

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE ON THE OPENING OF THE REICHSTAG

Kaiser Wilhelm II

an historical speech

delivered June 25, 1888

translated by Louis Elkind, M.D.

published in *The German Emperor's Speeches*, page 7-10
by Longmans, Green, and Co., 1904

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Gentlemen, I greet you with a heart that is full of deep sorrow, and I know that you share my grief.

The unspeakable sufferings of my lamented father, which are still fresh in your memory, and the touching circumstance that only three months after the demise of his Majesty, the Emperor William, it devolved upon me to ascend the Throne, have deeply affected all Germans, and our affliction has met with warm sympathy in all countries of the world. Overwhelmed with this grief, I implore God to grant me strength for the performance of the high duties, the fulfilment of which His decree has placed in my hands. In assuming this office I have before my eyes the example of pacific rule which the Emperor William, after severe wars, bequeathed to his successors, and which was also followed by my late father during his reign, so far as his illness and death did not prevent him from carrying out his intentions.

Gentlemen, I have summoned you for the purpose of declaring before your Assembly to the German people that I am determined, as Emperor and King, to take that course which enabled my late grandfather to win the confidence of his Allies, the love of the German people, and the respect of foreign countries. Whether I shall be successful to the same extent of course rests with God ; but for my part I will endeavour to achieve that end by earnest devotion to duty.

The principal duties of the German Emperor consist in upholding, by military and political measures, the interests of the Empire in relation to foreign countries, and in watching over the execution of the Imperial laws at home. The first of these laws is the Imperial Constitution, and it is one of the noblest privileges and duties of the German Emperor to preserve and protect all the rights which it confers on the two legislative bodies of the nation and on every German subject, and also those rights which it guarantees to the Emperor and to each of the federated States and its Sovereign. In accordance with the Constitution, I have to co-operate in the legislation of the Empire more in my capacity as King of Prussia than in that of German Emperor; but in both it will be my endeavour to proceed with the work of Imperial legislation in the spirit in which it was established by my lamented grandfather. I will adopt his message of November 17th, 1881, in its entirety, and in the sense of that message I will continue my endeavours to make Imperial legislation render in the future to the working population that protection which, in accordance with the principles of Christian morality, it is able to extend to the weak and oppressed in their struggle for existence. I hope that in this way it will be possible to effect an adjustment of unhealthy social contrasts, and I feel confident that my endeavours for our national welfare will meet with the unanimous support of all loyal subjects of the Empire and of the allied Governments, and that they will not dissociate themselves from us to form separate factions of their own.

I also deem it imperative to continue our national and social progress in the paths of legality and to offer firm resistance to all tendencies the object or effect of which is to subvert the order of the State.

As regards foreign politics, I am determined to keep peace with everyone, so far as it lies in my power. My love for the German Army, and the position I occupy in regard to it, will never lead me into the temptation to endanger the benefits which the country derives from peace, provided, of course, that war does not become a necessity forced upon us by an attack upon the Empire or its Allies. The object of the Army is to secure peace for us, or, if peace is broken, to be in a position to fight for it with honour. And that, with God's help, the Army will be able to accomplish, now that its strength has recently been supplemented by the Army Bill which you passed unanimously. But to make use of this strength for aggressive purposes is far from my intention. Germany is in no need of fresh military glory, nor does she require any new conquests, for she has already obtained once for all, on the field of battle, the right to exist as an united and independent nation.

Our Alliance with Austria-Hungary is a matter of public knowledge. I adhere to it with German sincerity, not merely because it happens to be concluded, but because I see in this defensive association the foundation of the balance of power in Europe as well as a legacy derived from German history, the terms of which are now approved of by the public opinion of the entire German Fatherland; and, moreover, it is also in accordance with the traditional international law of Europe as it was universally recognised down to 1866.

Again, historical relations and present national needs of a like character unite us to Italy. Both countries are anxious to hold fast to the blessings of peace, so that they may be able to work undisturbed for the consolidation of their newly won unity, the development of their national institutions, and the promotion of their welfare.

The agreements which we entered into with Austria-Hungary and Italy permit me, much to my satisfaction, to continue the careful cultivation of my personal friendship with the Emperor of Russia and of the peaceful relations which for a century have existed between us and the neighbouring Russian Empire, and which correspond with my own desires as well as with the interests of the Fatherland.

As regards my endeavours on behalf of peace and the care which I entertain for our Army, I place myself willingly and conscientiously at the service of the country ; and I rejoice in our traditional relations with foreign Powers, from which my efforts on behalf of peace will derive the necessary support. Trusting in God and in the military efficiency of our people, I confidently hope that it will be granted to us for a long time to come to foster and consolidate, by peaceful labour, what was won on the battlefield under the guidance of my two last(I said last two predecessors on the Throne, who are now resting in God.



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