

# **GERMAN WAR AIMS**

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German War Aims by Edwyn Bevan

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**EDWYN BEVAN**

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BY  
EDWYN BEVAN



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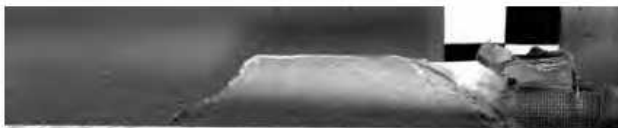


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### I. Three Kinds of Peace.

THE different schemes of peace-terms which are presented to the world at this moment as possible issues of the war seem to fall under three categories:—

- (1) There is the kind of peace which would mean that the Central Powers had come out of the adventure of the war with a balance of loss, that it had ended in an unquestionable defeat for Germany and her Allies:
- (2) There is the kind of peace which would mean no *territorial gain* for the Central Powers, a peace "without annexations" which would give back to all belligerents the territory which they possessed in July 1914 or its equivalent, but which would yet make it possible for Germany to say she had gained by the war in other ways—for instance, in the consolidation of her power in Central Europe and in the Near East:



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- (3) There is the kind of peace which would bring Germany territorial gain, in the West, or in Russia, or in Africa.

The first kind of peace, the only one which could be satisfactory to us, is still universally treated in Germany as unthinkable. No party or individual is willing in any public utterance or writing to contemplate it.

### 2. A Status quo Peace.

There are unquestionably numbers of people to-day in Germany who would welcome a peace on the *status quo ante* basis, by which no belligerent Power occupied any territory beyond that of which it stood possessed in July 1914, and, in respect of the material losses incurred during the course of the war, each side (in words attributed to Scheidemann, but repudiated by him) "bore its own burden." It is impossible to say how far this view has spread among the people, because naturally, where it exists it has had small opportunities of public expression. The Social Democrat "Minority" was until recently the only Party which made it a part of its professed programme. But the more central part of the Social Democrat "Majority," whose mind is expressed by Scheidemann, also declared as early as 1915 for a *status quo* peace. Probably the great mass of the working class is now with them. On the other hand among the educated bourgeoisie—the pastors and professors as well as in the higher ranks of the Army and Navy, there is still probably a great body of opinion which clings fiercely to the hope of territorial





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gain. During the earlier part of July the Centre (Roman Catholic) Party in the Reichstag came over to the "no annexations and no indemnities" formula, and joined with the Radicals and Social Democrat ("Majority") Group to pass the so-called "Peace Resolution," to which the new Chancellor gave a hesitating adherence. A *status quo* peace has now, therefore, the apparent support of a substantial majority of Members of the Reichstag; one has to bear in mind that a certain number of those who voted for the "Peace Resolution" have explained, outside the Reichstag, that when they subscribe to words which seem to exclude annexations, they do not really mean no annexations.

It is obvious that if the German people ultimately come to accept a net loss as inevitable, they will pass to that frame of mind through the intermediate stage of a willingness to accept a *status quo* peace. It is to be expected that if the war continues to go against Germany, offers to conclude a peace on this basis will be made, when the pressure reaches a certain point.

#### 3. The Five Ideas.

Apart from Social Democrat "Minority" circles, there is general agreement that whatever the issue of the war, somehow or somewhere, it must bring Germany a balance of gain. When, however, the question is raised in what direction this gain is to be secured, there is a notable conflict of views. Five, to some extent rival, ideas govern the German "war aims":—



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### 1. *Sea-power plus Annexations on the West.*—

The annexation of the Belgian coast—and, if possible, a good strip of the adjoining French coast—is represented as an essential condition of Germany's future sea-power. The same group which demands sea-power and the harbours on the North Sea demands also the annexation of the French mining districts (Briey and Longwy). There seems no theoretical reason why the demand for sea-power and the demand for Briey and Longwy should always go together, but so far in Germany the two demands have been found to go together as a single scheme. Possibly in the future a group in Germany may arise, which demands Briey and Longwy without demanding Belgium and sea-power, but up till now the party which lays stress upon sea-power and the party which demands annexations in the West has been identical:

2. *Mittleuropa, i.e.*, the constitution of a Central-European *bloc* of Allied Powers, political, military, and economically associated, under German leadership (in the first instance, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Poland, and Bulgaria):

3. *Berlin-to-Bagdad, i.e.*, German control of the Ottoman Empire:

4. *Colonies, i.e.*, an African empire, reaching across the Continent from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic:

5. *New land on the East, i.e.*, annexations of Russian territory (Courland, Lithuania) for agricultural colonisation by Germans.



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### 4. Competition between the Ideas.

It may be doubted whether there are many people in Germany to-day who think it possible that all the five ideas will be realised—or at any rate realised as a result of *this* war. There is no one German programme; it is a case of choosing which of the five ideas to pursue and which to let go. Hence we find a variety of programmes according to the combination selected. To some extent even those who hold the same body of ideas, distribute the emphasis differently, and are apt to guard jealously the ideas they especially champion, against the competition of the others. This is true even of the Pan-Germans. In foreign countries, for instance, *Mittleuropa* is commonly spoken of as essentially a "Pan-German" idea. If, however, we use the term Pan-German in the strict sense, for the body of opinion represented by the people called *Alldeutsche*, the *Alldeutsche Verband*, these people continually disparage the *Mittleuropa* idea, as a proffered substitute for the sea-power idea, which is for them the all-important one. Nor is it only that different groups distribute the emphasis differently; it is that the vicissitudes of the war give now to one, now to another, the chief prominence in public discussion and in the press.

### 5. The Memorandum of the Six Associations.

During the first seven or eight months of the war, little was said about "war aims." So long as the German people expected to win a sweeping victory, the discussion did not seem called for. It was the protraction of the war which gave urgency