

1 *La Grande Peur* of November 1918

The Flight of the Kaiser

By mid-morning on 9 November 1918, officers at the headquarters of the German General staff feared for the worst. In addition to recent reports of military defeats at the hands of the British, French and American armies, the latest news suggested that revolution had spread to German divisions at the front. Equally troubling, they thought that a violent battle had just commenced in Berlin, where the blood of revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries was supposedly flowing in the streets.¹ This news made them especially fearful for the wife of Kaiser Wilhelm II, Empress Auguste Victoria. At the end of October, when her husband went to stay with the General staff at the *Großes Hauptquartier* [GHQ] at Spa in occupied Belgium, she was left behind in the German capital. Now officers and the Kaiser thought that she was dangerously under-protected. Some even feared that revolutionaries would try to take her hostage.²

The royal and military elite's increasing powerlessness helped to fuel their fears of revolutionary violence. Over the course of the last five days they had learnt that the red flag was flying over more and more towns and cities across the German Empire. The first sign of trouble came on 4 November 1918, when the Imperial German naval base at Kiel fell under the control of revolutionary sailors. Within hours revolt spread across the north German coast, where military authority broke down in a series of towns and cities, including Wilhelmshaven, which was,

¹ Albrecht von Thaer, *Generalstabdienst an der Front und in der O.H.L.: Aus Briefen und Tagebuchaufzeichnungen 1915–1919*, ed. by Siegfried A. Kaehler (Göttingen, 1958), Diary Entry, 9 Nov. 1918, 256.

² Sigurd von Ilseman, *Der Kaiser in Holland. Aufzeichnungen des letzten Flügeladjutanten Kaiser Wilhelms II. aus Amerongen und Doorn. Bd. 1 1918–1923* (Munich, 1968), 9 Nov. 1918, 38. On Wilhelm II see further Isabel V. Hull, *The Entourage of Kaiser Wilhelm II 1888–1918* (Cambridge, 1982), 266–92; Clarke, *Kaiser Wilhelm II*, 332–45; John C.G. Röhl, *Wilhelm II. Der Weg in den Abgrund 1900–1941* (Munich, 2008), 1235–45.

alongside Kiel, Imperial Germany's most important naval base.³ The revolting sailors were soon joined by larger numbers of pro-revolutionary protestors, including workers, women and soldiers garrisoned across the country, who took to the streets to demand the Kaiser's abdication, an end to the war, and the full democratization of Germany's political system. The domino effect continued.⁴ On 6 November, the men at the GHQ learnt that Hamburg, strategically key to containing the revolution to northern Germany, was already under the control of revolutionaries.⁵ By 7 November revolution had spread from its foothold in northern Germany to include Hanover, Braunschweig and Cologne. More was to come, during the night of 7–8 November 1918, when revolutionaries led by radical Independent Socialist Kurt Eisner took control of Munich and proclaimed Bavaria a republic. By nightfall the next day, without ever facing anything more than token acts of resistance, revolutionaries had taken control of almost every major German city. The only exceptions were Berlin, Breslau and Königsberg.⁶

German military and political elites were at a loss to explain how this movement had spread so quickly. Many feared that a single conspiratorial organization was directing events. The Kaiser even thought that it was led by 'freemasonry or Jewish freemasonry'.⁷ He suspected that their final goal was the destruction of dynastic rule across Europe and the end of the Protestant and Catholic Churches. Officers at Spa also believed that an informant in their midst was feeding crucial information to their opponents.⁸ As a chain of unthinkable events continued to occur, while some officers grew increasingly fearful for their unprotected

³ On the revolution in the north German coastal towns see: Kolb, *Die Arbeiterräte*, 71–82; Kurt Zeisler, 'Die Revolutionäre Matrosenbewegung in Deutschland im Oktober/November 1918', in *Revolutionäre Ereignisse und Probleme in Deutschland während der Periode der Großen Sozialistischen Oktoberrevolution 1917/1918* (East Berlin, 1957), 185–228; Kluge, *Soldatenräte und Revolution*, 35–52.

⁴ See the map 'Ausbreitung der Revolution in Deutschland', in the appendix of Prince Max von Baden's memoirs: Prince Max von Baden, *Erinnerungen und Dokumente* (Berlin, 1927).

⁵ Volker Ullrich, *Die Hamburger Arbeiterbewegung vom Vorabend des Ersten Weltkrieges bis zur Revolution 1918–19*, 2 vols. (Hamburg, 1976).

⁶ Francis L. Carsten, *Revolution in Central Europe, 1918–1919* (London, 1972); Alan Mitchell, *Revolution in Bavaria 1918–1919: The Eisner Regime and the Soviet Republic* (Princeton, 1965), 92–109; Richard Watt, *The Kings Depart* (New York, 1968), 182–200.

⁷ Thaer, *Generalstabsdienst*, Letter 8 Nov. 1918 (Spa), 255. On the Kaiser's anti-Semitism, see further Holger Herwig, 'Tunes of Glory at the Twilight Stage: the Bad-Homburg Crown Council and the Evolution of German Statecraft 1917/1918', *GSR* 6 (1983), 475–94.

⁸ Thaer, *Generalstabsdienst*, Diary Entry, 15 Nov. 1918, 272.

families, others contemplated joining a suicidal cavalry charge in full colours against enemy lines. It was to be led by the Kaiser and his most senior officers.⁹

Shortly before midday on 9 November their sense of panic was briefly broken. Prince Max von Baden, who had been appointed Imperial Chancellor only one month earlier in a desperate attempt to fend off the worst consequences of German military defeats in August and September 1918, telephoned from Berlin. He informed Wilhelm II that he was no longer Emperor.¹⁰ The centuries-old rule of the Hohenzollern was at an end. Less than a week after it had begun, the revolution had triumphed. At first, this news left the Kaiser and his closest entourage overwhelmed by shock, anger and tears. But their emotional distress was soon replaced by thoughts for action. They quickly realized that it would be impossible to reverse Prince Max's decision. The news wires refused to publicize a statement denying the Kaiser's abdication. Equally damning of their loss of power, they were aware that they would be unable to mobilize sufficient numbers of men to march on Berlin to fight the revolution.¹¹ But they remained determined to ensure that the former Kaiser escape unharmed. At first, Wilhelm refused to abandon his headquarters. He told his advisors that to do so would be to display cowardice. Others were less assured. They expected armed revolutionaries to arrive that afternoon and force his arrest.¹² Some officers were so anxious that they took up weapons and occupied positions ready to fend off an attack.¹³ As the hours passed, Wilhelm's determination to remain began to sway. The deposed Kaiser worried that revolutionaries might arrive to 'string him up'.¹⁴ In this moment of extreme mental anguish, the head of the German navy, Admiral Reinhard Scheer, who was also present at Spa, wrote what he thought would be the last letter that his wife would ever receive from him. After a long emotionally laden discourse on her

⁹ MLS Nr.47: 'Gr.H.Qu., 5 Nov. 1918 11 Uhr vormittags', 165; Thaer, *Generalstabsdienst*, Diary Entry, 5 Nov. 1919 (Evening) and letter 6 Nov. 1918, 252–3.

¹⁰ On the final months of the war see, especially, Geyer, 'Insurrectionary Warfare'; Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, 184–231; Boff, *Winning and Losing on the Western Front*; David Stephenson, *With our Backs to the Wall: Victory and Defeat in 1918* (London, 2011), esp. 112–69.

¹¹ Hull, *The Entourage of Kaiser Wilhelm II*, 288–292; Stephenson, *The Final Battle*, 67–109; Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, 1242–46.

¹² 'Warum Wilhelm II flüchtete', *BM* Nr. 4, 4 Jan. 1919.

¹³ Holger Afflerbach (ed.), *Kaiser Wilhelm II. als Oberster Kriegsherr im Ersten Weltkrieg. Quellen aus der militärischen Umgebung des Kaisers 1914–1918*: Plessen Diary Entry 9 Nov. 1918, 933–4.

¹⁴ *Kaiser Wilhelm II. als Oberster Kriegsherr*, 61.

importance to him, he told her that after his death, she should not mourn for him.¹⁵

The anxious waiting continued until the early hours of 10 November, when, under the cover of darkness, the Kaiser finally took flight. He boarded the Royal Train to escape to neutral Holland but soon after it pulled away the train stopped. Two unmarked cars were parked alongside it. They were waiting for the deposed Kaiser and his closest entourage. It cannot be said with certainty whether the decision to change the means of escape was a cleverly planned decoy or a reflection of a sudden fear that revolutionaries may have blocked the railway lines. Once the unmarked cars sped off, Wilhelm himself demanded that they drive as fast as possible and his closest aides held loaded rifles.¹⁶ One passenger later wrote that they were ready to shoot their way across the border.¹⁷ It was not necessary, however; just as the armed revolutionaries who were supposed to be on the way to arrest the Kaiser never turned up, the historic script provided by the French Revolution was not to be repeated (in June 1791, disguised as a valet and a governess, the French King Louis XVI and his wife Marie Antoinette were arrested as they fled Paris heading in the direction of the Dutch border). Instead, at the border, the armed revolutionaries they expected to find were conspicuous by their absence – although there was a curious crowd of Dutch citizens anxious to catch a glimpse of a very special refugee. As for the Empress, while Germany was caught in the grip of revolution, she remained in Berlin, where contrary to a brief rumour, nothing happened to her either.¹⁸

From this point on, Wilhelm II, a man who was once symbolically central to a conflict in which millions of Europeans fought and died, spent the remainder of his life in Holland. And yet, for all that his abdication and exile is among the best-known outcomes of the First World War, it has generally been forgotten that it was *the fear* that Germany was on the verge of an extremely violent revolution; and not the demands of revolutionaries, or the orders of the victorious Entente, that led him to take flight. Of course, Wilhelm II, King of Prussia and Emperor of Germany since June 1888 had special reasons to fear revolutionary violence. But his problem was not unique: at the start of November 1918, *no one* knew what kind of revolutionary and counter-revolutionary violence was about to take place

¹⁵ *Kaiser Wilhelm II. als Oberster Kriegsherr*, Plessen Diary, 9 Nov. 1918, 933; MLS Nr. 52: '10 Nov. 1918', 174.

¹⁶ *Kaiser Wilhelm II. als Oberster Kriegsherr*, 627–8.

¹⁷ Ilsemann, *Der Kaiser in Holland*, 10 Nov. 1918, 45.

¹⁸ Soon after she was moved to Potsdam: 'Die Kaiserin in Potsdam. Berlin 12 Nov.', CZ Nr. 268, 14 Nov. 1918.

and many people expected that Germany was on the verge of a period of extreme violence. More than anything else, this uncertainty defined contemporary experiences of the revolution. From the pinnacle of Imperial Germany's social pyramid, right down to the revolutionaries who took to the streets, the expectation that the revolution would be violent had a profound influence upon behaviour, attitudes and decision-making. However, even though it was an omnipresent feature of contemporary experience, this aspect of the revolution's emotional history has played little role in its historiography.

Therefore, the following chapter sets out to examine the relationship between violence and fears of violence during the first ten days of November 1918. Our main concern is to examine as precisely as possible what kinds of revolutionary and counter-revolutionary violence actually took place, and to ask why the revolution's violence remained limited at this time. When we explore the first two weeks of November 1918 in this way, I argue, it becomes clear that just as fears of violence were central to how Wilhelm II experienced his final days as German Emperor, they played an equally important role during the course of events that occurred as the revolution spread 'from below'. As this book reveals for the first time, panic gunfire, caused by the expectation that counter-revolutionary officers were secretly opening fire upon revolutionaries, was the most deadly form of revolutionary violence. It was made possible by the interaction of a series of closely related historical phenomena; all of which are equally missing from the revolution's existing historiography. They include the powerful influence of highly suggestive and unverifiable rumours as well as the delusional expectations of elites and revolutionary actors in the streets. When these phenomena are examined together, it becomes clear that the idea that the revolution initially represented a moment of emotional release from the strains of warfare is untenable.¹⁹ Instead, a close examination of what happened when the Imperial state lost control of key urban spaces reveals that the revolution was a short moment of intense social panic that was as frightening for those who willed its success, as it was for those who fled from its outcomes. To make this case, the chapter starts with an examination of the immediate events that led tens of thousands of Germans to join a revolutionary movement that many later disowned as a horrendous moment of national betrayal.

¹⁹ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery*. trans. Jefferson Chase (London, 2004), esp. 8–14. See also Peukert, *Die Weimarer Republik*, 34.

32 *La Grande Peur* of November 1918

A Revolution Against *Endkampf*

The Navy's Attempt to Launch Endkampf

Two weeks before he feared violent death at the hands of angry revolutionaries, Admiral Reinhard Scheer was upbeat. He was waiting enthusiastically for news from the German high seas fleet. Without informing the government or the Kaiser, at the end of October 1918, he had instructed the navy to proceed with an unprecedented operation. For the first time in the war, every available vessel in the surface fleet, with the support of submarines, was to proceed towards southern England, in a deliberate attempt to lure the Royal Navy away from its base at Scapa Flow to attack the lines of German ships in the North Sea. The mission was deliberately provocative: three weeks after Prince Max announced that he was initiating a diplomatic exchange with the United States with a view to bringing about peace upon the basis of American President Woodrow Wilson's 14 Points, German warships were even ordered to sail into the Thames estuary and open fire upon London. Even though it may not have been conceived of as a suicide mission from which no German vessel was meant to return, as the operation's most ardent critics later suggested, the plan was intended to produce a colossal battle with high losses on the German side.²⁰ In the eyes of Imperial German Naval commanders, however, the human price of the operation was deemed to be worth it.²¹

The decision to proceed with such a momentous battle plan was taken after a month of planning and intrigue on the part of Scheer and two other naval commanders, Rear Admiral Adolf von Trotha and Captain Magnus von Levetzow. Together, these three men formed a triumvirate that dominated the *Seekriegsleitung* [*SKL*] – a single naval command that had been established in August 1918 and was modelled upon Field Marshal

²⁰ Wilhelm Deist, 'Die Politik der Seekriegsleitung und die Rebellion der Flotte Ende Oktober 1918', *VfZ* 14 (1966), 341–68, esp. 358–9; Horn, *The German Naval Mutinies of World War I*; Leonidas E. Hill, 'Signal zur Konterrevolution? Der Plan zum Vorstoß der deutschen Hochseeflotte am 30. Oktober 1918', *VfZ* 36 (1988), 113–30; Gerhard P. Groß, *Seekriegsführung der Kaiserlichen Marine im Jahre 1918* (Mainz, 1989), 404–28; Gerhard P. Groß, 'Eine Frage der Ehre? Die Marineführung und der letzte Flottenvorstoß 1918', in Jörg Duppler und Gerhard P. Groß (eds.), *Kriegsende 1918. Ereignis, Wirkung, Nachwirkung* (Munich, 1999), 349–67, esp. 364–5.

²¹ The commander of the German fleet, Admiral Franz Ritter von Hipper, predicted that the operation would cost him his life and at least one submarine did receive a suicidal instruction. It was to attack the British Fleet's base at Scapa Flow in the hours leading up to the main operation. Predictably enough, when the submarine tried to do so, it failed to make it through the Royal Navy's defences with the loss of 35 German lives: BArch-MA NL162/9 (Hipper Papers) Bl.9 Hipper Diary 31 Oct. 1918; Deist, 'Die Politik der Seekriegsleitung', 359.

Paul von Hindenburg and General Erich Ludendorff's Third Supreme Command of the army. On 29 September 1918, they were shocked when Ludendorff suddenly predicted that without an immediate ceasefire the German armies would be annihilated in battle and that total devastation would follow at the front *and* in the homeland. Even though he had previously rejected all moves towards a diplomatic peace, Ludendorff was now so inspired by his own fearful vision of revolutionary Armageddon that he demanded that Germany use diplomacy to immediately bring about a negotiated peace settlement. At least partially, in early October, Ludendorff got his way.²² Prince Max von Baden was appointed as Chancellor and decades of conservative opposition to political reform was suddenly reversed by a royal decree that introduced a new parliamentary system of government. For the first time, two Social Democrats, Gustav Bauer and Philipp Scheidemann, were included as government ministers.²³

Scheer, Levetzow and Trotha were horrified. Even though German defeats in August and September meant that the navy had just abandoned strategically important submarine bases in occupied Flanders, they were certain that the war was not lost and that Germany still possessed sufficient men and materials to continue fighting.²⁴ In October, as Ludendorff's dire predictions failed to occur, their spirits were raised by the prospect that a negotiated peace was no longer necessary. They were encouraged to think in this way on 5 October 1918, when, in a speech that the prestigious newspaper the *Vossische Zeitung* predicted would be one of the most important ever made by a German statesman, after he announced that he had sent the first German note to President Wilson, Prince Max threatened that if their enemies refused them a fair and just peace, a 'firmly determined and united Germany' would continue to fight with renewed vigour.²⁵ Many contemporaries understood this threat as

²² On Ludendorff's decision, see esp. Geyer, 'Insurrectionary Warfare', 468; Wolfgang Foerster, *Der Feldherr Ludendorff im Unglück* (Wiesbaden, 1952), 90–4; Joachim Petzold, 'Die Entscheidung vom 29. September 1918', *ZfM* 4 (1965), 517–34; Eberhard Kessel, 'Ludendorffs Waffenstillstandsforderungen am 29. September 1918', *MM* 2 (1968), 65–86. See further: *Ämtliche Urkunden*, Nr. 11 Telegramm, 21 Sept. 1918, 29 and Nr. 12 Aufzeichnung, Berlin, 28 September 1918, 29; Kitchen, *The Silent Dictatorship*; Nebelin, *Ludendorff*.

²³ For the contrast between conservative and liberal views of Prince Max's appointment see: 'Auf dem Weg zur Lösung der Krisis', Conrad Haußmann, *BT* Nr. 503, 2 Oct. 1918 MA; 'Seine Grossherzogliche Hoheit der Herr Reichskanzler', *DZ* Nr. 506, 4 Oct. 1918. In his diary, Hipper described 5 October as the day that Bismarck's Empire was destroyed: BArch-MA N162/8 (Hipper Papers) Bl.33, Hipper Diary 5 Oct. 1918.

²⁴ MLS Nr. 20: 'Spa, 29 September 1918', 112 and Nr. 23: 'Spa, 30 September 1918', 117.

²⁵ The *Vossische Zeitung*'s prediction, as well as the wording of Prince Max's speech, were circulated by the WTB and subsequently printed in a range of regional newspapers,

meaning that the war was about to enter a new phase that would take on the character of a ‘final struggle’ or *Endkampf*; it would entail a return to mobile warfare and it would continue even if the enemy occupied German territory. Scheer told his wife that the prospect left him feeling ‘really pleased’.²⁶

Only hours after Prince Max outlined this vision of a choice between *Endkampf* or a fair peace, a naval officer with a desk job in Berlin, Captain William Michaelis, wrote to Levetzow to outline how he thought the surface fleet could contribute to launching *Endkampf*.²⁷ In an influential letter, he made the case that the surface fleet was now the only German military force that was capable of achieving a ‘visible military success’.²⁸ He predicted that once the German people learnt of the navy’s heroism, there would be a tremendous ‘positive change of mood’ and that this change would inspire the German *Völk* to reject the diplomatic exchange of notes in favour of continued fighting for as long as necessary into the future.²⁹

For the remainder of the month, the promise of *Endkampf* or a war of *national defence* became increasingly important, especially as the American notes grew in severity.³⁰ Led by the industrialist and intellectual Walther Rathenau, who publicly called for Ludendorff’s dismissal and the prolongation of the war at the start of October, published opinion increasingly referred to the necessity to proclaim *Endkampf*, often contrasting the apparent willingness of Germans to negotiate peace while still occupying enemy territory with France’s refusal to surrender following the German invasions of 1870 and 1914.³¹ Other historical examples that were used to suggest that Germany could continue fighting included the

including, for example, the *Coburger Zeitung*: ‘Vor der Kanzlerrede’, *VZ* Nr. 509 5 Oct. 1918 MA; *CZ* Nr. 235, 6 Oct. 1918; ‘Der Friedensschritt der neuen deutschen Regierung. WTB. Berlin 5 October’, *CZ* Nr. 236, 8 October 1918. The text of Prince Max’s speech should be contrasted with the misleading account of the speech he provides in his memoirs: Prince Max von Baden, *Erinnerungen und Dokumente*, 353–86.

²⁶ *MLS* Nr. 28: ‘Gr.Hpt.Qu, 6 Oct. 1918’, 127.

²⁷ On parallel planning in the army, see Geyer, ‘Insurrectionary Warfare’, 488–502.

²⁸ BArch-MA N239/25 (von Levetzow Papers) Bl.5–6: Michaelis letter to Levetzow 5 Oct. 1918.

²⁹ BArch-MA N239/25 (von Levetzow Papers) Bl.5–6: Michaelis letter to Levetzow 5 Oct. 1918; BArch-MA N162/9 (Hipper Papers) Bl.1 Überlegungen in erster Stunde 7 Oct. 1918; Trotha letter to Levetzow, 8 Oct. 1918, quoted in Deist, ‘Die Politik der Seekriegsleitung’, 353; *MLS* Nr. 39: ‘In der Bahn, 27 Okt. 1918’, 149.

³⁰ See further Michael Geyer, ‘Endkampf 1918 and 1945. German Nationalism, Annihilation and Self-Destruction’, in Alf Lüdtke and Bernd Weisbrod (eds.), *No Man’s Land of Violence: Extreme Wars in the 20th Century* (Göttingen, 2006), 35–68.

³¹ ‘Festigkeit’, Walther Rathenau, *BT* Nr. 503, 2 Oct. 1918 MA; ‘Ein dunkler Tag’, Walther Rathenau, *VZ* 7 Oct. 1918; Walther Rathenau ‘Die Stunde drängt’, in *Politische Schriften*, ed. Walther Rathenau, (Berlin, 1928), 68–9. Rathenau even received the praise of the pan-German anti-Semitic press: ‘Ist kein Yorck da?’, Generalleutnant Keim, *DZ* Nr.

mythical idea that German unification in 1871 was a result of a process of military liberation that began with armies of volunteer soldiers who fought off the armies of Napoleon following French victories over Prussia and the occupation of Berlin in 1806–07.³² Even the Social Democrat's *Vorwärts* newspaper – the party's official mouthpiece – included mobilizing articles announcing that it was time to fight on rather than accept a humiliating peace.³³ Furthermore, even though it may have been unpopular amongst the general population, the same message was credibly delivered by petitions and political rallies organized by nationalist patriotic leagues; some of which took place in contested territories that Germany stood to lose, such as Danzig.³⁴

By mid-October 1918, it appeared to many contemporaries, especially among conservative and nationally orientated military and political elites, that the German government was close to rejecting the exchange of notes and proclaiming *Endkampf*. Notably, on 17 October, while a handful of naval planners were secretly working on the operation, Scheer and Levetzow attended a meeting between Ludendorff and the cabinet of Prince Max von Baden. Its main purpose was to deliberate the German response to the second American note, a note that liberal State Secretary Conrad Haußmann, a member of Prince Max's cabinet, described as 'exploding like a bomb' when its contents, including the stipulation that the Entente would control the speed of German military withdrawal from occupied France and Belgium, were made public in Germany. By the end of the meeting even Ludendorff openly spoke of *Endkampf*'s prospects for success.³⁵ In turn, after the German government responded to the Americans with a further conciliatory note on 20 October, four days later, on 24 October, the same day the planning stage of the naval operation was

530, 17 Oct. 1918 AA; BArch Berlin R901/55958 Bl.83: 'Ein dunkler Tag', *Reichsbote* Nr. 507, 7 Oct. 1918 MA. There is direct evidence that Rathenau's arguments impacted upon the thinking of the leadership of the German Navy. On 8 October Scheer told his wife that Rathenau's piece contained an 'extremely appropriate judgement': MLS Nr. 31: 'Gr.H.Qu., 8 Oct. 1918', 134.

³² Hans Werner Hahn, "'Ohne Jena kein Sedan,'" Die Erfahrung der Niederlage von 1806 und ihre Bedeutung für die deutsche Politik und Erinnerungskultur des 19. Jahrhunderts', *Historische Zeitschrift* 285 (2007), 599–642.

³³ For support for *Endkampf* in the *Vorwärts* newspaper see: BArch-Berlin R901/55958 Bl.16: 'Einzige Rettung', *Vorwärts* Nr. 291, 22 Oct. 1918 MA; Geyer, 'Insurrectionary Warfare', 479–80. On press calls for *Endkampf* see the collection of clippings contained in: BArch-Berlin R901/55366 and R901/55958. See further Barth, *Dolchstoßlegenden*, 87–8.

³⁴ For examples see: 'Deutschland erwache! Ein Ausschuß für nationale Verteidigung [Danzig, 13 Oct.]', *DZ* Nr. 525, 15 Oct. 1918 MA; 'An das deutsche Volk', *DZ* Nr. 536, 21 Oct. 1918 MA; Chickering, *The Great War and Urban Life in Germany*, 566.

³⁵ *Amlichen Urkunden* Nr. 54, 61–4; QPM Nr. 61: 'Sitzung des Kriegskabinetts, 16 Oct. 1918', 210.

declared complete, the *OHL*, the organization that demanded a ceasefire at the end of September, now attempted to publicly sabotage the work of Prince Max's government and end the diplomatic process.³⁶ On this occasion, Ludendorff was overruled. He was summoned to Berlin and dismissed on 26 October 1918.³⁷ This was the point when the navy's commanders thought their hour had arrived. In their eyes either the German surface fleet would justify its existence in battle and remobilize the German public to continue fighting; or, according to the logic of their ultra-nationalist worldview, fleet *and* nation would fail to exist.³⁸

The officers' decision making is often represented as something peculiar to a group of men whose expectations had been defined by the unique world of the Imperial German Navy's officers' corps. So too, some historians have dismissed discourses calling for *Endkampf* as nothing more than 'rousing calls for perseverance' and a 'final propaganda crusade'.³⁹ And yet, the more we think about how German military planning interacted with a much broader political and social conversation about *Endkampf*, the more it becomes clear that the prospect of *Endkampf* was one of the most important aspects of German strategic thought during the weeks leading up to the Armistices of November 1918.⁴⁰ The naval command was not unique: it was only one of a significant number of organizations thinking about how *Endkampf* could be realized. The difference between newspaper writers, nationalist speech-makers and the planners in the *SKL*, *OHL* and the War Ministry was more about practicality than mentality. With the surface fleet ready to go, it was far more straightforward for the officers of the *SKL* to move *Endkampf* from the planning to the operational stage, than it was for their likeminded colleagues in the army or War Ministry.⁴¹ In turn, the fact that language promising *Endkampf* empowered a widespread social fear that the military and political elite would chose *Endkampf* rather than peace, explains why once it began in

³⁶ Deist, 'Die Politik der Seekriegsleitung', 355–60; *Amtlichen Urkunden* Nrs. 64–85, 91–105.

³⁷ Geyer, 'Insurrectionary Warfare', 493–5; Wolfram Pyta, *Hindenburg. Herrschaft zwischen Hohenzollern und Hitler* (Munich, 2007), 344–59.

³⁸ On notions of sacrifice in the German Navy see: Holger Afflerbach, 'Mit wehender Fahne untergehen. Kapitulationsverweigerungen in der deutschen Marine', *VJZ* 49 (2001), 595–612; Jan Rüger, *The Great Naval Game: Britain and Germany in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge, 2007); Nicolas Wolz, *Das Lange Warten: Kriegserfahrungen deutscher und britischer Seeoffizier, 1914 bis 1918* (Paderborn, 2008).

³⁹ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte vol. 4. Vom Beginn des Ersten Weltkriegs bis zur Gründung der beiden deutschen Staaten* (Munich, 2003), 179.

⁴⁰ For examples of contemporary reactions see the diary of Gustav Mayer: *Mayer Diaries*, esp. 2 Oct. 1918, 152–3; 9 Oct. 1918, 157–8; 16 Oct. 1918, 162–3; 23 Oct. 1918, 170–1.

⁴¹ Geyer, 'Insurrectionary Warfare', 488–502.