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THE STARVATION OF GERMANY

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THE STARVATION OF GERMANY

ANYONE who has studied contemporary German controversial writings cannot fail to have noticed a fundamental inconsistency which runs through them. On the one hand they pride themselves, and naturally enough, on the unanimity and enthusiasm with which the whole nation, men and women alike, devote themselves to the common cause. For generations they have preached to us that the German Army was the nation in arms, and now they show in practice how the whole nation, even those who are not dressed in uniform, is really acting as part of the national organization by which the war is conducted. On the other hand, there is no bounds to their indignation at the conduct of the British Government, which, by instituting the blockade, is depriving the unarmed population of their nourishment.

These two opposed points of view, inconsistent and irreconcilable with one another as they are, are to be found running through all German apologies. Generally they are found in the works of different writers, and if one writer hesitates or vacillates between them, at any rate he usually reserves the inconsistency for different works. It is a peculiarity of the Chancellor, who in this has the supremacy even among his own countrymen, that he commits himself to the two points of view in the same speech. To convict the others of self-contradiction often requires a little labour and a little search; this the Chancellor spares us. Within the short space of an hour he himself destroys every argument which he advances.

Let us listen to him :

“ Now England wants to victimize the women and children, the old, aged, and sick of a nation numbering seventy million people, in order to force it into submission. It is England who, from the beginning, wanted to make this war, not a war of army against army, but a war of nation against nation.”

It is, then, the crime of England that she makes the war one, not of army against army, but of nation against nation. Does, then, Germany distinguish between the army and the nation? Does, then, the German nation stand as an idle spectator, watching and applauding the deeds of its soldiers, but not co-operating with its help? When he wishes to speak of the great deeds of his own nation the language of the Chancellor is very different :

“ While our soldiers at the front stand under the drum-fire in the trenches and our submarines, defying death, hasten through the seas ; *whilst we at home have absolutely no other task but to produce cannon, ammunition and food*, and distribute victuals with justice ; in the midst of this struggle for life and the future of our Empire, intensified to the extreme, there is only one necessity of the day which dominates all questions of policy, both foreign and internal—to fight and to gain the victory.”

We at home have “ no other task but to produce cannon, ammunition and food.” Note which comes first—cannon and ammunition. Are those who produce cannon and ammunition, who work day and night, as the Chancellor himself has again and again told us, in the workshops and laboratories, men and women and often children—are they not as essential a part of the combatant forces of the Empire as the soldiers who are in the trenches? It is indeed a truism that this war is a war of material, of mechanical contrivances, of explosives and gas and every devilish contrivance which the ingenuity of the chemist and the persistent labour of the suppliers can put together for the destruction of human life. And in

this great war, where hundreds of thousands of men are hurried from one front to the other, among the Allies on sea and among the Central Powers by the railways, are not the means of communication inside Germany as integral a part of the country's warlike system as are the transports and liners of the Allies?

And how is this great system of transport worked? It calls for the devoted service of thousands of men, and not only of men but of women, for it is women who now do three-quarters of the work which in happier days was done by the men who have been taken away for the line of battle. But then the Chancellor would tell us that these labourers at home are not taking any part in the struggle; this he would tell us when it is convenient to him for the purposes of his argument against England. They, we are to suppose, are a peaceful nation at home, and England is to look on impassive while food and clothing and the ammunitions of war are poured into the country without stint and without hindrance in order that the whole nation may devote itself with one mind to the furtherance of military objects and not be distracted by the course of production at home. What hypocrisy it all is!

He tells us in another place that one of the reasons for German starvation arises from the difficulties of transport:

“The difficulties of railroad traffic have increased the difficulties in supplying victuals and fuel.”

Why are there difficulties of railroad traffic? For the same reason that our difficulties at home arise. First, because so many men have been taken away from the service of the railroad for the service of the army; and secondly, because the material is used for the transport of armies from one front to the other, and in order to keep the armies themselves constantly supplied with food and ammunition. And therefore it is difficult to bring the food, which is in fact within the country, to the places where it may be required. There may be corn in Hungary, there may be petrol in Galicia, large stocks

of food may have been captured at Bucharest, but men are starving in Hamburg. How much more convenient would it be if the Port of Hamburg were open, if the ships could come from all the world and deliver their supplies at Hamburg and Stettin and Danzig and so feed the population of Berlin; if there were free intercourse from Rotterdam to Cologne and the food-stuffs of the Argentine could come without hindrance to the workshops of Essen! Then indeed the German nation, without concern for the necessary daily bread, would be able to concentrate itself to the single purpose of the production of cannon and high explosives. An admirable doctrine!

But this is not possible. The English are stony-hearted; they wish to limit the output of machine-guns and *Flammenwerfer*; they wish to save their soldiers from the death which comes to them in countless forms. They establish a blockade: food becomes short, materials for making explosives are deficient; some one must go without—who shall it be? It cannot be the soldiers who are starved, nor will it be the cannon which go without their food. Perish rather the young and the old, aged women and helpless children. Milk at least, one would have thought, was still produced in Germany; there are the broad fields and there are the cattle: this is the staff of life for the very young. But we have forgotten—milk too can be used for the manufacture of explosives; and if the babies go without their food, it is not that the import of milk into the country is checked, it is because the weak and helpless are sacrificed to the German Army.

Let us look at this question of the Blockade and the starvation of Germany frankly. The great change, as Lord Robert Cecil has pointed out, which the Allies have made in the conduct of the war by sea is that they have virtually done away with the distinction between absolute and conditional contraband. Why have they done so? It is because this distinction arose from the conditions under which previous wars have been conducted, and those conditions no longer prevail. Food-stuffs were

formerly conditional contraband, i.e. the importation of them was legitimate when it was intended for the civil population, illegitimate when it was intended for the immediate services of the army. But now we have shown this distinction to be no longer valid. Those who remain at home are deliberately working under an organized scheme for the service of the army and the conduct of the war just as much as those away in the field. All food-stuff imported into Germany directly and immediately adds to the combatant power of Germany.

It is well that we should remember this. The extent of territory over which the Central Powers now hold sway is, for the purpose of food-supply, practically self-sufficing; they can produce sufficient to maintain the population in health, if not in luxury. If Central Europe were completely shut out from the rest of the world in time of peace there would doubtless be a considerable reduction in the standard of living, which, as we know, has risen in Germany greatly in the last thirty or forty years, but there would not be anything in the nature of serious want or distress; the amount of food available would probably be, on the average, not less than would be requisite to provide for the standard of comfort equal to that which prevailed in Germany fifty or sixty years ago; i.e. supposing Germany were at peace. But Germany is not at peace; millions of the able-bodied men of the country are occupied in fighting on the frontier, millions more are occupied in ministering to the material requirements of the army. What is wanted is not so much the land and the resources sufficient for feeding the population, but the labour which is required for this purpose. If Germany is starving, it is not the blockade of the Allies that is the sole cause of the starvation; it is the drain on the country by the necessity of maintaining the armies in the field.

I remember some months ago reading an article in the *Continental Times* by Carl von Wiegand, the Berlin correspondent of the *New York World*, in which he says:

“If the war should continue very long, and the point of real suffering be reached within the Central

Empires, it will not be the men in the armies who will feel it—everything will be sacrificed for them—but it will be the non-combatants at home, more especially the babies and children of the poor.”

This is the truth. The object of the blockade is to force Germany to sue for terms and to make peace. This she will do when it becomes apparent that it is impossible at the same time for the life of the country to be carried on and the armies in the field to be supplied with all that is necessary for them.