹⁰ Gerhard, “Food as a Weapon,” 340.

⁵⁹¹ Alex J. Kay, “Germany’s Staatssekretäre, Mass Starvation and the Meeting of 2 May 1941,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 41, no. 4 (October 2006): 685-687.

As was often the case with National Socialism, murderous policies were couched in odd euphemisms and bureaucratic language. This is what the German-Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt called the “banality of evil”⁵⁹² – countries were invaded and lives were routinely eliminated by the Nazi regime all with the stroke of a pen. Quite simply, it was as if items on a dinner menu were being discussed, rather than the calculated and deliberate extermination of an ethnic or political group. The Nazi Hunger Plan was no exception. The proposal boldly called for the deficit regions to be sealed off from the rest of the Soviet Union. No food could leave the surplus zone unless it was intended for German soldiers or transported back to Berlin. This effectively meant that people in northern and central Russia were left to starve to death.

The famine in Eastern Europe was “unavoidable” because, as a 1941 Nazi memorandum on food policy explained, “the war can only continue to be waged if the entire *Wehrmacht* is fed from Russia during the third year of the war. As a result, X [10] million people will undoubtedly starve.” Ten million was a figure that far surpassed even the highest estimates of German casualties (750,000 civilians) on the home front from the Allied blockade; nor did it include the projected deaths of those living in the surplus zone.⁵⁹³ The population of Russia had increased by 30 million people since the outbreak of the First World War, which has led some scholars to speculate that the Hunger Plan intended to violently turn the clock back to when there were 30 million fewer Russians living in the East. Regardless of which statistic was more accurate, Backe’s plan served

⁵⁹² Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1964).

⁵⁹³ Kay, “Germany’s Staatssekretäre,” 685; idem, *Exploitation, Resettlement, and Mass Murder*, 134, 163. See also, Frederick Strauss, “The Food Problem in the German Economy,” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 55, no. 3 (May 1941): 364-370, 410. Subsequent meetings involving the implementation of the Hunger Plan estimated the projected death toll to “umpteens millions of people....” Collingham, 37.

as a brutal insurance policy so that Hitler could rest easy knowing that “no one can starve us again, as in the last war.”⁵⁹⁴

Historians of the Second World War have only recently begun to examine the influence of Herbert Backe on the broader war of extermination (*Vernichtungskrieg*) that uniquely characterized Nazi occupation in the East. Currently, there does not exist a single biography of the Reich food administrator, although he was highly instrumental in planning the mass murder of millions on the Eastern Front.⁵⁹⁵ The experience of the First World War ultimately brought senior Nazi officials to adopt extreme measures to circumvent the impending British blockade. The search for *Lebensraum* was their hubristic attempt to outsmart geography and avoid a calamitous repeat of 1914-1918. Germany’s aggressive bid for autarky drove the invasion of the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941 and marked the crossing of a “moral threshold” as its chance at victory faded on the battlefield.⁵⁹⁶

It would be straying too far into counterfactuals and hyperbole to suggest that the Allied blockade of Germany during the First World War directly caused the deaths of millions in Eastern Europe twenty years later. It did, however, establish a military and diplomatic precedent whereby food was used as a weapon to break the enemy’s will and, later, as a form of leverage throughout the peace process. The hunger blockade demonstrated that the lives of civilians could be subordinated to the political and military objectives of nations in conflict. Massive collateral damage was now merely part and

⁵⁹⁴ Kay, “Germany’s Staatssekretäre,” 689; Snyder, 161.

⁵⁹⁵ There is a forthcoming book by German agrarian historian Gesine Gerhard, although its title and publication date are unknown.

⁵⁹⁶ Kay, “Germany’s Staatssekretäre,” 687; Richard Overly, *Why The Allies Won* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995).

parcel of total war.⁵⁹⁷ It was a dangerous precedent especially when the defeated power could draw murderous inspiration from the experience to aid them in a future war of conquest.

⁵⁹⁷ Kramer, 4-5, 329.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUDING REMARKS ON THE HUNGER BLOCKADE

On 4 August 1914, Great Britain declared war on Imperial Germany following the latter's "blank cheque" of support for Austria-Hungary against Serbia in the Balkans and the subsequent invasions of Belgium and France, which sparked the First World War.⁵⁹⁸

Within two days of entering the conflict, the British Liberal government of H. H. Asquith launched a naval blockade of Germany in the North Sea and the Atlantic Ocean⁵⁹⁹ in order to exert economic pressure on the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire) and lend immediate support to their allies (France and Russia) on the Continent.

The naval blockade of Germany remained in place for the next 59½ months from 6 August 1914 to 12 July 1919 when the Treaty of Versailles was finally ratified. The Allies maintained the economic sanctions for almost eight months after the guns stopped firing on the Western Front and a ceasefire agreement had been reached between the victorious Allies and the vanquished *Kaiserreich*. Archibald C. Bell's British official history of the naval blockade (1937) estimated that its retention throughout 1914-1919 caused the deaths of more than 750,000 German civilians.⁶⁰⁰

Imperial Germany, like Britain, was heavily reliant on imports. In 1913, for

⁵⁹⁸ Michael S. Neiberg, *Dance of the Furies: Europe and the Outbreak of World War I* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011), 142-143.

⁵⁹⁹ The Royal Navy's Tenth Cruiser Squadron and the Dover Patrol established the initial blockade of Germany in the North Sea. Milan N. Vego, *Naval Strategy and Operations in the Narrow Seas* (New York: Frank Cass, 1999), 47; Osborne, 59-60.

⁶⁰⁰ Bell, 672-674. It is worth noting that Bell's figures do not even account for the high death toll from the Spanish influenza pandemic (1918-1919), which was responsible for an additional 400,000 German casualties. See, Price-Smith, 61.

example, three-quarters of German imports arrived by sea.⁶⁰¹ Thus, denying the Germans access to essential goods such as oil, food, and textiles eventually caused the home front to experience a level of hunger and deprivation that was unknown on the Allied home fronts. In fact, the term “hunger blockade” was first coined in the winter of 1916 to refer to the drastic reduction in German civilian rations from 1,900 calories a day to a starvation diet of 1,000 calories.⁶⁰²

While pleading his case before the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg on 14 July 1946, Admiral Karl Dönitz quoted a passage from Archibald C. Bell’s British official history of the naval blockade to remind the Allies that they, too, had engaged in wartime practices, which if scrutinized during peacetime would appear unnecessarily cruel.⁶⁰³ Even if one dismisses Dönitz’s claim as sensationalistic or hypocritical, it points to the negative long-term impact of targeting civilians in war for short-term goals or political concessions.

This thesis set out to explain how the British naval blockade “ranks first,” to quote famed military writer Sir Basil Liddell Hart, among the reasons for the defeat of Germany in the First World War.⁶⁰⁴ It argues that the naval blockade ultimately hastened the Allied victory and helped make possible the historic, albeit fragile, peace that followed. Chapter 1 provided an overview of the structure of the dissertation and

⁶⁰¹ Vincent, 36.

⁶⁰² Cox, 2; Kramer, 152-153.

⁶⁰³ Siney, “British Official Histories of the Blockade,” 393. See also, *Trial of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal* (vol. 28, Nuremberg, 1948), 351-358. Dönitz’s testimony was significant for several reasons. As Adolf Hitler’s named successor to the “1,000 year Reich” and president of the short-lived Flensburg government in Germany following Hitler’s suicide on 30 April 1945, Dönitz was one of the higher-ranking Nazis to be tried and convicted of planning a war of aggression and breaking the laws of war. Secondly, as a submarine commander in the First World War and Commander-in-Chief of the German Navy during the Second World War, he was well aware of the strategic implications of losing the *Materialschlacht* (the “battle for material”).

⁶⁰⁴ Basil Liddell Hart, *History of the First World War* (London: Cassell, 1970), 592-593.

contextualized this work against the existing literature on the Allied naval blockade. The central argument is that much of the previous scholarship focused too heavily on the initial decision to blockade Germany or merely analyzed the early work of Britain's Tenth Cruiser Squadron at the expense of examining the evolution of Allied economic warfare over the course of the war.

The naval blockade that Britain implemented in August 1914 was far more rudimentary and benign than the lethal "weapon of starvation" that Winston Churchill denounced as Britain's Secretary of State for War in March 1919.⁶⁰⁵ As discussed in Chapter 2, it was not until an 11 March 1915 Order in Council that food was added to the list of contraband items bound for Germany. Even then, the British Foreign Office found itself in a legal quandary when it tried to persuade neutrals against trading with the Central Powers. The United States and the Northern Neutrals – Sweden, Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Switzerland – did not take kindly to outside interference from Whitehall. Neither did British businessmen whose revenue was derived from the *laissez-faire* principle of a free market economy. The main obstacle that the Allies faced in the early years of the blockade's existence was that very few businesses wanted to turn their backs on Britain's largest trading partner, Imperial Germany.⁶⁰⁶ Indeed, patriotism and morality only held so much sway when the policy of "business as usual" seemed far more profitable and even pragmatic.

The French, meanwhile, attempted to clamp down on instances where domestic goods and exports from other countries indirectly made their way to the Central Powers via the Northern Neutrals. The French Foreign Minister Théophile Delcassé was

⁶⁰⁵ Winston Churchill quoted in Bane and Lutz, *The Blockade of Germany After the Armistice, 1918-1919*, 744.

⁶⁰⁶ McDermott, "Total War and the Merchant State," 63.

instrumental in creating an inter-departmental committee (*Comité de Restriction des Approvisionnements et du Commerce de l'Ennemi*) to investigate which countries or French corporations disproportionately traded with neutral Europe compared to prewar trade statistics. He recommended that the French parliament should allocate a portion of its war budget to pre-emptively stockpile certain goods from the Northern Neutrals (foodstuffs and potential war matériel) before the Germans could even purchase them.⁶⁰⁷ However, both the French War Ministry and the parliament thought the idea was rather tedious and spendthrift. The annual budget only stretched so far and, consequently, the collective buying power of France was not going to be used to stockpile Dutch meat or Swedish iron ore at the expense of aiding troops at the front.

Even the sinking of the *Lusitania*, a British ocean liner carrying approximately 2,000 passengers from New York to Liverpool on 7 May 1915, did not initially convince the U.S. Congress to declare war on Imperial Germany. Ultimately, 1,200 passengers died off the coast of Ireland, including 128 Americans, when a German torpedo hit the ship as it approached the British Isles. Although the *Lusitania* disaster signalled an intensification of the war at sea – following the introduction of unrestricted German submarine warfare in February 1915 – President Woodrow Wilson and the U.S. State Department were torn between maintaining America's position of neutrality and defending the country against wanton attacks by joining the Allies in their fight against the *Kaiserreich*.⁶⁰⁸

It took another twenty-three months for the United States to enter the war and finally join the Allied blockade of the Central Powers. During that time, as in 1914,

⁶⁰⁷ Farrar, "Preclusive Purchases," 117-133; idem, *Conflict and Compromise*.

⁶⁰⁸ Bailey, "The Sinking of the *Lusitania*," 70-73.

Britain and France encountered a rather steep learning curve in regards to mediating inter-departmental conflicts and forging political and economic ties with the neutrals in order to best exploit their command of the sea. The tightening of the Allied blockade c.1914-1916 was very much an evolutionary process of learning what legal tactics worked and what proved too inflammatory in the eyes of the neutrals and profit-driven Allied businesses. The growth of an efficient civil-military bureaucracy in Britain took several campaign seasons to refine. Real change only occurred once it became clear to all parties involved that the policy of business as usual was hampering the Allied war effort.

Chapter 3 explored how mounting criticism of the Asquith administration's "timid" handling of the war effort helped refashion the blockade into a more potent weapon of war in 1916-1917. John Jellicoe thought, for example, that the Foreign Office under Edward Grey worried far too much about offending the neutrals when, in fact, they should have demanded greater transparency and cooperation from them. Admiral Jellicoe was not the only influential voice of dissent when it came to the strategic direction of the naval blockade.⁶⁰⁹ Robert Cecil also believed that his department needed to adopt a firmer stance on indirect trade with Germany via the Northern Neutrals.

Conservative-leaning publications such as the *Daily Mail* and *The Spectator* capitalized on the prevailing anti-Grey sentiment by alleging that the blockade now "leaked at every seam."⁶¹⁰ In response to the growing criticism, and with the realization that his preservationist stance on neutral rights was deeply unpopular with both the Conservatives and the Liberals, Grey asked the prime minister on 23 February 1916 to

⁶⁰⁹ Osborne, 101.

⁶¹⁰ *The Spectator*, 19 February 1916.

remove him from all matters relating to the trade war with Germany. Asquith, for his part, was quite relieved that Grey voluntarily distanced himself from the day-to-day management of the blockade. In his place, Asquith appointed Lord Robert Cecil to head a separate Ministry of the Blockade with the aim to stop unnecessary trade leakages at the source.⁶¹¹

Cecil immediately reversed Grey's tactic of championing neutral rights through a series of new policies that promoted Britain's right to blockade the Central Powers. The first policy (forcible rationing) insisted on rationing the Northern Neutrals to within an "acceptable" prewar level of imports from other countries. In spite of lost imports and widespread resentment throughout Scandinavia, Cecil maintained that was the price they paid for neutrality in an increasingly global war. The second policy (the Statutory List) involved compiling a list of international corporations with known ties to German businesses and financial institutions and placing them on a blacklist for embassies worldwide to monitor. As a result, neutral and Allied businessmen quickly learned that blacklisted firms were far more trouble to deal with than officially permitted ones.

The final measure that Cecil enacted in the first half of 1916 was the introduction of the navicert – a commercial passport issued to U.S. exporters in order to expedite trade between compliant American firms and the United Kingdom. These policies signified a tightening of the naval blockade at a time when the hope of a short war had irreparably faded. Allied policymakers such as Théophile Delcassé, Robert Cecil, and the soon-to-be British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, realized that they had to adjust their expectations and try new tactics when waging total war.

⁶¹¹ For a comprehensive overview of Robert Cecil's political career, including his appointment as chairman of the Allied Blockade Committee and early proponent of the League of Nations, see, Gaynor Johnson, *Lord Robert Cecil: Politician and Internationalist* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013).

Unbeknownst to the Allies, the tightening of the blockade occurred just as Germany experienced an early frost that culminated in the widespread failure of its potato crop. The starchy vegetable was such a staple in the German diet that its absence proved troubling for many on the home front. Although the public grudgingly turned to turnips as a substitute of carbohydrates, the lack of variety coupled with news of extraordinary casualties on the Western Front (namely, at Verdun and the Somme) made for a very weary and embattled home front. As the “Turnip Winter” of 1916-1917 progressed, temperatures plummeted to record lows and government rations were slashed once again from 1,985 calories to only 1,000 calories a day – nearly two-thirds less than what the British Royal Society recommended the average adult should consume each day.⁶¹²

It was during this particularly brutal winter that Britain’s blockade of Germany earned its notorious moniker of a “hunger blockade.” The German High Command (OHL) responded by resurrecting the policy of unrestricted submarine warfare against Allied seaborne trade, primarily in the western approaches to Britain, in early February 1917.⁶¹³ Yet instead of starving the British into submission, Germany’s gamble convinced the United States to abandon its entrenched position of neutrality in favour of joining the Allies against the Central Powers. America’s entry into the First World War on 6 April 1917 gave Robert Cecil the opportunity to tighten the naval blockade even further. American cooperation ensured that virtually no goods passed undetected across the Atlantic Ocean. Convincing neutral countries it was in their best moral and political interest to suspend trade with Germany was, however, only half of the battle. The Allies also needed to convince the Germans that it was in their best interest to capitulate.

⁶¹² Starling, 226, 236.

⁶¹³ Steffen, 219-220.

Chapter 4 discussed how the British press baron Lord Northcliffe skilfully exploited the increasing malaise in Germany over the last year of the war through the release of blockade related propaganda.⁶¹⁴ In February 1918, Lloyd George personally selected Northcliffe to head the Department of Propaganda in Enemy Countries or, “Crewe House,” as it was more commonly known in government circles, with the sole purpose of convincing the enemy to lay down their arms as quickly as possible. Lord Northcliffe believed that the surest way to end the war from a propaganda standpoint was to exploit the omnipresence of the hunger blockade. Through a series of propaganda leaflets distributed by air balloons to enemy soldiers via the “Balloon Post,” Northcliffe reminded the German and Austro-Hungarians troops that they were desperately hungry and poorly equipped compared to their Allied counterparts. At its height in late August 1918, the Balloon Post delivered on average 100,000 pamphlets a day to weary enemy troops.⁶¹⁵ The success of this propaganda effort lay in the candour of its message. That is to say, Crewe House would not have been as effective had it distributed leaflets based on half-truths or fiction. It was the discontent of the Germany army and populace that made it possible for Northcliffe’s propaganda to take hold in 1918. But if the political and propagandistic impact of the blockade shortened the war in any way, its post-Armistice retention brought the issue of morality to the forefront.

Much has been written on the cataclysmic impact of war on society in the Second World War and it continues to be a topic of great interest for scholars of post-1945 international relations. The history of the First World War, however, has been written

⁶¹⁴ McEwen, “The National Press during the First World War,” 466-467. See also, Peter Catterall, ed., *Northcliffe’s Legacy: Aspects of the British Popular Press, 1896-1996* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000); J. Lee Thompson, “Fleet Street Colossus: The Rise and Fall of Northcliffe, 1896-1922,” *Parliamentary History* 25, no. 1 (2006): 115-138.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid.

almost without examination of civilian casualties. Therefore, the second aim of this dissertation in Chapters 5, 6, and 7 was to reveal why the blockade was continued after the Armistice and examine how its retention impacted the peace conference or shaped postwar opinion.

From the perspective of the French delegation, Germany could not be trusted to honour the ceasefire agreement without the threat of reprisal. The blockade then was meant to serve as a reminder that the physical suffering would end once the Germans signed the peace treaty. The prospect of revenge for the German siege of Paris in the winter of 1870-1871, as well as the brutality of the recent conflict, was also a motivating factor for some French politicians, including Georges Clemenceau.⁶¹⁶

Although not driven by the same retributive urge as the French, the U.S. and Britain were in complete agreement that the naval blockade needed to continue after the Armistice. In a confidential memorandum circulated by the British General Staff, the Admiralty, Foreign and War Office made it plain that they believed, "... with the abolition of the Blockade, and especially its machinery, we lose our power of coercion over Germany; we run the risk of seeing Germany crumble and become unable to pay any indemnity...."⁶¹⁷ Intended as a cure-all to the social, political, and economic strife facing the Allies at the peace table, the naval blockade was retained solely for political reasons.

But the decision to prolong the blockade was not without controversy and disagreement. Herbert Hoover was in charge of the revictualling of postwar Europe as

⁶¹⁶ Georges Clemenceau to the Supreme War Council, 13 January 1919, in Bane and Lutz, 218-219.

⁶¹⁷ 'Memorandum Embodying the Views of the General Staff Respecting the Continuance of the Blockade, 22 January 1919,' TNA, T 1/12275.

the Allied Food Director and the head of the American Relief Administration (ARA). From December 1918 to February 1919, he devised several international aid plans – known collectively as the “Hoover Plan” – to allow foodstuffs into Germany to prevent further revolutionary upheaval and discontent. The population of Europe stood at approximately 420 million people in late 1918. Hoover, therefore, understood the great urgency with which his agency needed to transport food to Europe in the wake of the First World War. It was his rationale that the Allies ought to lift the crippling economic sanctions against the Central Powers in order for their respective governments to purchase food. This action, in turn, would allow Hoover to focus his efforts and that of the ARA on feeding the rest of Europe in a timely manner.⁶¹⁸

After witnessing the desperation and extreme hunger first hand, Second Army Commander General Herbert Plumer informed the British P.M. that his men were giving their rations to the enemy in order to prevent further starvation. Like Hoover, Plumer recommended that the Allied blockade must be lifted at once. Unlike the Allied Food Director, though, his reasoning was based on seeing the level of deprivation on the German home front and knowing the moral dilemma that his men faced when hearing innocent civilians say that “an end by bullets is preferable to death by starvation.”⁶¹⁹ Plumer’s report to David Lloyd George on 8 March 1919 finally forced the British government to see the blockade for what it had become – a regrettable “weapon of starvation.”

Faced with undeniable proof that the continuation of the blockade was exacerbating the poor living conditions of Germans on the home front, the Allies

⁶¹⁸ See, Willis.

⁶¹⁹ Minutes of the Supreme War Council, 8 March 1919, Bane and Lutz, 214.

convened an emergency meeting to discuss the necessity of provisioning the enemy. On 13 March 1919, representatives from Britain, France, Italy, the U.S., and Belgium met with German diplomats in Brussels to negotiate a payment plan in order to purchase food. The Brussels agreement was intended to signify the end of the Allied economic warfare in preparation for the coming peace treaty and the reconstruction of Europe after the war. Nevertheless, Clemenceau thought it "...useful to remind the Germans that the blockade shall cease at the same moment as the state of war [i.e. upon signing the peace treaty and not a moment sooner]."⁶²⁰ True to his word, not a single shipment of food reached German ports until after 12 July 1919 when the Treaty of Versailles was formally ratified. Meanwhile, nearly 800 German civilians died each day the hunger blockade was maintained after the Armistice.⁶²¹

This was not what the British Admiralty or Committee of Imperial Defense envisioned when implementing the naval blockade at the start of the war. Nor did the blockade's early inefficacy hint at its latent power and eventual use as a political bargaining chip after 11 November 1918. This transformation occurred over time. The concept of threatening starvation was first proposed in 1917 but quickly dismissed as too dangerous. It ultimately took Northcliffe and the Balloon Post to exploit the rampant hunger in Germany by offering an end to wartime suffering. Perhaps the Paris peace settlement could have retained more of its legitimacy had the Allies followed Hoover's advice to Woodrow Wilson: "we should not be led into joining in a food blockade against Germany as a method of forcing peace."⁶²² Hindsight, of course, is 20/20 and the reality

⁶²⁰ Vincent, 115.

⁶²¹ 'Inter-Allied Scientific Food Commission,' in the Graham Lusk Papers Box 1, f. 1, HIA.

⁶²² Memorandum from Herbert Hoover to Woodrow Wilson re: Food Blockade of Germany, 14 May 1919, in the Herbert Hoover Subject Collection, HIA.

of international relations is that prompt, definitive decision-making often takes precedence over cautious and even-handed treatment of the enemy.

This thesis does not attempt to simply castigate British and Allied policymakers for using food as a weapon against Germany. Rather, by highlighting the politics, propaganda, and morality of the naval blockade, it underscores the nuances and political considerations behind their *Realpolitik* decision. There is no direct line from the First World War to the Second World War. It is therefore counterproductive to imply as Patrick Buchanan does that Britain's blockade irreparably damaged relations with Germany and directly caused the rise of National Socialism.⁶²³ It is regrettable that a traditional weapon of war was used to garner political victory in 1918-1919. But one should be mindful, as Vincent notes in *The Politics of Hunger*, not to "manipulate such findings and thereby speculate that the critically undernourished generation of children from World War I logically grew up to become the loyal *Schutzstaffeln* of the 1930s."⁶²⁴

Thus Chapter 7 traced the postwar legacy of the blockade in order to glean how the rampant hunger and political instability in Germany was regarded in postwar Britain, America, and Germany itself. The issue of morality figured quite prominently in the Allies' decision to finally lift the post-Armistice blockade. It also conditioned the postwar relief efforts of Hoover's American Relief Administration and social activists in Britain to feed the starving mouths of Europe – be they German or otherwise. This issue of humanitarian food relief has yet to be examined by other historians of the naval blockade. Yet the charitable work of activists like Eglantyne Jebb and the Fight the Famine Council, which evolved into the internationally recognized Save The Children

⁶²³ Buchanan, 77-81.

⁶²⁴ Vincent, vii.

organization, offered valuable insights into the prevailing March 1919 opinion that it was needless and immoral to use food as a weapon.⁶²⁵

The humanitarian relief work of Anglo-American organizations like the SCF and the ARA suggests that many people in Allied countries were compelled to donate money and/or their time to help feed children of the enemy. Yet famine relief was offered too late to erase the memories of the brutal Turnip Winter and endemic hunger that persisted throughout the remainder of the blockade's existence.

In 1992, celebrated Weimar historian Detlev Peukert identified a generational link between one's age (i.e. Germans born at or just after the turn of the twentieth century) and an affiliation with paramilitary groups and high-ranking placement within the Nazi Party. These "superfluous" youths, as Peukert termed them, were too young to participate in the First World War yet were old enough to remember the social and political upheaval on the home front. These young men witnessed their country's defeat at the hands of the Allies and became increasingly disaffected after the war.⁶²⁶

While there was nothing inevitable about the rise of Adolf Hitler and his murderous *Weltanschauung* in the course of Germany history, the Nazi quest for living space in the East was influenced, in part, by a conscious decision to avoid a repeat of 1914-1918. In contrast to the First World War, German military planners did not want to engage in a two-front war with Britain, France, and the United States on the one hand and the Soviet Union on the other.⁶²⁷ But it was the potential for exploiting Russia's vast

⁶²⁵ Lord Parmoor, *The Policy and the Work of the Fight the Famine Council*. See also, Francesca Mary Wilson, *A Rebel Daughter of a Country House*, 174; Mulley, 213-214.

⁶²⁶ Peukert, 279-280; Donson, esp. Chapters 7 and 10.

⁶²⁷ For an in-depth look at Nazi-Soviet relations in the lead-up to the invasion of the U.S.S.R. see, Trumbull Higgins, *Hitler and Russia: The Third Reich in a Two-Front War, 1937-1943* (New York: Macmillan, 1966); Mark Harrison, "Resource Mobilization for World War II: The U.S.A., U.K., U.S.S.R., and Germany, 1938-1945," *Economic History Review* 41, no. 2 (May 1988): 171-192; Gerhard L.

resources that shaped the Nazis' approach to food policy and their overall eastern strategy in the lead-up to the war with Russia. In fact, the Reich Minister for Food and Agriculture, Herbert Backe, developed a ruthless "Hunger Plan" in early 1941, which called for the division of the Soviet Union into two zones based on their potential for economic exploitation. The Ukraine and southern Russia were ultimately identified as prime land for the German army to violently confiscate grain and other vital resources.⁶²⁸

Only recently have historians of the Second World War started to analyze the conflict through the lens of food and agrarian politics. Fine works like Lizzie Collingham's *The Taste of War: World War Two and the Battle for Food* (2011) and Gesine Gerhard's two articles on Germany's aggressive bid for autarky in the 1930s and early 1940s highlight some of the broader implications of the Allied decision to maintain a naval blockade of Germany throughout 1914-1919. Research, of course, is still needed to discover if the legacy of the hunger blockade influenced more contemporary historical events. Did the origins of the Marshall Plan (1948-1952), for instance, stem from an Allied desire to right the wrongs of the Armistice and the Paris peace settlement? What role did the blockade play in George C. Marshall's decision to extend aid to former enemy countries following the Second World War? Did the U.S. Secretary of State learn directly from Herbert Hoover's experience that "famine is the mother of anarchy" and, thus, prioritize food relief as a result? Only time and further enquiry will tell. Although a century has elapsed since Britain first implemented the naval blockade of Germany, these questions and others still remain.

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⁶²⁸ Kay, "Germany's Staatssekretäre," 685.

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