

**THE GUILT OF
WILLIAM
HOHENZOLLERN**

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The guilt of William Hohenzollern by Karl Kautsky

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KARL KAUTSKY

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BY
KARL KAUTSKY



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PREFACE

AFTER the Revolution of November 9th, 1918, I was requested by the People's Commissioners to enter the Foreign Office as a collateral Secretary of State. One of the first tasks which I set myself was to ascertain whether incriminating material had been removed from the archives, as many at that time feared would be the case. I saw nothing to confirm this suspicion. On the contrary, the first materials which I obtained to test it showed that important materials were at hand. I proposed to the Commissioners that, as a beginning, the documents relating to the outbreak of the war should be published. We owed that to the German people, who had a right to learn the truth about those who had hitherto guided the course of the State. It was, I urged, also necessary because nothing else could so clearly bring home to the incredulous foreigner our complete breach with the old régime.

The Commissioners agreed with me, and entrusted me with the collection and editing of the documents. My past record was, I hope, a warrant that no inconvenient material would be suppressed. The only reservation made was that I should not, like Eisner, issue the separate documents according as they came to light, but should wait until they all lay ready to hand. Politically, this was not quite the most desirable plan, for it necessarily meant the postponing of the publication and of its favourable influence on foreign countries. But it cut the ground from under the champions of the old régime, who could not say that we were garbling the material, and producing documents torn from their context, to which no evidential force could be attached.

I recognized the justice of this view and acted accordingly.

When, in December, my party colleagues, Barth, Dittmann and Haase, left the Government, I also resigned my post as State Secretary, but declared my willingness to proceed with the collection and editing of the war-documents. On this I received the following missive, dated January 4th :

“ ESTEEMED COMRADE,

“ In reply to your communication of January 2nd, the Imperial Government requests you to continue your activity as joint-editor of the documents relating to the outbreak of the war.

“ For the Imperial Government,

“ EBERT.”

The term “ joint-editor ” refers to the practice in vogue during those weeks of associating a Majority and an Independent Socialist in all the higher offices, and Quarck had been appointed along with me.

This practice ceased with the withdrawal of the Independents from the Government. Quarck's joint-editorship also shortly came to an end, and I remained sole editor.

But I need hardly say that I did not execute alone the whole of this great task. Before I had obtained other help, my wife, who had, indeed, for past decades been associated with the planning and execution of almost all my works, came loyally to my aid. Before long, however, a special editorial bureau was found to be necessary.

The work had to be speeded up, and, besides this, I had literary work to do in connection with the Department of Socialization. In December, Quarck and I

had already appealed to Dr. Gustav Mayer to let us call upon him for more workers in the collection and arrangement of the documents than I was able to give. He cordially agreed, although he was thus obliged to lay aside other tasks in which he was interested. At his instance we also obtained the services of Dr. Hermann Meyer, Archivist of the Secret Archives of State, for archival work, and then, at the beginning of February, as the work accumulated and a speedy conclusion became desirable, we engaged also Dr. Richard Wolff and Fräulein N. Stibel, *cand. hist.*

I feel it my duty to thank all of the above, and particularly the two gentlemen first mentioned, for the valuable and devoted labours which they gave to this great undertaking.

They put it in my power to inform Count Brockdorff-Rantzau, on March 26th, that the collection was practically completed and could at once be set up in type. There were, indeed, a number of points still to be settled: thus, the dates of dispatch or reception of certain documents could not at the moment be accurately fixed. But these and other matters, such as a table of contents, etc., could be added during the process of composition.

It was necessary to go to press as soon as possible if we wished, before the opening of peace negotiations, to lay before the world the clearest evidence that the German Government, which should conduct these negotiations, had nothing whatever in common with that which had declared war.

But the Government clearly took another view. They postponed the publication, and issued, instead of these documents, a report on the outbreak of the war in the White Book of June, 1919, to which reference