Hello and welcome history friends patrons all to episode 77 of the VAP. Last time, we assessed the moment when the allied leaders finally seemed to rally behind a unified policy, in their delivery of the basic rejection of the German counterproposals on 16th June. This moment could hardly have been a surprising one – while the allies disagreed on a lot of things, something which everyone agreed on was not allowing Germany to have its way, and those counterproposals did not read like a power that was willing to accept the allied directions unconditionally. That sense of surrender did not enter into the German government’s psyche until surprisingly late in the day. In fact as we will see, it was only really once the allied threats to make use of force were made to seem real, and the German government exhausted its final appeal, that the German government resigned itself to signing, before the previous government actually resigned that is.

The period from 16th to 20th June is thus an important one for our story, because it was this period where, in light of the allied response to the German counterproposals, the German position became much more acute. How could Ulrich von BR, a man who had proclaimed his unwillingness and inability to sign, now sign the treaty? As it transpired, he could not. Ulrich von BR was one among many German civil servants who elected to resign rather than face the shame, but before matters reached that point, discussions in Weimar were got underway. What options did Germany realistically have? What options did she favour the most? Questions like these will take up much of our time, as will the other relevant question of exactly how much leeway or mercy the German government actually expected. Were her statesmen living in the clouds, hoping against hope, or did they have a genuine plan? It’s about time we moved our focus away from the confines of the C4, and towards the power whom the allied energies were meant to be aimed at. Without any further ado then, I will now take you to WG in late May, 1919…

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The Americans want to get our unconditional signature on the treaty. Their policy aims to put us off with the prospect of a future revision, but we cannot consent to that. Just as President Wilson has always failed up to now when he was called upon to assert himself, so he will continue to fail in the future whenever the opposition he meets, whether within the United States or outside them, is too great.[[1]](#footnote-1)

These were the words of Germany’s legation secretary, sent to another official in Germany’s FO. The names of these characters are less important than the core message which is presented here. Among other notes, the legation secretary took the time to refer to WW as ‘that pig-headed professor ignorant of Europe.’ German officials both within their delegation at Paris, and back home in Germany, had evidently lost faith in the American President to work for their interests. We have largely avoided bringing more German names into the story of the PPC than is generally necessary, since we also have more than enough names to keep track of on the allied side. The heavy hitters, like President Ebert, Chancellor Scheidemann and the head of the German delegation, Ulrich von BR, are the figures we have mostly concerned ourselves with. However, it is important to mention another significant but also mostly forgotten source of information which the German and American sides made use of.

Colonel Arthur Conger was an American military intelligence officer working in Pershing’s general staff, and in mid-February, he managed to connect with a German counterpart, an officer by the name of Walter Loeb. This connection, Conger insisted, would be vital for establishing a backchannel communication between American and Germany, and his superiors seemed to agree. Chancellor Scheidemann had approved this channel as well, and by late March, Conger had received a document labelled ‘Peace Conditions Acceptable to Germany’ from Mr Loeb. The document was a prelude to the German counterproposals which would follow two months later, and they contained a long list of demands, including instant German membership of the LON, German control over her colonies as a mandatory power, and a general desire for a peace of justice, as it was called.

These demands, as we have seen, were reiterated in the counterproposals of 29th May; German officials had evidently had some time to think about the most important elements of the peace. The historian Lloyd Ambrosius discerned that German officials interpreted the FPs from a distinctly German point of view. Rather than accept the chasm of opinion which existed between the allies and Germans in this regard, President Ebert went out of his way to emphasise, through the channel which Conger and Loeb maintained, that the allies would have to abandon their unjust interpretation of the FPs, and that documents such as the draft covenant of the LON – available by 14th February before Wilson returned to the US – would have to be modified to suit Germany’s needs. While the difference in opinion existed between the allies and Germans, Ebert expected nonetheless for President Wilson to share the opinions of the German side. ‘Because of their unrealistic expectations’, Ambrosius writes, ‘German leaders were naturally disappointed with the Versailles Treaty.’ And Ambrosius then added:

President Ebert and Scheidemann’s cabinet issued a statement to the German people on May 9 denouncing these conditions of peace as a contradiction to the promised FPs. They labelled this treaty as ‘unbearable’ and ‘unfulfillable.’ The revised covenant that it contained obviously failed to satisfy the German desire for an inclusive League. The German government asserted that ‘the world must abandon all hope for a LON that would liberate a reconcile peoples and secure peace.’ What these leaders wanted was a peace that spared Germany the consequences of military defeat. The treaty, including the covenant, obviously fell short of this goal, which they had identified with Wilson’s FPs.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Indeed, the scales fell from the eyes of Germany’s government with the delivery of the draft peace treaty to von BR on 7th May. Up to that point, the government in Weimar had believed, rightly or wrongly, that Wilson was on their side, and that it was only the vengeful French, opportunistic British and some elements of his own delegation who were leading Wilson astray. They clung desperately to this interpretation of Wilson’s role in the PPC and his actual character, but the Germans were fundamentally incorrect in these ideas. Furthermore, in their false interpretation of Wilson’s role in the negotiations, the Germans believed it would be better to resist the treaty’s terms at all costs, because it would play to Wilson’s hand. Throughout the month of May, these beliefs died hard, as they had served as the foundation stone of German diplomacy from the beginning of the conference. At the centre of this foundation was the hope, sometimes the expectation, that German diplomacy would be able to split the allies and play off their differing objectives and perspectives on the treaty’s harshness.

The Germans had singled out the American President as the most different of the allied leaders, because he had, after all, identified himself as not bound by those old ideas which bound his European allied counterparts. The US did not seek to gain anything material at the peace table, only a lasting peace with a newly christened organisation at its core. These ideals, and the revolutionary new approach to peace-making which the FPs imagined, captured the hope of the German government.[[3]](#footnote-3) They clung to Wilson’s old promises like a lifeboat in a storm, unaware that, first, so much had changed since January 1918 when those promises had been made, and second, that Wilson was perfectly capable of moulding those apparently holy goals of the FPs to suit his less popular ends. But were the Germans right to single out Wilson in this way? The historian Klaus Schwabe would argue that they were, and that even though the chasm wasn’t as total among the allies as the Germans imagined, it was still certainly present. Schwabe wrote:

The President was clearly subject to a number of conflicting political pressures. He had singled out the most important one himself: It was essential in this final crisis of the conference to keep the victors' coalition from breaking down, for, as Wilson correctly argued, a schism of this kind would have represented a diplomatic triumph for Germany. This is the major reason why he went along with Lloyd George's effort to secure the concessions which Clemenceau did not reject immediately. Wilson sometimes met Lloyd George halfway, and sometimes he was willing to go even farther to reach agreement than Lloyd George was. For this same reason, the last thing he would have done was to defy the Allies' veto and push through the concessions which he favoured, regardless of the consequences. To have done that would have been inconsistent with the role of arbiter between Lloyd George and Clemenceau which he had assumed in this stage of the negotiations, and it would have been frowned upon in the United States as well. The mood in his own country, indeed, was a second factor which Wilson could not completely ignore. For domestic political reasons, he needed to conclude the peace soon, and it could not be excessively watered down…Any leniency toward Germany, however, would only increase the difficulty of winning approval of the treaty from the Senate, where the main opposition which Wilson would have to face would come from the right. Wilson expected it to be difficult enough to obtain Senate approval of the League of Nations Covenant, and he knew that any blatantly obvious concessions to the German counterproposals would only increase this difficulty. This explains his basic antipathy for the policy of leniency which Lloyd George seemed to be advocating at first.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The American President was thus facing a lot of pressures, but what of the aforementioned backchannel of Colonel Conger and Mr Loeb – could they have played a role in helping to smooth over the misunderstandings in German American diplomacy, particularly in the first half of June when the allied response to the German counterproposals was in development? In fact, we can discern an important development in this regard. Above all, Wilson’s clear decision during this process to choose allied unity over moderation towards Germany looms into view. In some cases, such as with his relations towards LG, those two considerations went hand in hand. Most of the time though, Wilson felt compelled to ignore or reject hopeful German approaches, on the basis that they could jeopardise allied unity. Thanks to the position of Colonel Conger, in addition, the Germans were drip fed this information over late May and early June. By the time the allied reply had been received in the middle of the month indeed, the German delegation had been told in no uncertain terms by Colonel Conger that, contrary to what they might have expected, America was just as willing to participate in the threatened military adventure into Germany if the Weimar government refused to sign. American troops would defend the Poles, would facilitate the partitioning of Germany, would participate perhaps in similar atrocities on German citizens to those visited upon the Belgian and French citizenry in 1914. This, said Conger, would be akin to disaster, ‘If all this happens’, Conger said, ‘France will finally have achieved the war aim which it thought had been withheld from it so far.’[[5]](#footnote-5)

With this warning in their possession, it must surely have been plain by mid-June that Germany could expect to have no success in its efforts to split the allies. Furthermore, Ulrich von BR would have known that the allies were very serious indeed about maintaining this united front in the face of German stubbornness. In fact, so certain had BR become of the futility of Colonel Conger’s channel for solving the German problems, that he requested it be closed off. On 12th June, significantly, a few days before the final nail in the coffin of German hopes was hammered in, the government in Weimar approved of this policy. There was therefore no longer any communication between the American and German governments from that point. We might ask with some reason, why BR advocated this approach – surely it was better to keep all options open with the challenges that loomed ahead? The incredible answer is that, rather than giving up hope of a successful diplomatic solution to Germany’s woes, BR planned to use the threatened war against Germany to her advantage.

The plan was as bold as it was reckless. Knowing full well that the allies were serious in their threats to make good the use of force, and that Marshal Foch would be leading their efforts, BR began to see this conflict not as a disaster for Germany, but as an opportunity. The German counterproposals, BR believed, had underlined the divisions present in the allied camp. That was why the allies had taken so long to deliver their verdict on those terms. While the allies agreed on the need to invade Germany if she did not accept the terms, the question was, just how far would this conviction go? German military planners imagined a nightmare scenario where the whole of the Rhineland, Hanover, Bavaria and vast portions of the interior would all be occupied. Where some might have viewed that as the end of Germany, however, BR did not. Instead he viewed it as the beginning of a new chapter in Germany’s life cycle, this one characterised by resistance and sacrifice which would dramatically bolster her reputation. It wasn’t just about resisting the shame of a humiliating peace, but about posing as the final defendant of the FPs. Essentially, BR seems to have believed that not Wilson's United States but a Germany oppressed by the victors would be the spokesman for the left throughout the world. Speaking from this perspective, BR had actually warned the victors in early May of the "danger" which it would pose to "world peace...if a nationalistic socialism were to take the place of a nationalistic capitalism" (such as he felt was embodied in the western powers). These eerily prophetic warnings notwithstanding, BR had the support of several figures within the delegation, one of whom declared:

Within me abides an invincible belief that the ideas for which we are fighting are the ideas of the future, and that whatever the treaty may look like...in the conflict of ideas the German and not the Allied delegates will in the future be held to be the victors. I likewise believe that the practical results of our work here...will not hurt our people deep in their spirit, even if the Reich should be broken to pieces because of it.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Exactly how far did BR’s vision go? Did it contain any long term, practical elements? In fact, BR’s vision was as thorough as it was unreal. The masses in the Entente countries, Brockdorff felt, would not be able to resist the "power" of these new ideas. The people would pressure their leaders and thereby prevent their governments from carrying out their coercive policy against Germany. BR believed that he had already seen signs of what he called a "revolutionary crisis" in the Entente countries. This crisis would worsen as the masses would force their governments to change their course, and this change would initiate the collapse of the enemy coalition. Then, once her enemies had splintered and revolted, the moment for negotiations and for a thorough revision of the peace treaty would have come. BR indicated that he expected this reversal to come about very soon, at one point alluding to a time span of two months. BR’s colleagues in the delegation bought into this illusion, with one subordinate completely adopted the argument of his high-ranking friend when, in a letter of June 4, he tried to dispel all worries about the future: ‘We are not confronting the Rome that Carthage did’ his colleague wrote, ‘but a coalition that is crumbling’.[[7]](#footnote-7) Additional, darker pictures of what would follow if Germany did accept the treaty included the fall of democratic socialism and the rise of the far right, which would be unstoppable in the face of the national shame. ‘We will dig our own grave, demoralize the entire nation, destroy democracy and socialism’, insisted Max Warburg, member of the prominent Warburg Jewish banking family, and later a board member on the Reichsbank during the inter-war years, adding:

…for once the peace treaty goes into effect and misery and hunger appear among us, everyone will turn against those who signed this treaty. The people will forget that the men responsible for this whole misfortune are the ones who started the war, and there will be a swing to the right or a revolution from the most radical quarter.

Although of course, BR’s vision and claims were far more illusionary than rational, the Foreign Minister's view completely captivated his advisers. Among them, too, the rejection of the treaty appeared to be the lesser of two evils. Opening Germany up to a potentially devastating invasion by the allied powers was considered somehow less inherently bad than accepting the unacceptable, assigning their names to this document of shame, and admitting that Germany was actually beaten. Such developments throughout the month of June should illustrate how warped the sense of reality had become in Germany, that these officials believed death and a resumption of the war, accompanied of course by a re-imposition of the hated blockade which had been momentarily lifted, was preferable to signing.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Easy though it is to lambast these figures for playing with the lives of their countrymen, and for failing to accept the reality of their hopeless situation, it is also easy to understand that position, even if we maintain that it is morally indefensible. For the intangible concept of national honour and prestige, to avoid tarnishing Germany’s good name, to prevent national humiliation, these figures chose to gamble with additional German lives like any other offensive on the front. We should hardly be surprised that when it was learned the allies had rejected the counterproposals on 16th June, the German delegation in their turn elected unanimously to reject the peace treaty. They would resolutely refuse to accept it, whatever the consequences might be, since these consequences at least provided additional opportunities, whereas signing the treaty would close the door on the humiliation.

That might well have been it, and the narrative of the PPC might now have degenerated into a terrible story on the resumption of the war. Germany would have been devastated and destroyed, and the true extent of her defeat would have been brought home to her. Contrary to BR’s anticipations, the intervention back into Germany and the resumption of hostilities was very unlikely indeed to affect a collapse in allied unity. In fact, German rejection of the peace treaty, after the processes of negotiation had been undertaken, would have shown the populations in the allied countries that Germany wanted everything its own way. While nobody would have relished the resumption of hostilities, it would be a stretch to suppose that they would have feared them, or that the rift among the allies would have taken place. One of the few things the allies could agree on, when they weren’t giving out to Marshal Foch for his changing opinions, was the necessity of making real their threat to invade Germany if it proved necessary.

Perhaps, if the conflict went on for more than a year, and reluctant allied soldiers continued to be forced into the fray, problems would have emerged, but Wilson had worked so hard to preserve allied unity, and had sacrificed so much to maintain it, that he was unlikely to buckle now. The French government, similarly, did not desire to rid the world of German power with a second war; they wanted Berlin to admit it was defeated, as France had had to do in 1871. The British as well were happy to get through peace what they had been unable to conquer, but it would have been impossible for LG to have ignored the challenge to allied unity which a total German rejection of the treaty would have occasioned. Remember, the Germans wouldn’t have been only rejecting the peace treaty, they would have also rejected the months of hard work which the big three had engaged with.

It would have been a slap in the face, from a foe who would not accept the hand he had been dealt. There would have been little mercy in reserve for such an opponent, and for the sake of proving their point if nothing else, the allies would have sacrificed an awful lot to drive this point home. Perhaps if BR had had his way then, Germany would have felt the true extent of its defeat in 1919, and her leaders would have come to terms with the fact of many states’ life cycles – that you win some and you lose some, and then you move on. From there, it would be a question of how utterly destroyed German resistance was by the allied invasion. What would it take, in other words, for the stabbed in the back mythos to be eradicated? Allied flags fluttering over the Reichstag, a-la the Red Army in 1945, or perhaps the worsening of the circumstances which forced Germans to the peace table in the first place? It is impossible to know for sure, and is a matter for speculators to draw their own conclusions. What is important though, is that this vision of opportunistic self-sacrifice by BR and his delegation did not come to life, as we know. The reason for this was relatively simple – BR may have been unwilling to accept the treaty, may have been willing to tempt destruction, but the government back in Weimar was not.

While Chancellor Scheidemann and President Ebert presided over the government, this government was not united in the slightest. From the first week of June, even those two normally defiant officials were beginning to have doubts. Scheidemann commissioned German officials on 4th June to complete a study of what would happen if Germany elected to reject the treaty, and the prognosis was not pretty. Ugly though it was, it was similar to BR’s imagined consequences in many respects, with a critical difference. BR supposed that, following some terrible initial consequences, Germany would shortly be back on its feet, because America would never countenance a wasteland in place of the German state. Those officials tasked with imagining the allied wrath felt differently though; they anticipated a German state ripped into pieces, assailed by Bolshevism, partitioned by its neighbours and economically disadvantaged for as much as three generations.

The only silver lining, they said, was that German honour would be preserved, but this was not even guaranteed, since what kind of stomach could the successor states of the German Empire have to fight, when their strength had been so weakened? And this was centre of the fears among the German government – that the Reich would be partitioned, reduced to its old kingdoms, in the event of an allied invasion, and that this terrible outcome would be made permanent, rather than temporary. This latter fear was especially acute because it was known that certain governments like Bavaria was prepared to negotiate a separate armistice with the allies. And additionally, there was the concern that Prussia’s iteration of the German Empire would be extinguished forever once its appendages discovered the full extent of her futile plans for resistance. How many dead bodies was the preservation of the Empire worth to average Germans? What if they believed that Prussian militarism was primarily responsible for the crisis? What if the allies offered them sumptuous terms to make peace and abandon the Prussian core?

So much of this was up in the air, and this was before one even considered Germany’s actual capacity for armed resistance. While the defeat of German arms was predicted, at least some resistance was also expected by BR and his delegation, in line with the vision of something akin to national martyrdom. Germans would fight to the bitter end, as much as they could, to preserve their democratic vision of a united Germany, and the allies would be the ultimate bad guys for supressing this dream. Yet, BR hadn't really bothered to consult or then to listen to what the German high command had had to say; it more than had its hands full with the east, the conflict in Silesia and the tumult in the Baltic. The German commanders had no appetite for conflict in the West, and the allied threats from late May had made a serious impact upon them. They, unlike BR, could see no upside to the unmitigated disaster which would follow the allied invasion. In fact, it would be akin to a humiliation once more, as the demoralised and frustrated German soldiers fled or were brushed aside, vindicating in the process the allied argument that the Germans were defeated, and the German people were being led astray. It is also worth considering the possibility that Germany’s high command noted how this humiliation would remove their ability to cry betrayal by the civilian government. If the allied resumed the war, it could not be claimed that Germany was stabbed in the back, but defeated at the front, by the enemy whom, it was loudly proclaimed, had not been able to defeat her in the past.

Just how resolutely determined the allies were to make their threats come to life was made abundantly clear by 20th June, when the C4 confirmed their authorisation for Marshal Foch to advance to the River Weser, and to conclude separate peace negotiations with the disparate old German kingdoms like Hanover, Bavaria and Saxony. Thus, the partitioning of Germany was put to paper as a contingency plan only a few days after news of BR’s planned rejection of the treaty was made known. Now, it should be stated that by 20th June, Wilson and his counterparts expected Germany to sign at the last minute. However, on the other hand, it is important not to doubt the President’s determination to follow through; not he, nor GC or LG, could afford to relent at this late stage in the game, and the minutes make that clear. As Klaus Schwabe confirms:

The fact that the Americans and the British were ready to depart totally from their earlier German policy in order to force the submission of the Berlin government made it likely that continuing German resistance would only unite them further and bring them closer together with the French as well. There was not the slightest chance that their coalition would collapse.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Although the allied leaders only gathered for the C4 three times between 17th to 20th June, the decisions reached on those days illustrated how deadly serious they were about proceeding down the dark path of resuming the war. The minutes of 17th June contained the most complete account yet of the plan for resuming the war, and while Clemenceau noted that Marshal Petain had urged caution, the French premier indicated his determination to support Foch and see the policy through. Interestingly, the declared allied goal was not the conquest of Germany, but to force her to sign the peace. The directive read:

The offensive of the Allied Armies is ready to start again on the day prescribed by the Governments: the armies, ready a first time for May 20th, have been prepared again as a consequence of the orders given by Marshal Foch June 14th, and confirmed the 16th. The operations, except for an order of the Governments to the contrary, will commence the day they have indicated, June 23rd, 7PM…It is difficult to foresee at what point of this movement we shall obtain peace, and whether it will be necessary or not to go to Berlin to overthrow the German Government.[[10]](#footnote-10)

The clearly defined timetable meant that the Germans would have only a few days to signify their acceptance of the allied reply. Indeed, as we learned in the last episode, within the allied reply was a demand that the Germans must respond within five days. It was indeed at the very last moment, literally up to the final hour of the deadline, that the German government confirmed that it would accept the peace treaty as it then stood. However, we should not imagine that the period of 17th to 23rd June contained a straightforward tale of German resignation. It in fact contained resignation of a different kind, and the final act of protest, which actually did the allies a favour in the end. The 20th June seems to have been a critical moment, since it was on this day that the most discussions regarding the intended allied policy towards Germany were hosted.

The military representatives of the big four were all listened to, and after Marshal Foch spoke for France and the allied command, General Robertson spoke for Britain, and General Tasker Howard Bliss spoke up for the US. Bliss’ comments are especially interesting, because that American delegate had been of the opinion in the past that the German treaty contained several harsh elements that went against Wilson’s old principles enshrined in the FPs. Bliss, in short, was among those who believed that the Germans were justified in the arguments laid down in their counterproposals. Yet here on Friday 20th June, he argued for nothing less than the forceful imposition of the treaty: ‘If the Germans refused to sign the Treaty’ Bliss said, ‘something must clearly be done’. The General added that he ‘could see nothing else but military action in the form of an advance.’ Indeed, in line with this theme of something having to be done, Bliss continued to imagine the outcome of their invasion:

There would undoubtedly be propaganda to the effect that the occupation of Berlin was only a step towards the occupation of Moscow nor could we now judge what its effect would be on the Czechs and Poles or what would be the effect of military pressure on Germany. We did not know whether the forces were sufficient: or whether or how great additions might have to be called for: or whether the forces might not get through to Berlin with very little resistance; nor whether when Berlin was reached, the signature of Peace would be any nearer. Something however must be done. Without knowing Marshal Foch’s plan, [I have] studied the matter with the officers of his own staff, and had come to very much the same conclusions.

This meeting on the 20th June hammered home other important developments. The River Weser would be the declared limit of the allied invasion, as the outcome of Foch’s overtures to the southern German governments was awaited. Foch, it was said, had been placed in total control of all Polish armies as well, which offered the allies a unique advantage to constrain Germany on both sides. In addition, to facilitate aid coming from Prague, the big four worked to imagine how the peace between the Czechs and Hungarians might be reached. Just beyond the River Weser was Hannover, while the cities of Bremen, Gottingen, Celle, Minden, Kassel and Oldenburg resided on its course or nearby it. It was perhaps the last geographic barrier Germany had to offer, and was an ideal location to initiative diplomacy to potential separatist movements, particularly to Hannover, which would be within striking distance. All the allied leaders were in agreement, with Clemenceau noting, according to the stenographer Sir Maurice Hankey, that:

…what he understood was that the march on Berlin was conditioned by the achievement of successive armistices in the south. He did not complain of that modification of the original plan as he had understood it. He thought it was prudent. At all costs anything in the nature of a setback or a check must be avoided. He had been forcibly struck by the fact that all the Allied and Associated Generals were in agreement that a march as far as the Weser was feasible, and that thereafter supplementary troops would be required for the further advance. He hoped and understood, however, that if the Allies were favoured by chance, no further forces would be required.

So the allies intended to play on the demoralisation of the German camp and divide and conquer, thereby hopefully reducing the amount of troops which would be needed, and perhaps even negating the need for a march on Berlin. There was no question as to the fact that they would march on Berlin if it proved necessary though, and while it would take them a while both Wilson and LG in their turn indicated that reinforcements would be brought in. In other words, the record of the minutes illustrate plainly that BR’s vision for a collapsed allied front and splintered aims was unfeasible. If anything, the allies were more determined than ever to exact the consequences of rejection upon Germany; their plans to divide and conquer should not necessarily be seen as a temporary measure either, as the minutes record how Foch planned dividing reparations payments among the separate German governments, which strongly hinted that the division would be at least made temporary, or until reparations were paid.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Though they were not clued into the formidable extent of these allied decisions, the German government was aware of allied resolve and determination to follow through on threats which had been consistently made since the treaty had been handed over. Despite this though, BR reacted with fury to the allied refusal to accept the counterproposals. Since these were the only terms which BR found acceptable, he elected to leave Paris on for Weimar on 18th June. His delegation went with him, sending in the process a clear message to the big three, and going some way towards explaining why talk of military reprisals began increasingly doing the rounds in allied council meetings from that point. A German delegation that intended to sign would hardly have had cause to leave the building, and thus the German exit was interpreted invariably as a last futile act of resistance by a desperate regime, or as a signal of German intentions to face the storm come what may.

Within a day of returning to Weimar, BR resigned as head of the German delegation, and the German Chancellor Scheidemann followed suit. Only President Ebert was now left standing as the opponent of the treaty, but if Germany was to avoid collapse, it would require a new government. It was difficult indeed to find a government which would be willing to approve of the treaty. The Weimar finance minister, Matthias Erzberger, stayed on as a moderate voice, and helped gather together a new government under Chancellor Gustav Bauer. Erzberger had been one of the German officials sent to sign the armistice back in November, and he now assumed the vice chancellorship and a leading role in the government. BR’s replacement was the new foreign minister Herman Muller, and Muller would be one of the Germans tasked with signing the treaty of Versailles.

The infamous profile which BR had cast would soon be forgotten, replaced by Muller’s more moderate, statesmanlike demeanour. Muller, in time, would come to serve twice as Chancellor, most notably during 1928-30, when the WR which he had helped bring into being teetered on the edge of collapse following the WSC. Of course, by the time the new cabinet had taken its seats on 21st June, all of this could not have been known.[[12]](#footnote-12) There was still a smidgeon of time left, it appeared, to appeal to the good nature of the allies. Unfortunately for this new cabinet, any hope of exploiting the occasion of the removal of the hardliners would be lost when, many miles from the atmosphere of their desperate cabinet meeting, that same day, the German navy attempted to take matters into their own hands at a place called Scapa Flow…

1. Quoted in Klaus Schwabe, *Woodrow Wilson, Revolutionary Germany, and Peace-making*, p. 382. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Lloyd Ambrosius, *Woodrow Wilson and the American Diplomatic Tradition: The Treaty Fight in Perspective* (Cambridge University Press, London; 1990), pp. 126-127. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Ibid*, pp. 128-131. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Klaus Schwabe, *Woodrow Wilson, Revolutionary Germany, and Peace-making*, p. 378. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Ibid*, p. 381. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See *Ibid*, pp. 382-383. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Ibid*, p. 383. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See *Ibid*, pp. 383-384. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *Ibid*, pp. 389-390. Schwabe provides by far the best narrative and analysis of this period which I have found, although Ambrosius’ aforementioned study is also good and detailed. Remember that Schwabe’s book and others like it can be found on Questia! [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See the minutes: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1919Parisv06/d54> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Minutes available: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1919Parisv06/d56> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ambrosius, *Woodrow Wilson and the American Diplomatic Tradition*, pp. 134-135. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)