

President Ebert's Address to the Opening Session of the German Assembly, 7 February 1919

... We have done forever with the old kings and princes by the grace of God. (*Loud applause on the Left; hisses on the Right...*)

The German people is free, remains free, and governs itself for all the future. This freedom is the one hope which remains to the German people - the one way by which it can work itself out of the bloody morass of war and defeat. We have lost the war; this is not the consequence of the revolution.

Ladies and gentlemen, it was the Imperial Government of Prince Max of Baden which began the armistice which made us defenceless. After the collapse of our allies, and in view of the military and economic situation, there was nothing else for it to do.

The revolution declines the responsibility for the misery into which the evils of the old autocracy, and the arrogance of the military threw the German people. (*Loud applause from the Socialists; protests from the Right.*)

It is also not responsible for our serious shortage of food. The fact that by the hunger blockade we have lost many hundreds of thousands of human lives - that hundreds of thousands of men, women, children, and aged people have fallen victims to it - disposes of the story that we could have managed with our food supplies if the revolution had not come.

Defeat and food shortage have handed us over to the enemy Powers. But not only we, but also our enemies, have been terribly exhausted by the war, and the feeling of exhaustion among our enemies springs from their effort to indemnify themselves at the cost of the German people, and the idea of exploitation is brought into the work of peace. These plans of revenge and oppression called for the sharpest protest. (*Loud applause from all sides.*)

The German people cannot be made the wage slaves of other nations for twenty, forty, or sixty years. (*Loud applause.*)

... In view of the misery of the masses of the peoples; in view of the mass misery on every side, the question of guilt seems almost small. Still, the German people is resolved itself to call to judgment all against whom deliberate guilt or deliberate baseness can be proved. But those ought not to be punished who themselves were victims - victims of the war, victims of our former lack of freedom.

To what end, on their own witness, did our enemies fight? To annihilate Kaiserism. Kaiserism exists no more. It is abolished forever. The very fact of this National Assembly proves it.

According to their solemn proclamation, our enemies fought "for justice, freedom, and a permanent peace," but so far the armistice conditions have been of unprecedented severity and have been pitilessly carried through. Without more ado, Alsace is treated as French territory.

The Germans have been driven out of the country and their properties sequestered. The occupied territory on the left of the Rhine has been cut off from the rest of Germany. The attempt is being made monstrously to extend the provision of the armistice agreement ... and to turn it into a general financial enslavement of the German people.

We warn the enemy not to drive us to extremities ... Let them not place before us the dangerous choice between starvation and disgrace. Even a Socialist People's Government, and this one above all others, must hold fast to its principle that it would rather suffer the extremity of want than be dishonoured. (*Loud applause.*)

.... Once more we turn to all the peoples in the world with the urgent appeal to see that justice is done to the German people - not to permit the annihilation of our hopeful beginnings by the oppression of our people and our economic life. The German people has won its right to self-determination at home. It cannot sacrifice that right abroad. We cannot renounce uniting the whole German nation in the framework of a single Empire. (*Applause.*)