CHAPTER XVI

World War I (1914-18)

Speaking to members of the Reichstag assembled at the palace in Berlin shortly after the outbreak of the war, Emperor William declared, "I know no more parties; I know only Germans." With this remark the emperor ushered in the Burgfrieden ("civil peace"), which continued with relatively little disturbance until 1917. The first manifestation of this unanimity occurred almost immediately when, on August 4, 1914, the Reichstag without dissent passed a request for the first appropriation bill to finance the war. The interest of this event lies in the fact that the Social Democrats, in spite of their pacifist doctrine, joined in the affirmative vote. They rationalized this action in terms of a war against the tsarist autocracy, but they also unwittingly laid the foundation for the split in the party which was to become open in 1917 and very important in the years immediately thereafter.

Meanwhile all eyes were focused on the military scene. The German mobilization proceeded with the expected clocklike accuracy, and the Schlieffen plan was placed in operation under the incompetent and ailing chief of staff, Moltke, a nephew of the great Moltke. Eight large German armies were set in motion to advance in a series of concentric arcs, the easternmost pivoting near the northeast corner of France while the westernmost, under General von Kluck, was to sweep across Belgium and down into France while keeping to the west of Paris. The idea was to make a great enveloping movement around Paris, pushing the French army continually ahead of the German in a southward and then eastward direction until the French were caught in a trap between two German elements somewhere in Champagne or Lorraine, where they could be annihilated or forced to surrender. It is impossible to judge the Schlieffen plan because it was never carried out as devised. Several factors entered into this failure. One was that Moltke was ill and remained at Koblenz, then Luxembourg, a long way from the center of activity; a hesitant and indecisive man, he was incapable of firm action.
The French attempted an invasion of German Lorraine, which was repulsed; instead of remaining on the defensive there and permitting the decisive action to be taken by the western armies, the German command ordered an offensive into France near Nancy. This came to nothing but used troops which would better have been sent to reinforce the vital army of Kluck. With the First German Army Kluck entered Brussels in triumph on August 20, 1914, and then started south into France. On August 25 Moltke made an inexcusable error. Overoptimistic about events in the west and worried at the news of a Russian invasion of East Prussia, he detached two corps from General von Bülow's Second Army, Kluck's neighbor, and sent them to the east. These troops, had they remained, might have changed the outcome of the battle of the Marne; as it was, they arrived in the east too late to be of use. By August 30 the Schlieffen plan was completely sabotaged when Kluck, worried about the gap that was developing between his army and Bülow's, ordered a shift of course to the eastward, which led him to the northeast instead of the northwest of Paris. The French and a small British army, which had arrived quickly in France, were able to take advantage of these changes and prepared a major effort to stop the German advance. By September 4 the German armies had crossed the Marne River and were at one point less than twenty miles from Paris. Here, under the command of General Joffre, the French armies stopped their retreat and from September 6 to 12 fought the first battle of the Marne or, as the French prefer to think of it, the "miracle of the Marne." The French gave their all to this battle, even ordering out the garrison of Paris under its aged general, Galliéni, who transported his men to the battlefield in taxicabs. The result of the battle was that the Germans were not only stopped but pushed back a considerable distance. Its importance is not to be measured by the territory regained but by the fact that the inertia of the German army was brought to a halt. Shortly after the Marne Moltke was replaced by a new chief of staff, General Erich von Falkenhayn, although the change was kept secret for some weeks. Moltke did not long outlive his disgrace.

The next two months on the western front are generally known as "the race for the sea." The action consisted of a gradual widening of the battle front until by November it reached the English Channel coast at a point just northeast of the Franco-Belgian border, where with a few small shifts it remained anchored for almost the duration of the war. During this period the main action in the west lay with the British who carried out a heroic, if perhaps badly planned, defense of Ypres. It was becoming clear to many observers that the defenders had the advantage in this type of warfare, but the high commands did not accept this fact
willingly. By the end of the year opposing armies dug a long series of
trenches extending from the channel to the Swiss border in a generally
southeasterly direction; thus began the horrible warfare of position and
attrition which was to last for four years, one of the most bloody holo-
causts in human history.

In the east, events were more decisive and quite different. The Rus-
sians astonished both their enemies and their allies by mobilizing part
of their army with commendable speed. In mid-August the First Rus-
sian Army under the command of General Rennenkampf started an ad-
vance westward into East Prussia, apparently heading for the city of
Königsberg; at about the same time the Second Russian Army under
General Samsonov was headed northward toward the same area from
the neighborhood of Warsaw. At this news Berlin became jittery; the
German commander in the east, Prittwitz, lost his nerve and, immedi-
ately thereafter, his command. At this point Moltke, in spite of his usual
incompetence, made an exceedingly wise choice. On the evening of
August 22 an aged and retired general, whose career had been depend-
able if not brilliant, received the news that he had been put in command
of an army in the east and that he was to be at the Hanover railway sta-
tion at three in the morning where he would meet the chief of staff at-
tached to him. Thus occurred the meeting of two men whose collabora-
tion was to rule the army and Germany itself during the later years of the
war; one of them was further reserved to be the chief executive of his
nation during nine decisive years. General Paul von Hindenburg-
Beneckendorff and General Erich Ludendorff entrained at Hanover
and made their way eastward to take over Prittwitz' command. This
combination was to be an extraordinarily fruitful one. The two men be-
came almost a duplicate personality during the war, HL (Hindenburg-
Ludendorff) the Rosencrantz and Gudelstern of the war. Hindenburg
was loyal, reliable, massive, solid, not overly intelligent, but able to
maintain morale and confidence; Ludendorff, probably the major military
mind of the war on either side, was tough, intellectual, aggressive, active,
and determined. The combination worked with remarkably few clashes
almost to the armistice of 1918.

Upon their arrival in the east the new commanders were met by
Colonel Hoffman, another brilliant strategist, who had worked out a
plan for dealing with the Russian menace with the modest forces at his
disposal. Hindenburg and Ludendorff approved the plan, and it was put
into operation. The main object was to prevent the two Russian armies
from joining and overwhelming the Germans by force of numbers. This
was rendered easier by the general inefficiency of the Russians, by the
fact that they did not use code in their messages, and because the two
Russian generals had loathed each other ever since they had engaged in a fist fight during the Russo-Japanese War. During the last week of August the Germans achieved a brilliant and complete victory over Samsonov near Tannenberg, scene of the Slavic defeat of the Teutonic Knights in the fifteenth century. A few days later an almost equally decisive victory was won over Rennenkampf at the battle of the Masurian Lakes. Lack of manpower prevented a complete pursuit of the fleeing Russians, but the threat in the east was ended and two new names entered the military pantheon.

The following months saw Hindenburg anxious to follow his earlier triumphs with a concerted drive against the Russians to force them out of the war. To accomplish this he would need more troops; here he came into conflict with Falkenhayn, whose interests centered in the west. In spite of the conflict Hindenburg, now commander of all German forces in the east, came to the aid of the Austrian ally, whose territory in Galicia had also been invaded by the Russians. During November and December the Germans pushed across western Poland along a wide front and captured the important city of Lodz. The winter lull found them not many miles from Warsaw, the Polish metropolis.

With the approach of fighting weather in 1915 the Russian commander in chief, Grand Duke Nicholas, decided to attack the Austrians in Galicia. This offensive was so successful that the Russians soon seemed to be in a position to dash down the Carpathian Mountains into the vital Hungarian plain. Austria was in dire straits, for in addition to her failures in this area she also had been unable to conquer little Serbia. Austria’s plight forced Falkenhayn’s unwilling hand, and he allocated large reinforcements of German troops to replace Austrians in the area near Cracow. A new army was formed under the supreme command of Hindenburg, but immediately under General von Mackensen with Seeckt as chief of staff. In April the German offensive was launched, and the great Russian retreat began. It was a melancholy year for Russia. In August Warsaw was taken, and by September the line in the east had stabilized itself where it was to remain with minor shifts until the Russian Revolution in 1917. It started in the north near Riga and pursued an almost straight north-south course to the Romanian border. Thus Russia had lost to Germany nearly all of Poland and Lithuania and part of Latvia. Germany was no longer threatened from the east. She could now turn her full attention to her British and French enemies in the west.

Little is gained by a detailed examination of the fighting in the west in 1915. Both sides were mainly occupied in learning to fight trench warfare, for which no one was trained. It became increasingly clear that matériel rather than men was the vital need; it also became apparent to
some that the western front was going to remain deadlocked and that another front had to be developed to achieve victory. This consideration impelled the British to launch the ill-fated campaign against the Turks (who had entered the war on the German side in October 1914) on the Gallipoli Peninsula. On the whole, however, the belligerents stuck to the idea of drives against the line. During 1915 the Allies undertook most of the offensive fighting because Germany had committed so many of her reserves in the east. Britain launched a major attack near Ypres during which the Germans introduced the use of gas; France, a little later, undertook an offensive in Champagne. Both were unsuccessful in proportion to the men and matériel used. More and more discouragement developed at the prospects for the future.

On the diplomatic front there was intense activity during the first eighteen months of the war, resulting in an increase of the number of nations committed. The fighting was not a month old when Japan entered on the Allied side and drove the Germans out of their Far Eastern possessions. Shortly afterward in October the Turks, long under the influence of Germany, joined their friends and opened a front against Russia in the Caucasus. More important, Turkey’s participation was a threat to the vital British position in the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. The great prize seemed to be the adherence of Italy. Both sides tenderly wooed this reluctant virgin. Germany sent Prince Bülow and his charming Italian wife with offers of juicy pieces of territory to be taken from her ally, Austria. It was easier for the western Allies, who were at war with both Austria and Turkey, each Italy’s prospective prey. A treaty was signed with Italy at London in April 1915, promising Italy considerable slices of both these empires after the victory. In return, Italy declared war on Austria in May and opened a new front in the Alps, to the further discomfiture of the already weakened Hapsburg monarchy. The German bloc achieved its last diplomatic success when Bulgaria joined it in September 1915. This made it at last possible to conquer Serbia and to connect by rail the Central Powers with their Turkish ally.

At home in Germany a good deal of optimism reigned during 1915. No enemy soldier was on German soil; on the contrary, German armies were deep into Russia, Belgium, and France. It looked like merely a matter of time. This optimism was reinforced by the press, which invariably looked at the rosy side of the picture. The civil peace continued, and one of the main preoccupations of important Germans was to decide what Germany was really fighting for and what she should demand of her prostrate enemies when the time came for peace terms. Opinion rapidly crystallized into considering Great Britain the principal
enemy. This is observed in the famous “Hymn of Hate” directed against England and in the slogan “Gott strafe England” (“May God punish England”). Much of this attitude was based on jealousy of Britain’s economic and commercial dominance, which, it was argued, forced Britain to desire the destruction of Germany, her main rival. Accordingly, the idea of striking at Britain’s future by continually increasing German pre-eminence became a popular one. The way to achieve this was to threaten Britain on her industrial front. From this to an aggressive program, aimed at annexing Belgium and the industrial areas of northern France and the harbors facing Britain, was a short step. The demands of the annexationists were completed by a plan to annex unspecified, but certainly large, territories in the east, which were to be taken from Russia to serve Germany as agricultural lands to increase her food supply. This program of annexationism dominated the minds of most of the leading German industrialists and the military and naval figures. It entered the political parties as well; the further right the party, the more annexationist. Even many of the moderate socialists were not immune, rationalizing their position by stating that if any lands were rescued from the black tsarist autocracy, it would constitute social progress. Naturally the right-wing pressure groups were most vociferous in this movement, taking their lead from the Pan-German League, which disseminated all kinds of propaganda for the cause of the Kriegszielbewegung (“war-aims movement”).

Not all Germans were annexationists. There were a number of leaders who took a much more moderate position. The most important of these was the chancellor, Bethmann. He was a man of good sense and generally of good will, but he was a chronic straddler and not strong enough a personality to force his opinions in the way Bismarck would have done. Bethmann had long been convinced that a reform in the German government was bound to occur. In particular, he knew that the illiberal Prussian three-class system of voting had to go. He saw with dismay that the same forces which were riding the annexationist bandwagon were also those which opposed reform. He feared the extremists, so his speeches tried to temper right-wing enthusiasm, but in this effort he lost much of his former support and moved gradually to his fall in the summer of 1917 when Germany was rapidly becoming a military dictatorship dominated by Ludendorff.

The year 1916 opened with continuing German optimism. Russia and Serbia were no longer problems. The Allies had been uniformly unsuccessful in their offensives. Falkenhayn was free to move large numbers of German reinforcements back to the west and also to pick a spot for the major offensive. He concluded that he would mount so massive
an offensive against the French that they would be forced out of the
war. For this operation he picked a hitherto relatively quiet sector, quiet
because it was heavily fortified by the French. The Germans decided to
focus their attack upon the fortress of Verdun, the capture of which,
they argued, would so strain French resources and so lower morale that
all would be lost for France. Thus in late February the attack began, one
of the great epics of military history. Descriptive language cannot depict
the horror and macabre magnificence of the following several months;
it requires the pen of the novelist, not of the historian. Fortunately, Jules
Romains' novel *Verdun* has caught much of this grandeur and pity. The
fighting went on from February to July. The Germans captured outlying
outpost after outpost; they advanced yard by yard at unimaginable cost
in blood and effort. However, the French held. The story can be summed
up in the immortal phrase of the French general most associated with the
defense, General Henri Philippe Pétain: *Ils ne passeront pas* ("They
shall not pass"). And they did not pass.

Before the battle of Verdun the British and French had agreed that
they would launch a major offensive in the summer of 1916. As the
fighting at Verdun became more intense, the Allied offensive became
more urgently needed to relieve the pressure on the French army by
forcing the Germans to divide their forces. On July 1 the British opened
a furious bombardment in the west near the river Somme. This again
was one of the great epics of the war. It lasted until exhaustion was
reached in October. Once again the story repeated itself. The British
gained some ground; the line at the end of the battle was more favorable
to the Allies than it had been; a new weapon, the tank, had been intro-
duced. Yet where was this to end? No nation could continue for much
longer this almost mortal attrition. All were exhausted, especially the
Germans, who had strained every nerve during the year. A new factor,
however, presented itself in the west. After the failure of the battle for
Verdun in late August 1916 Falkenhayn was removed from command
and sent to defeat the Romanians, who had just come into the war; he
carried this mission out quickly and efficiently. To replace him, Hinden-
burg and Ludendorff were brought from the east and placed in com-
mand of all German armies, the latter with the title of Quartermaster-
General. It was to be expected that a new type of strategy would develop.

However, the events of 1917, the year of decision, were not depend-
ent upon German strategy on the western front. Other relatively un-
connected events were to prove decisive in the long run. One of these
was the war at sea.

The naval war can be divided into two parts: occurrences on the
surface of the seas, and action underneath. The latter was much more important. Except for some romantic additions to the lore of the sea—and also the greatest naval battle in history up to that time, a battle which, however, was indecisive—the surface fleets accomplished remarkably little except escort duties. Early in the war occurred the epic of the fleet commanded by Admiral Graf Spee, who took his ships across the Pacific Ocean from the German China station and defeated a British fleet off the coast of Chile, but found defeat and death at the hands of the British at the battle of the Falkland Islands on December 8, 1914. In addition, there were the activities of the famous commerce raiders, of which the best known was the "Emden," which made the Indian Ocean perilous for the British during the first year of the war. The German High Seas Fleet itself made a number of forays out of its harbors and came in contact with units of the British Grand Fleet upon occasion. The one major battle did not occur until May 31, 1916, when the battle of Jutland was fought, with Admiral Scheer in command of the Germans and Admiral Jellicoe of the British. Naval historians still disagree about the result. The British sustained the greater losses, but the Germans retired from the scene. Thereafter the High Seas Fleet spent nearly all its time in harbor, where many of the sailors, bored with their sedentary life, became the prey of defeatist propagandists and prepared themselves for their role in starting the revolution of 1918.

Much more significant than the surface action was the activity of the submarines. The vital importance of preventing merchant vessels from bringing goods and supplies to the enemy became rapidly apparent to both Britain and Germany, and they quickly undertook such measures as they could to starve each other economically. Geography favored the British, who could pretty well control the sea routes leading to Germany. The British early declared parts of the North Sea war zones and arrogated to themselves the right to search ships and to do their best to prevent war matériel from getting through. The problem was to what degree they could do this without raising the ire of the neutrals, particularly the United States. The American government was vigilant to protect her shipping rights, and President Woodrow Wilson addressed a number of sharp complaints to London. The German problem was much more complex. Germany, in order to prevent goods from reaching Britain, had to use submarines; here international law became heavily involved because it is impossible to save the crews of ships sunk by submarines, both because it annuls the vital element of surprise and also because there is no room for extra persons on a submarine. Nevertheless, the submarine campaign was begun early in the war, although it was not
a grave threat at first because Germany did not possess many vessels. By the spring of 1915 it took on a more serious aspect when, in May, an American ship was sunk; a few days later the neutral world was horrified when a German submarine attacked and sank in eighteen minutes the great British liner "Lusitania," with a loss of over a thousand lives of whom more than a hundred were American. The German government had advertised in New York newspapers warning against embarking on the ship. The vessel did carry some war matériel and was a British ship. The legal aspect of the sinking can be argued both ways; the important thing is not the event itself but the wave of anti-German revulsion which it caused, particularly in the United States. The sinkings went on, and, as they did, President Wilson's earlier profoundly neutral attitude grew stronger until by early 1916 he received a promise from Germany that no more merchantmen would be sunk without warning and without saving human life. The submarine peril receded for some months. It is not coincidence that these were the months when the Germans hoped to win the war by the Verdun offensive and were anxious not to add the United States to their list of enemies.

By the end of the year the whole picture had changed for Germany. The Verdun offensive had failed to knock France out of the war; a Russian offensive in the summer had been dangerous enough to show that Russia could not be entirely disregarded; Falkenhayn had been replaced by Ludendorff. (Although Hindenburg was the titular superior, both military and political policy was handled by Ludendorff.) Ludendorff, who was becoming more and more the dictator of Germany, became convinced that the war could not be won on land and that Germany's only hope was to starve Britain. His staff had drawn up statistics to prove that this could be done in a matter of months if the submarine offensive were pushed as hard as possible. He therefore espoused the cause of unrestricted submarine warfare. The matter became a political rather than a purely military consideration. Ludendorff was backed by most of the leading naval and military figures, as well as the leading annexationists. Their main opponent was Chancellor Bethmann, who feared the repercussions abroad. The submarine enthusiasts won the ear of the emperor, and on February 1, 1917, unrestricted submarine warfare was declared. The next day the United States broke diplomatic relations with Germany but did not yet go the full length of war. Fate at this point played very conveniently into the hands of the British, for in February they released to the United States a message (the so-called Zimmermann note) sent a few days before from Berlin to the German legation in Mexico, offering Mexico an alliance against the United States and promising the Mexicans Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona at the
end of the war. During the same month five American ships were sunk. On April 2, 1917, Woodrow Wilson delivered his superb war message to Congress; on April 6 Congress declared war on Germany.

This account is, of course, a gross oversimplification of the progressive steps which led the United States into the war, but that subject has been dealt with abundantly elsewhere. One interesting aspect of it is the relative casualness with which the German leaders accepted the news. They reasoned that Britain would be forced to her knees before American help could be of importance and that no large amount of American troops could ever get across the Atlantic Ocean. They hardly realized how near the truth they were on the first count.

If ever a year can justly be called a "year of decision," it is 1917. Obviously the two most spectacular events of the year were the entry of the United States into the war and the revolution which transformed Russia from an autocratic tsardom into a Communist state. In addition, a number of events occurred in Germany which help explain things to come. There were three major developments: the passage of the Peace Resolution, the dismissal of Bethmann with the consequent consolidation of the Ludendorff dictatorship, and the split within the Social Democratic party.

Some scholars suggest that in mid-1917 the Reichstag had its first chance since the Daily Telegraph affair to convert Germany into a parliamentary monarchy but that it let itself be outmaneuvered by Ludendorff and the High Command. Be this as it may, for some weeks in the summer of the year the Reichstag seemed to assert itself in the cause of peace. These events hinged around the personality of Matthias Erzberger. Erzberger, a south German Catholic, had for some time been the leader of the minority liberal wing of the Center party. In spite of this, as late as the fall of 1916 he had been an annexationist and had played along with the conservative leaders of his party. However, in early 1917 he became convinced that Germany had no chance of victory in the war and decided to do what he could to get Germany out of it as cheaply as possible. His conviction arose from several bases. He traveled to Eastern Army Headquarters where he was shown figures proving that the submarine campaign was not starving Britain and never could, and that the blockade of Germany by the British was in fact worse. Secondly, he was close to events in Austria-Hungary. The aged Emperor Francis Joseph had died in November 1916 and been succeeded by his great-nephew Archduke Charles, who was at best lukewarm about the German alliance and mainly interested in preserving his ramshackle empire, which gave signs of falling apart around him. He was anxious to get out of the war and had even made gestures to Paris
and London through his brother-in-law, Prince Sixtus of Bourbon-Parma, an officer in the Belgian army. Finally, Erzberger had learned through ecclesiastical sources that Pope Benedict XV was about to launch an appeal for peace. All of these factors led Erzberger to deliver a famous speech in the Reichstag on July 6, 1917, in which he outlined his fears and called for a statement by the Reichstag which would convince the world of Germany’s desire for a just peace. The speech caused consternation throughout the nation. Erzberger next proceeded to enlist the support of his own party, which he received at a stormy caucus on July 12, so stormy indeed that one of the conservative Center leaders was taken from it with a heart attack. The Social Democrats and the Progressives joined with the newly oriented Center, and there was for a time a preview of the Weimar coalition. A Peace Resolution was drawn up and passed by an almost two-to-one majority. It called for a peace of conciliation and used the Socialist slogan, “no annexations and no indemnities.” The resolution was passed but was little heard of again, except as a source of annoyance to the annexationist group, who about this time organized themselves into a pressure group under the name of the Vaterlandspartei ("Fatherland Party"). Ludendorff, in fact, was the winner; in spite of the Peace Resolution flurry, he became more completely a dictator.

The conflict between Ludendorff and Bethmann which led to the latter’s resignation on July 14, 1917, was not a new one. Bethmann had been distasteful to the annexationists and extreme military party ever since the start of the war because they felt he was cowardly about the war aims. Bethmann, however, was unable to push his ideas to their logical conclusion, so an uneasy truce existed between the two groups. By early 1917, however, Bethmann had become exceedingly worried about the food shortage in Germany, the difficulties of life, and the consequent shift toward disaffection and defeatism which he sensed. In the spring he persuaded Emperor William to issue an Easter message promising the Prussian people that the three-class system of voting would be abolished, but not until the war was over. Even this partial promise infuriated Bethmann’s opponents, among them Ludendorff, and they waited for the moment to get rid of the chancellor. The moment came during the Peace Resolution debates, when the Center also abandoned the chancellor. During this debate Bethmann gave in to pressure and resigned. The question of his successor was all-important, and here the degree to which the emperor had abdicated his powers and fallen under the spell of the High Command becomes obvious. After some hesitation Ludendorff proposed the name of Dr. George Michaelis, an almost unknown civil servant who had gained a reputation as food commissioner
for East Prussia. The emperor had never heard of him, it is reported; nevertheless, he appointed him. One of Michaelis' first tasks was to state his position on the Peace Resolution before the Reichstag. He made the celebrated hedging statement that he believed that the aims of the Resolution were attainable "as I interpret them"; since no one ever found out how he interpreted them, the matter became a dead issue and Michaelis operated mainly as a clerk for Ludendorff. Even Ludendorff realized how incompetent his appointee was, and poor Michaelis was forced out of office in late October and succeeded by the dignified, aged, and honorable figure of Count Hertling, a Bavarian nobleman, who was no match for Ludendorff and was content to let the High Command continue to rule Germany politically as well as militarily. Until September 1918 Ludendorff was for all intents and purposes the German government.

The year 1917 was decisive also in the history of the Social Democratic party, for in that year the strains and fissures which had existed for years came into the open and the party divided in two, with a third section of irreconcilable radicals. This third group, the Spartacus League, did not grow until the end of the war and was led by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, son of Wilhelm, one of the earliest German Social Democrats. Liebknecht made his break with the party in December 1914, when he refused to vote for the war credit of that month. After this he publicly spoke against the war, was put in the army, took part in demonstrations, and was court-martialed and jailed; he was the radical martyr of the German opposition to the war. In spite of a good deal of personal sympathy for him, his group was almost negligible until 1918.

More important was the group of Social Democrats who broke away from the mother party in 1917 and formed the Independent Social Democratic party. This break in the party mirrored the old cleavage between revisionists and antirevisionists, between trade unionists and theorists, which had been developing over the years; but it mirrored it in an odd way. As is so often the case in socialist history, the lines were not drawn clearly. For example, the revisionists found themselves divided, some remaining with the old party, some joining the new, and some trying to bridge the gap. Essentially the Independents grew out of the war. They refused to vote for war credits, not necessarily on doctrinaire grounds nor because they denied the right of self-defense, but because they felt that the party had surrendered its right to independent action vis-à-vis the government. In late 1915 and early 1916 a group of Social Democrats, led by Hugo Haase, voted against war credits and thus violated the unanimity of the party. They faced disciplinary action from their own leaders, formed a separate group, and in the spring of 1917
broke away completely and founded their new party. In it were some strange bedfellows. In addition to the old radicals, such as Haase and Wilhelm Dittmann, there were also Karl Kautsky and Eduard Bernstein, representatives of opposing lines of Marxist theory. The lack of homogeneity of the Independents is one of the reasons for their relative ineffectiveness in the years after 1918. The Majority Social Democratic party, as the parent party came to be called, was now almost completely the party of the trade-union organization with all its conservative social overtones.

The mighty events which were occurring in Russia during 1917 were no doubt a spur to the radicals in Germany. At first, however, they were of advantage to Ludendorff and the militarist group. The ease with which the tsar was dislodged from his throne in March gave notice of the basic weakness of the eastern enemy. The first contribution made by the German government to the situation was to permit Lenin, his wife, and several of his colleagues to pass across Germany from Switzerland on their way home to add their particular form of Bolshevik confusion to the general chaos in Petrograd. The Provisional Russian Government announced its loyalty to its allies and vowed to continue to do its share in the war, but the gradual disintegration of the Russian army by desertions was becoming an inescapable fact. Alexander Kerensky, Russian dictator after July, attempted to mount an offensive toward Galicia in the summer, but after a few days of success it was pushed back. Ludendorff decided on a partial offensive to make things worse for the Russians; in the late summer and fall he captured Riga and, in a remarkable amphibious landing, the islands at the mouth of the Gulf of Finland. By the fall the position of the Provisional Government was impossible, and in November the Bolsheviks seized control of the government with a program which called for an immediate peace with Germany.

Accordingly, the new Soviet government asked for a meeting to discuss an armistice, and the Germans (represented by the secretary of state for foreign affairs, von Kühmann, and by General Hoffman) and Austrians met with the Russians at Brest-Litovsk on December 3, 1917. Both Germans and Russians agreed that they would be animated by the spirit of the Peace Resolution: no annexations and no indemnities; but it remained to be seen how they would interpret these aspirations. It soon became clear that the Germans thought in terms of the erection of buffer states in the area between Germany and Russia, a form of cloaked annexation. On Christmas Day the conference adjourned for ten days in a vain effort to get the western Allies to join in the discus-
sions. When it reassembled, now with Leon Trotsky as Soviet leader, the Russians forced the Germans into the open statement that since Germany had won the war, the peace would be made on German terms. The terms included cession by Russia of claims to Finland, the Baltic states, and Poland, and the occupation of the Ukraine by German troops. Trotsky, angered beyond control by these demands, left the conference uttering the theatrical if fatuous slogan, “No war, no peace.” German troops promptly started to advance and in early March had reached a point only a hundred miles from Petrograd. By this time Lenin had taken the matter in hand, had realized that as a practical statesman he had to make peace with Germany on whatever terms he could get, and had opened negotiations once again. The German terms remained the same with the addition of some territorial grants to Turkey in the Caucasus area. The Russians signed on March 3, 1918, one of the severest treaties in history. In spite of violent oratory from the two wings of the Social Democrats, the treaty received a majority in the Reichstag. When the final vote on ratification was taken, only the Independents voted against it with the Majority Socialists abstaining. The spirit of the Peace Resolution was dead. A few months later the same sort of treaty was made at Bucharest with Romania, granting to Germany among other things a ninety-year lease of the Romanian oil fields.

On the western front the German armies remained during 1917 pretty much on the defensive. They started the year by shortening their line and retiring across scorched earth to the strongly fortified “Hindenburg” line, thus making more difficult the Allied offensive. Ludendorff was banking heavily on the success of the submarine campaign and did not want to commit the army to losses. The Allies tried several offensives; none accomplished very much and one, the French offensive under General Nivelle, was a complete failure. By the end of the year things looked very discouraging to the Allies. Russia was out of the war; Italy was staggering from a terrible defeat at Caporetto; French morale was very low as evidenced by serious mutinies in the army. The only signs of hope were the improvement in the submarine situation and the gradually increasing arrivals of American troops. Ludendorff appreciated the Allied position. He also knew that German strength had been stretched almost to the breaking point and that Germany’s three allies all showed serious signs of weakness. He knew further that the German people at home were undergoing terrible privations, a situation which was effectively aiding defeatist and socialist propaganda, some of it emanating from Soviet Russia. He therefore revised his earlier strategy and decided to try to end the war before the Americans should arrive.
in force, but to end it by land action rather than by waiting for the eventual submarine triumph. Thus he planned the greatest of all offensives, one more powerful even than the attack on Verdun.

Every kind of expert care was used in the preparation of this great and final offensive. It began on March 21, 1918, against the British and within a few days had achieved spectacular results. The width of the push increased as the weeks went by, until by the early summer it reached all the way from north of Ypres in Belgium to Rheims. The impetus of the attack brought the Germans almost as close to Paris as they had been in the first month of the war. Once again they were on the Marne. In June at Belleau Wood they encountered American troops in force for the first time. This was discouraging because it showed how time was running against Germany. There were other signs of trouble for Germany. Peace and defeatist propaganda was moving from the rear lines at home to the front. German supplies and equipment were no longer so good as they had been. This offensive seems like the last effort of a dying animal. It finally petered out in July after four months of unprecedented ferocity. On July 18, 1918, Germany lost the offensive, never to regain it.

The remainder of the story of the war in the west is quickly told, although this speed belies the heroism, the blood, and the effort. On July 18 Ferdinand Foch, Allied commander in chief since April, opened a counterattack near Chateau-Thierry at a spot where the Germans had exposed themselves unwisely. The impetus northward slowly replaced the earlier German push toward Paris. On August 8 the British started their phase of the action near Amiens. In his memoirs Ludendorff calls this day, "the black day of the German army." Slowly but relentlessly the French, British, and Americans forced the Germans back until they reached their greatly protected Hindenburg line. On September 29 the Hindenburg line was cracked. On this day also, Ludendorff, the man of steel, collapsed. After a conversation the evening before with Hindenburg, fearful that German resistance was a matter of only a few days and conscious of the threat from the south which the imminent Bulgarian surrender posed, Ludendorff asked Chancellor Hertling to start immediate negotiations for an armistice to be based on the Fourteen Points program for peace which President Wilson had outlined in January. From this time on, although the somber dying war continued to burn for six more horrible weeks, interest shifts to the diplomats who spent these days in an effort to achieve an end to the fighting.