

*German Reparations*

I place no importance whatsoever upon her signature as an admission. I judge of Germany's obligation not by what she signed, but by what she did, and so far as it lies in my power, I shall support the view that there should be no remission beyond the point of Germany's capacity to pay.

There remains an argument that perhaps I might refer to—there are some who hold it, and, I think, hold it conscientiously—that the exactions made of Germany under the treaty went beyond what could reasonably be read into the Fourteen Points promulgated by the President of the United States; that the President of the United States having stipulated that only civilian damage should be held as that for which Germany should account, and Germany having ceased fighting on those stipulations, it was not fair to include in civilian damage the capitalized value of separation pay, and, I think, of pensions as well. This matter was argued at the Versailles Conference. I understand the United States representatives for a time took a stand against the inclusion of those items, but after argument and the fullest debate they conceded the point, and as a consequence those were included. Such was the judgment of the majority—I think it was the unanimous judgment—of those who attended that conference. Such judgment has not been reversed, and I have never been able to persuade myself that it should be reversed. If it could be shown that to include these classes of damages was in any way in derogation of the stipulations on the faith of which Germany laid down her arms, then, whatever the prior crime of Germany, I would be prepared to abide by the real meaning of those stipulations. This as yet has not been shown; until it is shown I think the only principle that should govern is the principle that I have just sought to elucidate to the House. At all events, that is the course I would pursue.

I propose to vote against the resolution, but I do not for a moment suggest that the government of this country should not take its place among the nations of the Empire, or if necessary among all the Allied nations, and seek to have a composition of the whole subject of war reparations, so long as in that composition the principle I have sought to emphasize is not forgotten.

Mr. ANDREW McMASTER (Brome): I do not intend to delay the House very long this afternoon in the observations which I propose to make on this very important resolution. It seems to me that the quiet, weighty and reasonable remarks of the Prime Minister will find a responsive chord in the

[Mr. Meighen.]

hearts of nearly all of us present, and I trust that those responsible for bringing the resolution before the House will feel it incumbent upon them to comply with his courteous request.

But things have been said in this debate which I do not think should go without some observations being made thereon. I have been pained at some attacks made upon the member for Centre Winnipeg (Mr. Woods-worth). I do not believe he deserved those attacks. I believe he brought this resolution before the House with the best of good will, with absolute sincerity and conviction of the righteousness of what he brought forward. It has been the glory of British people, Mr. Speaker, that at all times in the nation's history here and overseas there have been men who have been prepared to stand up for what they thought was right, even if it went against the current of popular opinion at the time. Fox withstood Pitt and argued against the continuance of war with France a hundred or more years ago. At the time of the Crimean war, John Bright fulminated against Great Britain's stand at that time, and history has said that he was right. A few years after, it was the turn of Richard Cobden to protest against the Opium War in China. We should always courteously listen to those with whom we disagree, even if they say things we might not consider wise, or if wise which we consider unpalatable.

Now, that Germany was the immediate aggressor, I think we are nearly all in accord. But if Germany was the immediate aggressor in the Great War—and dearly has she paid for her aggression—does anyone in this House composed of intelligent men, believe that Germany was solely responsible for the war?

Mr. MEIGHEN: Hear, hear.

Mr. McMASTER: Mr. Speaker, the war came because the European peoples had for years followed a false system. They tried to find security in military preparedness. I grant you that it was enormously difficult when one nation had set the pace for others not to keep step with it. Once Germany believed that Russia was arming against her, it was difficult for Germany not to prepare. Once England believed that Germany was arming against her, it seemed only the part of wisdom to prepare for war and to seek alliances; and we found before the Great War broke upon this world that Europe was divided into two great armed camps—the Central Empires on the one side, who relied at that time upon the adhesion of Italy,