

CAN EUROPE DISARM? <sup>399</sup>

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**Kann Europa abrüsten?**

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## FOREWORD

The articles reprinted here were published in the Berlin newspaper *Vorwärts* in March 1893, during the Reichstag debate on the Military Bill.

In them I proceed from the assumption that is increasingly gaining general acceptance: that the system of standing armies has been carried to such extremes throughout Europe that it must either bring economic ruin to the peoples on account of the military burden, or else degenerate into a general war of extermination, unless the standing armies are transformed in good time into a militia based on the universal arming of the people.

I attempt to prove that this transformation is possible right at this moment, even for the present governments and in the present political situation. I thus take this situation as my basis and for the time being propose only such means as could be adopted by any government of the day without jeopardising national security. I simply seek to establish that from a purely military point of view there is nothing whatever to prevent the gradual abolition of standing armies; and that, if these armies are nevertheless maintained, it is for political and not military reasons—that, in a word, the armies are intended to provide protection not so much against the external enemy as the internal one.

However, I consider the gradual reduction of the term of service by international treaty, which forms the core of my argument, to be the simplest and quickest way possible of effecting the general transition from a standing army to the arming of the people organised as a militia. The terms of such a treaty would naturally vary according to the nature of the contracting governments and the political situation of the day. And things

could not possibly be more favourable than at present; if it is possible even today to set a *maximum* term of service of two years as a starting point, in a few years it may be possible to choose a much shorter period of time.

By making the physical and military training of all male youths an essential condition for the transition to the new system, I expressly preclude the possibility of the military system proposed here being confused with any other militia now in existence, e.g., the Swiss one.

London, March 28, 1893

F. Engels

## I

For the past twenty-five years all Europe has been arming on a hitherto unprecedented scale. Every major power is seeking to surpass another in military might and readiness for war. Germany, France and Russia are exhausting themselves in their efforts to outdo one another. At this very moment the German government is demanding from the people a new exertion so tremendous that even the present tame Reichstag shrinks away from it. Is it not folly, then, to talk of disarmament?

And yet in all countries the classes of people who almost exclusively have to provide the bulk of the soldiers and pay the bulk of the taxes are crying out for disarmament. And yet everywhere the effort has reached the stage where its strength—here the recruits, there the money, somewhere else both—is beginning to fail. Is there no way out of this blind alley except through a war of destruction such as the world has never seen?

I maintain: disarmament and thus a guarantee of peace is possible, it is even comparatively easy to carry out, and Germany more than any other civilised state has the power, as well as the mission, to carry it out.

After the war of 1870-71, the superiority of the system of universal compulsory military service with a reserve and Landwehr—even in its then stunted Prussian form<sup>340</sup>—over the system of conscription by proxy had been conclusively demonstrated. All the continental countries adopted it in more or less modified forms. There would not have been any great harm in this itself. An army that has its main reserve in middle-aged married men is by its very nature less offensive than was the conscript army of

Louis Napoleon, which was heavily permeated by paid proxies—recruited professional soldiers. But then came the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine, which turned the Peace of Frankfurt into a mere ceasefire for France, as the Peace of Tilsit<sup>341</sup> had been for Prussia. And now began the feverish arms race between France and Germany, into which Russia, Austria and Italy were also gradually drawn.

To start with, the obligatory term of service in the Landwehr was extended. In France the territorial army acquired a reserve of older men; in Germany the second levy of the Landwehr and even the Landsturm were revived.<sup>342</sup> And so it went on, step by step, until the age limit set by nature was reached and even exceeded.

Then conscription was stepped up and the new training cadres which this made necessary were set up; but here again the limit has been almost or fully reached, and in France has even been exceeded. The last enlistment intakes of the French army already include quite a number of young men who are not yet—or not at all—equal to the hardships of service. The English officers, impartial on this point, who attended the large manoeuvre in Champagne in 1891 and acknowledged the high efficiency of the present French army, generously and at times admiringly, report unanimously that an excessively large number of young soldiers dropped out in the course of the marches and combat exercises. In Germany we have admittedly not yet exhausted our reserves of men fit for military service, but to remedy that is precisely the purpose of the new Military Bill. In short, even in this respect we are approaching the limits of our powers.

Now the modern, the *revolutionary* aspect of the Prussian military system consists precisely in the demand that the strength of every able-bodied man should be placed at the service of national defence for as long as he is capable of bearing arms. And the only revolutionary thing that can be discerned in all military development since 1870 is the very fact that it has been deemed necessary—often enough with some reluctance—actually to increasingly carry out this demand, which had hitherto only been fulfilled in chauvinist fantasy. Neither the term of service liability nor the enlistment of all able-bodied young men can be called into question today, least of all by Germany and even less by the Social-Democratic Party, which, quite the contrary, is the only force able to translate also this demand fully into practice.

Accordingly there remains only one point where the need for disarmament can apply the lever: the term of service with the colours. And this, in fact, is the Archimedean point: *international*

*regulation*, by the great powers of the Continent, of the maximum term of active service with the colours for all arms of the service, initially for two years, as far as I am concerned—but with the proviso of an immediate further reduction as soon as people are convinced of the possibility, and with the militia system as the ultimate objective. And I maintain that Germany in particular is better able to make this proposal, and that Germany will profit more than anyone else by making it, even if it is rejected.

## II

The international regulation of the maximum term of service with the colours would affect the armies of all powers equally. It is generally assumed that, in armies whose men have never been under fire, for the initial phase of a campaign the term of active service—within certain limits—provides the best measure of their suitability in all war situations, particularly for strategic and tactical attack. Our warriors of 1870 had sufficient experience of the *furia francese*, of the bayonet attack of the long-serving imperial infantry and the full force of the cavalry attacks at Wörth and Sedan; but at Spichern, right at the beginning of the war, they also demonstrated that they could expel this same infantry from a strong position—even though outnumbered.<sup>343</sup> Generally speaking, then, let us concede that within certain limits, which vary with the national character, in troops with no experience of war the term of service with the colours is decisive with regard to their general suitability for war and particularly their fitness for the offensive.

If we succeed in setting a maximum limit to their term of service internationally, the relative capacity of the various armies will remain roughly what it is today. What one forfeits in immediate potential, the others will also forfeit. Insofar as a surprise attack by one state on another is excluded, it will continue to be so, to the same extent. The difference in the term of active service between France and Germany, for instance, has up till now not been such that it is of any importance; even under the reduced term of service everything would depend on how the agreed term of service was used in each of the armies, just as it does today. Apart from this, the relative strength of the two armies would correspond to the ratio between the populations of the two countries. Once universal compulsory military service is actually introduced, in countries of roughly equal economic



development (which determines the percentage of the unfit) the population size will always be the measure of the strength of the armed forces. Then there will be no more tricks like the Prussian tricks of 1813; *that* cream will have been skimmed off.

But a great deal is dependent on how the established term of service is utilised. And on this subject there are men in almost all armies who could tell a tale or two if they were—permitted to, for shortage of money has everywhere forced armies to give a proportion of their recruits a “makeshift” training in a few months. Then they have to restrict themselves to essentials, a whole lot of traditional tomfoolery is thrown out of the window, and they find to their surprise how little time it takes to make a soldier out of a tolerably well-built young man. Bebel has related in the Reichstag how this astonished the training officers of the German Ersatzreserve.<sup>344</sup> In the Austrian army there are plenty of officers who maintain that the Landwehr, which has about the same term of service as the German Ersatzreserve, is better than the line. No wonder. There they lack the time that is wasted in the line on the traditional and hence sanctified idiocies—and for this very reason it is not wasted.

The German infantry regulations of 1888 limit the tactical formations for battle to the essentials. It contains nothing new; fighting ability in all reversed situations had already been introduced by the Austrians after 1859; the formation of all battalion columns by means of a simple combination of four company columns had been introduced at about the same time by the Darmhessians, who had to succumb to this rational formation again being prohibited by the Prussians after 1866.<sup>345</sup> In other respects the new regulations do away with an immense tangle of antediluvian ceremonies that were as useless as they were sancrosanct; least of all do I have any reason to find fault with it. For after the war of 1870 I allowed myself the luxury of drawing up a plan of the closed formations and movements of companies and battalions appropriate to present-day warfare, and was not a little surprised to find this piece of the “state of the future” implemented in almost every particular in the relevant sections of the new regulations.

But the regulations are one thing, and putting them into practice is another. The martinets, which have always flourished in the Prussian army in times of peace, reintroduce the time-wasting abolished in the instructions through the back door of the parade-ground. All at once parade drill is vitally necessary to counterbalance the unruliness of the dispersed battle order, as the sole means of establish-

ing true discipline, etc., etc. This is tantamount to saying that order and discipline can only be established by making the men practise utterly useless things. The abolition of the "goose step" alone would make whole weeks available for rational exercises, quite apart from the fact that foreign officers could then watch a German review without laughing up their sleeves.

Another similar obsolete institution is sentry duty, which, according to an old traditional notion, also serves to develop the intelligence and especially the independent thought of the men by teaching them the art—in case they are not already familiar with it—of standing guard and thinking of nothing at all for two hours. In view of the present universal custom of practising outpost duty in the field, sentry duty in town, where there are after all security police of every kind, has become totally senseless. Its abolition would result in at least a twenty per cent gain in the effective term of service for the army and ensure safety on the streets for civilians.

And then there are everywhere a lot of soldiers who on all sorts of pretexts do as little service as possible: company craftsmen, batmen, etc. There is plenty of scope for changes here.

Yes—but what about the cavalry? Surely they must have a longer term of service?—This is certainly desirable if one is dealing with recruits who can neither ride nor tend a horse. But there is plenty of scope for changes here too. If the horse rations were not so meagerly proportioned—the horses have to be specially fed for the manoeuvres in order to attain their normal strength!—and if every squadron had a number of extra horses available so that the men were able to practise in the saddle more often and for longer periods—in short, if a serious effort were made to compensate for the shorter term of service by the more intensive pursuit of essentials and the elimination of things superfluous, it would soon be found that it is possible to manage in that way, too. Even for rough-riding, on which so much stress has been placed and the vital necessity of which I readily concede, ways and means can be found. And anyway there is nothing to prevent the retention and extension of the system of three or four-year volunteers or of re-enlisted soldiers for cavalry troops, for as long as it is considered necessary—in return for corresponding compensations in the service liability of the reserve and the Landwehr, without which such things will not be attained.

Of course, if one listens to the military authorities one hears quite a different tale. It is all quite impossible, they say, and

nothing may be altered without everything collapsing. But for fifty years now I have heard so many military institutions solemnly described as unassailable and sacrosanct today, only to see them flung mercilessly into the junk room tomorrow, and by the very same authorities; furthermore, I have so often seen that what is praised to the skies in one army is deemed beneath contempt in another; I have so often observed that customs lavished with praise and institutions of long standing prove to be folly in the face of the enemy; finally, it has so often been my experience that in every army there is a particular conventional tradition intended for those of minor rank, the common soldier and the public, that is cultivated by the higher superiors but ridiculed by the officers of independent mind and reduced to nought by every campaign—in short, I have had so much historical experience of this that I would advise everyone to distrust nothing more than military “*expertise*”.

### III

It is a peculiar contrast: our high-ranking soldiers are generally so dreadfully conservative precisely in their own field, and yet there is today scarcely any other domain that is as revolutionary as the military one. The smooth-bore six-pounder and the seven-pound howitzer which I handled close by the Kupfergraben in the old days<sup>346</sup> and today’s rifled breech-loading guns, the large-calibre smooth-bore gun of those days and the modern 5mm repeating breech-loaders, seem centuries apart; and there is still no end to it, every day technology still ruthlessly throws overboard all the latest innovations. Now it is even discarding the romantic powder-smoke, giving battle a totally different character and course that are quite incalculable in advance. We must, however, increasingly come to terms with such incalculable factors in the midst of this ceaseless revolutionising of the technical basis of warfare.

As late as forty years ago the effective firing range of the infantry extended no further than 300 paces, at which distance a single man could survive unscathed a volley from an entire battalion, provided that the men were all really aiming at him. As for the firing range of the field artillery, it was practically ineffectual even at 1,500 to 1,800 paces. In the Franco-Prussian War the effective firing range of the rifles was 600-1,000 paces, that of the artillery 3,000-4,000 paces at the most. But the new

small-bore rifles, as yet untried in war, have a range approaching that of the artillery, their projectiles have four to six times the penetration; the repeating rifle gives a section today the same firepower that a whole company used to have; the artillery, while it cannot boast of a similar increase in firing range, has loaded its shells with entirely new explosives of previously unheard-of effect; though admittedly it is not yet quite certain who will have to suffer this effect, the shooter or the shot-at.

And in the midst of this unceasing, ever accelerating revolutionisation of the whole military system we are faced with military authorities who five years ago were still drumming into their troops all the conventional ceremonies and artificial contortions of old Fritz's<sup>a</sup> linear tactics, which vanished from the battlefield long ago, and continued to revere regulations by which you could still be beaten because you had marched off to the right and there was no room to form up on the left! Authorities who to this very day dare not question the shiny buttons and metal fittings of the soldiers' equipment—just as many magnets to attract 5mm bullets—who send the Uhlans into action with broad red doublets, and the cuirassiers admittedly without cuirasses—at last!—but in white battledress, and have only decided after much heart-searching to sacrifice on the altar of the fatherland the epaulettes (which were all the more sacred for being in such appalling taste)—rather than the epaulette-bearer himself.

It seems to me that it is neither in the interest of the German people, nor of the German army that this conservative superstition remains in control of the army amidst the technical revolution surging all around it. We need fresher, bolder minds, and I would be very much mistaken if there were not plenty of these among our most capable officers, plenty longing to be liberated from the routine and the pedantry which has again run riot in the last twenty years of peace. But until they find the courage and the opportunity to assert their convictions, the rest of us will have to step into the breach and do our best to prove that we too learnt something in the army.

Furthermore I have attempted to demonstrate above that the two-year term of service can be put into practice now in all arms of the service if the men are taught what they need to know in war and are spared the traditional time-consuming antiquities. But I stated right from the outset that it should not stop at two years. Rather, the proposal for an international two-year term of service

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<sup>a</sup> Frederick II.—*Ed.*

should be seen as simply the first step towards a gradual further reduction in the term of service—say, eighteen months to begin with, two summers and a winter—then a year—then...? This is where the state of the future starts, the unadulterated militia system, and we shall return to this once the thing has really been set in motion.

And this, setting the thing in motion, is most important of all. If one first faces the fact that the reduction of the term of service is a necessity for the economic existence of all countries and for the preservation of European peace, the next gain to be made is the realisation that *the stress in military training should be placed on the education of youth.*

When I returned to the Rhine after ten years' exile,<sup>347</sup> I was pleasantly surprised to see parallel and horizontal bars set up everywhere in the yards of the village schools. So far, so good: unfortunately it did not go very far. The apparatus was acquired in accordance with instructions, in the good old Prussian manner, but when it came to using it there was always some sort of obstacle. That was a different kettle of fish entirely—in fact, it usually never came to it at all. Is it too much to ask that the whole business should be taken seriously at last? That school pupils of all classes should be taught gymnastics both with and without apparatus systematically and thoroughly while their limbs are still elastic and supple, instead of, as now, making twenty-year-old lads slave away in vain in the sweat of their brows—and one's own—in order to make their stiffened bones, muscles and ligaments loose and pliant once again? Any doctor will tell you that the division of labour deforms any human being subjected to it, whole series of muscles being developed at the expense of others, and that the effects of this vary according to the specific branch of labour, each job producing its own deformity. Is it not then madness first to let the men become deformed and then afterwards make them straight and mobile again in the army? Does it demand a degree of insight surpassing the official horizon to see that one will obtain soldiers that are three times as good if one guards against this deformation at the appropriate time, at elementary school and secondary college?

But this is only the beginning. A boy can be taught the formation and movement of a serried troop at school with ease. The schoolboy stands and walks straight by nature, particularly when he has physical training; during our military service every one of us has observed the way our recruits stand and how hard it is to teach many of them to walk and stand straight. The

movements in column and company can be trained at any school and with a facility unknown in the army. What is a detested, often almost insurmountable difficulty for the recruit is a game and a diversion for the schoolboy. The contact and sense of direction in frontal marching and wheeling which is so difficult to attain with adult recruits is easily learnt by schoolboys as soon as drill is systematically carried out with them. If a good part of the summer is devoted to marches and exercises in the field, the minds and bodies of the boys will derive no less benefit from it than the military coffers, which will thus save whole months of service time. Military rambles of this kind are particularly well suited for getting the boys to solve such problems as are encountered on active service, and this in turn is highly apt to develop the pupils' intelligence and enable them to acquire a specifically military training in a comparatively short time. The practical proof of this has been provided by my old friend Beust, himself a former Prussian officer, at his school in Zurich. With the present complicated state of military matters, a transition to the militia system is inconceivable without preparatory military training for young people, and it is precisely in this field that Beust's successful experiments are of the greatest importance.

And now permit me to strike a specifically Prussian note. The vital question of concern to the Prussian state is: what is to become of the non-commissioned officer who has served his time? Until now he has been used as a policeman, frontier guard, doorkeeper, clerk, as a civil servant of every conceivable kind; there is not a single slot in the Prussian bureaucracy, however humble, that has not been filled with non-commissioned officers with a claim to a government appointment. Well then: you have worked your fingers to the bone to find situations for the non-commissioned officers; you have insisted on thrusting them in where they are no good, and using them for things of which they know nothing; is it not about time they were found a place in the field with which they are familiar and in which they can perform a useful job? They should become schoolmasters, but not in reading, writing and arithmetic—let them teach gymnastics and drill. That will do them and the boys good. And once the non-commissioned officers are transferred from the secrecy of the barracks and military jurisdiction into the daylight of the schoolyard and civil criminal procedure, I bet our rebellious school pupils will soon teach even the worst parade-ground despot good manners.

## IV

We reserve the right to return to the question of whether such a proposal for a universal, equal and gradual reduction in the term of service has any prospect of being adopted by international treaty. For the time being let us proceed from the assumption that it has been adopted. Will it then be translated from paper into reality, will it be honestly carried out by all parties?

Certainly, in the main. Firstly, it will not be possible to keep secret a way of evading it that is in any respect worth the trouble. And secondly, the population itself will ensure that it is implemented. No one remains in the barracks of his own free will if he is kept there beyond the period prescribed by law.

As far as individual countries are concerned, Austria and Italy, as well as the second and third-rank states that have introduced universal military service, will welcome such a treaty as an act of liberation and will happily adhere to it in every detail. We shall discuss Russia in the next section. But what about France? And in this matter France is quite definitely the decisive country.

Once France has signed and ratified the treaty there can be no doubt that it will have, by and large, to keep to it. But let us admit that the revanchist tendency existing in the propertied classes and the part of the working class that is not yet socialist may win the upper hand for a moment and provoke infringements of the treaty limits, either direct or based on hair-splitting. Such infringements can, however, never be of any importance, for otherwise Paris would prefer to abrogate the treaty. But Germany is in the fortunate position of being able generously to turn a blind eye to such minor cheating. Despite all the very commendable efforts of France to render a repetition of the defeats of 1870 impossible, Germany is much further ahead of it than is evident at first glance. Firstly there is the annually growing gap between the populations, now amounting to more than 12 million in Germany's favour. Secondly, the fact that the present military system has been in existence in Prussia for more than seventy years; the population has grown accustomed to it; it has been tested in every detail in a long series of mobilisations; all the problems that may arise and the mode of solving them have been experienced in practice and are familiar—advantages from which the other German armies also benefit. In France, however, general mobilisation still has to be tried out, and with an organisation that, for this purpose, is much more complicated. Thirdly, however, the undemocratic institution of one-year volunteers has encountered

insuperable obstacles in France; the three-year soldiers have simply ousted the one-year privileged ones from the army by means of chicanery. This proves how far public political consciousness in Germany, and the political institutions tolerated by it, lag behind those of France. But the political shortcoming is in this case a military advantage. It is beyond all doubt that no country, in relation to its population, sends such a number of young people through its secondary and high schools as Germany, and so the institution of one-year volunteers, undemocratic and politically objectionable though it may be, provides the army command with an excellent means of giving the majority of these young people (who have already received an adequate all-round training) a military training for service as officers. The campaign of 1866 first illustrated this, but since then, and particularly since 1871, this aspect of Germany's military strength has been specially fostered, indeed almost to excess. And even if so many of the German reserve officers have recently been doing their best to make their rank a laughing stock, there is still no doubt that as a body they are militarily superior, man for man, to their French counterparts, and, most importantly, that among its reservists and territorials Germany possesses a much higher percentage of men qualified for service as officers than any other country.

This peculiar abundance of officers enables Germany to muster a disproportionately larger number of new formations, already trained in peacetime, than any other country. According to the claim made by Richter (*Freisinnige Zeitung*, November 26, 1892<sup>348</sup>), which as far as I know has not been refuted either in the Reichstag or in the military commission, each German infantry regiment will be able to provide a mobile reserve regiment, two battalions of Landwehr and two Ersatzreserve battalions for action in war. Thus every three battalions provide ten, or the 519 battalions of the 173 peacetime regiments turn into 1,730 battalions in wartime, not counting riflemen and gunners. And in such a short time that no other country is able to come even remotely near it.

The French reserve officers, as one of them admitted to me, are much less numerous; yet they are supposed to be sufficient to fill the posts of the new formations envisaged by official publications. What is more, this man confessed that half of these officers are not of much use. The new formations in question are, however, a long way from equalling what Germany is said to be capable of achieving. And even so, the officers that France is able to muster will by then all have been used, while Germany will still be keeping some of them in reserve.



In all wars hitherto there has been a lack of officers after a couple of months of campaigning. With all other countries this would still be the case even today. Germany alone has an inexhaustible supply of officers. This being so, should we not be able to turn a blind eye to it if the French occasionally drill their men two or three weeks longer than stipulated in the treaty?

## V

We now come to Russia. Frankly speaking, it makes little difference whether Russia adheres to a treaty on the gradual equal reduction of the term of service, or even enters into one at all. In fact, as far as the issue at hand is concerned, we can disregard Russia almost entirely, for reasons given below.

Although the Russian Empire embraces over a hundred million people, easily twice as many as the German Empire, it is far from possessing an offensive military force anywhere near that of Germany. The fifty million people of Germany are huddled together over an area of 540,000 square kilometres; the at most 90 to 100 million people in Russia that come into consideration for us militarily are dispersed over  $3\frac{1}{2}$  million square kilometres, at a moderate estimate; the advantage accruing to the Germans on account of this far greater density of population is enhanced even further by the incomparably better railway network. In spite of this, the fact remains that a hundred million can in the long run provide more soldiers than fifty. As things stand it will take quite a long time before they come; but they are bound to come eventually. What then?

An army needs not only recruits but also officers. And in this respect the position in Russia looks pretty bad. In Russia only the nobility and the citizenry of the towns are considered for the rank of officer. The nobility is comparatively very small in numbers; there are few towns—one man in ten at most lives in a town—and of these towns only very few indeed merit the name. The number of secondary schools and of the pupils attending them is exceedingly small. Where are the officers for all the rank-and-file troops supposed to come from?

One man's meat is another man's poison. The system of universal military service presupposes a certain degree of economic and intellectual development; where this is lacking the system does more harm than good. And this is obviously the case in Russia.

First, it takes a comparatively long time anyway to make a trained soldier out of the average Russian recruit. The Russian soldier is of unquestionable bravery. As long as the attack by serried ranks of infantry was tactically decisive, he was in his element. His entire experience of life had led him to rely on the union with his comrades. In the villages, the semi-communistic community, in the towns, the cooperative work of the *artel*,<sup>349</sup> everywhere the *krugovaya poruka*,<sup>a</sup> the mutual liability of the comrades; in short, a state of society that palpably points to cohesion, the fount of all salvation, on the one hand, and the powerless solitude of the isolated individual left to his own initiative, on the other. The Russian retains this character even in the army; the massed battalions are almost impossible to break up, the greater the danger, the harder the lumps cluster together. But this instinct to close ranks, which was still of inestimable value at the time of the Napoleonic campaigns and compensated for a good many less useful aspects of the Russian soldier, is today a definite danger. Today the masses in closed ranks have disappeared from the battle-line, today it is a matter of holding together dispersed bands of infantrymen, in which troops from the most diverse units are all mixed up and command often and rapidly enough switches to officers who are completely unknown to most of the men; today every soldier must be able to do what has to be done at any particular moment on his own, though without losing his sense of belonging to the whole. This sense of cohesion cannot be facilitated through the primitive herd instinct of the Russian but only by developing the intelligence of each individual. The essential conditions for this can only be found at a stage of civilisation marked by higher "individualistic" development, such as that existing in the capitalist nations of the West. The small-bore repeating breech-loader and low-smoke powder have transformed the quality which was hitherto the greatest strength of the Russian army into one of its greatest weaknesses. Thus nowadays it will take even longer than before to make the Russian recruit into a soldier fit for battle, and he will no longer be able to match the soldiers of the West at all.

But secondly: where are the officers to come from to give all these new formations a framework in wartime? If even France is having trouble finding a sufficient number of officers, how will Russia manage? Russia, where the educated population, which alone can supply competent officers, constitutes such a dispropor-

<sup>a</sup> Engels' transliteration of the Russian words.—*Ed.*

tionately small percentage of the total, and yet the soldiers, even the trained soldiers, need a larger percentage of officers than in other armies?

And thirdly: with the notorious, widespread system of embezzlement and theft on the part of the civil servants in Russia, and all too often the officers too, how is a mobilisation supposed to take place? In all previous Russian wars it immediately turned out that even part of the peacetime army and its stocks of equipment existed only on paper. How will they manage, then, when the reservists on leave and the *opoltschenie*<sup>a</sup> (Landwehr) are to join their units and be equipped with uniforms, arms and ammunition? Unless everything goes off smoothly during mobilisation, unless everything is available at the right time and in the right place, there is utter confusion. But how is everything to go off smoothly if everything passes through the hands of thieving, corrupt Russian *tschinowniks*<sup>b</sup>? The Russian mobilisation—that will be a show fit for the Gods!

All things considered: for purely military reasons alone, we can allow the Russians to call up as many soldiers and to keep them with the colours as long as the Tsar sees fit. Apart from the troops who are already under arms he will hardly be able to put many more on their feet, and hardly at the right time. The experiment with universal military service may cost Russia dear.

And then, if it comes to war, all along the border from Kovno to Kaminiets the Russian army will be in enemy country right there on her own soil, amidst Poles and Jews, the Tsarist government even having made mortal enemies of the Jews. The moment Russia loses a couple of battles the battlefield will be pushed back from the Vistula to the Dvina and the Dnieper; in the rear of the German army, under its protection, an army of Polish allies will be formed; and it will be a just punishment for Prussia if it is then compelled to restore a strong Poland to ensure its own safety.

Up to now we have only considered the directly military conditions, finding that Russia can be disregarded as far as the present issue is concerned. This will become even more evident, however, as soon as we cast a glance at the overall economic situation, and particularly the financial position, in Russia.

<sup>a</sup> Engels' transliteration of the Russian word.— *Ed.*

<sup>b</sup> Engels' transliteration of the Russian word meaning "civil servants".— *Ed.*

## VI

The internal situation in Russia is almost desperate at the moment. The emancipation of the serfs in 1861 and the development of large-scale capitalist industry related to it, partly as cause, partly as effect, have hurled this, the stablest of all countries, *this European China*, into an economic and social revolution which is now proceeding inexorably on its way; and its progress is, for the time being, overwhelmingly devastating.

At the time of the emancipation, the nobility received compensation in state loan bonds, which they spent in revelry as fast as they could. When this was accomplished, the new railways opened up a market for the wood from their forest for them; they had the timber cut and sold and once again lived in splendour and pleasure as long as the proceeds lasted. The management of the estates under the new conditions and with free workers generally remained most unsatisfactory; little wonder that the landowning Russian nobility are up to their ears in debt, if not utterly bankrupt, and that the produce yielded by their estates is decreasing rather than increasing.

The peasant generally received worse land, and less of it, than he had owned until then; he lost the right to common grazing and the use of the forest, and hence the basis for rearing livestock. Taxes were raised considerably, and now had to be paid by him personally in cash, everywhere; on top of this there were the instalments—also in cash—to pay off the interest and capital on the redemption money advanced by the state (*wykup*)<sup>a</sup>. In short, the deterioration of his overall economic position was aggravated by his suddenly being forcibly removed from a subsistence farming economy and being placed in a money economy, which is alone enough to ruin the peasantry of a country. The result of this was the luxuriant development of the exploitation of the peasants by the rural money-owners, well-to-do farmers and pot-house landlords, *mirojedy* (literally “community eaters”) and *kulaki*<sup>a</sup> (usurers). And as if that were not enough, along came modern large-scale industry and ruined the subsistence economy of the peasants to the very last bit. Not only did its competition undermine the domestic industrial production of the peasant for his own wants, it also took away the market for his handicrafts intended for sale, or placed it, at best, under the sway of the capitalist “entrepreneur” or, even worse, his middleman. The

<sup>a</sup> Engels' transliteration of the Russian words.—Ed.

Russian peasant, with his primeval agriculture and his old communistic community system, was thus suddenly brought into collision with the most advanced form of modern large-scale industry, which had to forcibly acquire a domestic market; a situation in which he was irredeemably bound to perish. But the peasant comprised almost nine-tenths of the population of Russia, and the ruin of the peasant was synonymous with the—at least temporary—ruin of Russia.\*

After this process of social upheaval had been going on for about twenty years, other results emerged too. The ruthless deforestation destroyed the stocks of subsoil water, the rain and snow water flowed quickly away along the streams and rivers without being absorbed, producing serious floods; but in summer the rivers became shallow and the ground dried out. In many of the most fertile areas of Russia the level of subsoil water is said to have dropped a full metre, so that the roots of the corn crops can no longer reach it and wither away. So that not only are the human beings ruined, but in many areas so is the land itself for at least a generation.

This hitherto chronic process of ruination was rendered acute and thus visible to the whole world by the famine of 1891. And for this reason Russia has not managed to escape from famine since 1891. That bad year largely ruined the peasants' last and most important means of production—livestock—and drove their indebtedness to such heights that it is bound to crush their last powers of resistance.

In a position like this a country could do no more than embark on a war of desperation. But even the means for this are lacking. In Russia the nobility lives on debts, the peasant now also lives on debts, and the state, especially, lives on debts. The amount of money owed by the Russian state abroad is known: over four thousand million marks. The amount it owes at home is known to no one; firstly, because neither the total of the loans raised nor that of the paper-money in circulation is known and, secondly, because the value of this paper-money changes every day. But one thing is certain: Russia's credit abroad is exhausted. The four thousand million marks of the Russian national debt bonds have glutted the Western European money market to bursting point.

\* I set forth all this a year ago in the *Neue Zeit* 1891/92, No. 19, in the article "Socialism in Germany".<sup>a</sup>

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<sup>a</sup> See this volume, pp. 246-50.—*Ed.*

England got rid of most of her "Russians" long ago, and Germany has recently done so. Holland and France have ruined their digestion by purchasing them, as was evident from the last Russian loan in Paris: only 300 of the 500 million francs could be placed, and the Russian minister of finance had to take back 200 million from the subscribing and oversubscribing bankers.<sup>350</sup> This constitutes proof of the fact that there is no prospect whatever of a new Russian loan in the immediate future, not even in France.

This is the position of the country which is said to be threatening us with the imminent risk of war and yet is even unable to get a war of desperation off the ground unless we are stupid enough to toss the money for it into its jaws ourselves.

The ignorance of the French government and the French *bourgeois* public opinion that controls it is incomprehensible. It is not France that needs Russia—rather it is Russia that needs France. Without France, the Tsar and his policy would be isolated in Europe; powerless he would have to let everything in the West and the Balkans take its course. With a little common sense France could squeeze as much out of Russia as it wanted to. But instead, the French authorities are grovelling prostrate before the Tsar.

Russia's wheat exports have already been ruined by cheaper American competition. This leaves only rye as its chief export commodity, and this goes almost exclusively to Germany. *The moment Germany starts eating white bread instead of black bread, the present, official Tsarist-big-bourgeois Russia will go bankrupt.*

## VII

We have now sufficiently criticised our neighbouring, placid enemies. But what are things like at home?

Well, to put it bluntly: a gradual reduction in the term of service can only be to the advantage of the army if an end is put once and for all to *maltreatment* of soldiers which has gained ground in recent years and become the rule in the army, far more than people care to admit.

This maltreatment is the counterpart of square-bashing and parade drill; both have always spread in the Prussian army as soon as it becomes a peacetime army for a while, and from the Prussians it is passed on to the Saxons, Bavarians, etc. It is a legacy from the genuine "Old Prussian" age, when the soldier was either an enlisted ragamuffin or the son of a bond peasant, and therefore had to put up with every form of ill-treatment and

degradation from his Junker officer without a murmur. And particularly the down-at-heel nobility of starvelings and spongers, which is by no means under-represented east of the Elbe, still provides its share of the worst tormentors even today, and is only equalled in this respect by the snobbish little sons of the bourgeoisie eager to play the Junker.

The browbeating of the soldier has never entirely died out in the Prussian army. But it used to be rarer, more lenient and at times more humorous. But then, on the one hand, it became necessary to teach the soldier more and more, while, on the other hand, nobody thought of abolishing the useless debris of outmoded tactical drills, which had become meaningless. From this time on, the non-commissioned officer increasingly received tacit authorisation to adopt any method of training which he deemed suitable. Furthermore he was indirectly constrained to employ forcible means by the order to drum one thing or another into his squad with a satisfactory result in a limited period. On top of all this, the soldier's right of complaint is a downright mockery—no wonder the favourite Old Prussian method came into vogue again wherever the soldiers put up with it. For I am certain that there is much less tormenting of soldiers in the regiments of the West or those with a strong admixture of city-dwellers than in those which are chiefly made up of country people from east of the Elbe.

There used to be a means of counterbalancing this, at least in practice. With the smooth-bore muzzle-loader it was a simple matter to drop a pebble down the barrel onto the blank cartridge during manoeuvres, and it was by no means unusual for hated superiors to be accidentally shot during manoeuvres. Sometimes it went wrong as well: I knew a young man from Cologne who was killed in this way in 1849, by a shot that was intended for his captain. Now, with the small-bore breech-loader it is no longer possible to do this so easily and unobtrusively; for this reason, the army suicide statistics indicate to us the barometric level of soldier tormenting fairly accurately. But if the live cartridge is put to use in "serious cases", there is certainly every reason to wonder whether the old practice is again finding its advocates, as is said to have happened here and there in recent wars; though of course that would not contribute much to victory.<sup>351</sup>

The reports of English officers are unanimous in praising the exceptionally good relations between superiors and soldiers in the French army on manoeuvres in Champagne in 1891. Such things as so often leak out of the barracks and into the press in our country would be quite impossible in this army. Even before the

Great Revolution the attempt to introduce Prussian flogging with rods failed. Even at the worst moment of the Algerian campaigns and the Second Empire, no superior would have dared treat the French soldiers anything like as badly as the German soldier is treated before our very eyes. And today, after the introduction of universal compulsory military service, I should like to see the French non-commissioned officer who would venture to order the soldiers to box each other's ears or spit in each other's faces. But what scorn the French soldiers must feel for their future adversaries when they hear and read what they submit to without turning a hair. And every care is taken to ensure that the men in French barracks do read and hear all about it.

In the French army there prevails the spirit and relationship between officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers that prevailed in Prussia from 1813 to 1815, and twice took our soldiers to Paris. In our own country, however, the state of affairs is fast approaching that of 1806, when the soldier was hardly even considered a human being, and was flogged and tormented, when there was an unbridgeable gulf between him and the officer—and this state of affairs led the army to Jena<sup>352</sup> and into French captivity.

There is a lot of talk about the decisive value of morale in war. Yet what else is done in peacetime but to destroy it almost systematically?

## VIII

So far we have assumed that the proposal for a gradual, equal reduction in the term of service with an ultimate transition to the militia system has been universally adopted. But the main question is: will it be adopted?

Let us assume that Germany first puts the proposal to Austria, Italy and France. Austria will gladly accept a maximum term of service of two years and will probably reduce it even further in actual practice. In the Austrian army it seems that there is far less reticence than in the German army to talk about the fact that the short term of service of some troops has been a success. Many officers there state quite bluntly that the Landwehr, which only serves for a few months, is a better troop than the line; one thing in their favour, at any rate, I am assured, is that a Landwehr battalion can mobilise in 24 hours, while a battalion of the line requires several days. Naturally: in the line they are afraid to



infringe on the casual old Austrian arrogance; in the Landwehr, where all the institutions are newly created, they have, however, had the guts not to introduce it. At any rate, both the people and the government of Austria are longing for an alleviation of the military burden, which is most easily obtainable here by reducing the term of service, precisely on account of their own experience.

Italy will likewise grasp the opportunity with both hands. It is succumbing under the pressure of the military budget to such a degree that the help must be brought in, and soon. Here, too, reduction of the maximum term of service is the shortest and easiest way. One may thus say: either the Triple Alliance<sup>353</sup> will come to grief or it will have to adopt a method that is more or less tantamount to our proposal.

But if Germany, supported by the acceptance of Austria and Italy, puts this proposal to the French government, the latter will be placed in a very awkward position. If it accepts the proposal, it will certainly not be making its relative military position any worse. On the contrary, it would have the opportunity of improving this relative position. In some respects it is a disadvantage for France that universal compulsory military service was only introduced there 20 years ago. But this disadvantage entails the advantage that everything is still new, that the pigtail of yore has only recently been chopped off, that further improvements can easily be introduced without coming up against the stubborn resistance of ingrained prejudices. All armies are immensely capable of development after *major defeats*. Better utilisation of the term of service laid down by treaty would therefore be far easier to put into effect in France than elsewhere. Moreover, since the educational system is also in a state of revolutionisation, just like the army, it will be possible to put the all-round physical (and particularly the military) training of young people into operation far more rapidly and more easily there than elsewhere. But this would mean a strengthening in the military position of France vis-à-vis that of Germany. In spite of all this, it is possible and indeed even probable that the chauvinist tendency—French chauvinism is just as stupid as the German variety—will be strong enough to bring down any government that adopts any such thing, particularly if it hails from Germany. So let us assume that France refuses. What then?

Then, by the simple fact of having made this proposal, Germany will have gained a tremendous advantage. We should not forget: the twenty-seven years of Bismarckian rule have made Germany hated in all countries—not without justification. Neither the

annexation of the North Schleswig Danes, nor the breaking and subsequent juggling away of the Prague Peace Treaty article relating to it,<sup>354</sup> nor the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine, nor the petty-minded measures against the Prussian Poles, had anything at all to do with restoration of the "national unity". Bismarck has managed to give Germany the reputation of being greedy for territory; the chauvinist German burgher who threw out the German Austrians and yet still desires to hold Germany fraternally together above everything "from the *Etsch* to the Memel",<sup>a</sup> but would like to unite Holland, Flanders, Switzerland and the allegedly "German" Baltic provinces of Russia with the German Empire—this German chauvinist has given Bismarck every possible assistance, and with such splendid success that not a single person in Europe trusts the "honest Germans" any more. Wherever you care to go, you will find everywhere sympathy for France and distrust of Germany, which is regarded as the cause of the present war danger. There would be an end to all this if Germany decided to put forward our proposal. It would be acting as a peacemaker in a manner that left no room for doubt. It would be declaring its willingness to lead the way in the work of disarmament, as rightly befits the country that gave the signal for armament. Distrust would turn into trust, aversion into sympathy. Not only would the saying that the Triple Alliance is an alliance for peace finally become a reality—so would the Triple Alliance itself, which at present is a mere pretence. All public opinion in Europe and America would take sides with Germany. And that would be a moral conquest which would amply outweigh even any military disadvantages in our proposal that could possibly be thought out.

France, on the other hand, having turned down the disarmament proposal, would slip into the same unfavourable position of suspicion now occupied by Germany. Now we all see, the European philistine would say—and it is he who is the greatest great power—now we all see who wants peace and who wants war. And if a really warlike government should one day take the helm in France, it would be faced with a situation that with a little sense would positively prohibit war. No matter how it went about it, it would stand before the whole of Europe as the party that had precipitated, indeed generated the war. Thus it would not only have prejudiced the small countries against it, and England too; it would not even be sure of the aid of Russia, not even the

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<sup>a</sup> A paraphrase of *Lied der Deutschen* by Hoffmann von Fallersleben.—Ed.

traditional Russian aid that consists of first getting its allies into trouble and then leaving them in the lurch.

Let us not forget: *the next war will be decided by England*. The Triple Alliance at war with Russia and France, as well as France, separated from Russia by enemy territory, are all dependent on sea transport for the large grain imports which are indispensable to them. England is absolute master of the sea. If it places its navy at the disposal of one side, the other will simply be starved into submission, its grain supplies being cut off; it will be the starvation of Paris<sup>355</sup> on an immensely larger scale, and the side that is starved out will have to surrender, as sure as two and two are four.

All right then: at the moment the Liberal tendency has the upper hand in England, and the English Liberals have distinct French sympathies. Moreover, old Gladstone is personally a Russophile. If a European war breaks out, England will remain neutral as long as possible; but in the above-mentioned circumstances even her "benevolent" neutrality may be of decisive help to one of the warring parties. If Germany puts forward our proposal and it is rejected by France, Germany will not only have overcome all English sympathies opposed to it, and assured itself of England's benevolent neutrality; it will also have made it virtually impossible for the English government to join the war on the side of Germany's opponents.

So, in conclusion:

Either France accepts the proposal. Then the risk of war arising out of ever-increasing armaments will really have been removed, the peoples will come to rest and Germany will enjoy the glory for having initiated this.

Or France does not accept. It will then make its own position in Europe worse and Germany's better, to such an extent that Germany will no longer need to fear a war at all and will even be able to proceed to gradually reduce the term of service and pave the way for the militia system off its own bat and free of danger in collaboration with its allies, who will only then truly be its allies.

Will it have the courage to take the step towards deliverance? Or will it wait until France, enlightened as to the position of Russia, takes the first step and reaps the credit for itself?