

PEACE TALK AND WAR ACTION

HERE can be no intelligent surprise at the nature of the Allied response to the German proposals. It was as certain as the sunrise. The message of the ten governments of the Entente to the four governments of the Teutonic Alliance is a direct and emphatic refusal to meet in conference. Moreover, it declines to believe in the sincerity of these proposals, which are described, not as an offer of peace, but as a war manoeuvre, and as intended to produce discord among the Entente Allies. None the less it can hardly be said that this message has the absolute finality that some commentators have seen in it. That would have been a diplomatic error from which the Allied statesmen have saved themselves. The fourth paragraph of the reply describes the German proposal as "a mere suggestion, without a statement of terms, that negotiations should be opened." Germany may now, if she wishes, invite a further response based upon that tacit invitation to state upon what basis she proposes to meet her enemies. And we may safely believe that she will do this. We may also remember that the American note requesting or suggesting a statement of terms from all of the belligerents has not yet been answered by the Allies. Germany replied to it with extraordinary promptness, although she ignored the suggestion that she state her terms. But no direct answer has yet come from the Allies, and it may be that their reply, when it shall arrive, will push the door still a little further open.

Writing in this column some three weeks ago it was suggested that the temper of the German communication, as well as the accompanying reports of speeches by German statesmen and generals, would be found to be insuperable obstacles to the favourable consideration of that proposal. The third paragraph of the Allied note shows that this view was well founded. The German proclamation of victory, we are told, renders "sterile all tentative negotiations." It could not possibly be otherwise. An acceptance of the German suggestion must necessarily imply an acquiescence in the causes advanced for the making of that suggestion. Those causes were definitely stated to be a German triumph. Germany, we were told, having vanquished her enemies, was now willing to make known over a conference board the conditions upon which she would allow them to have peace. Now that may have been the German view. No doubt that was the German view. At least it was the view of the German public. But how shall we account for the avowal of that view in a diplomatic document, an avowal that was absolutely certain to make that document nugatory? And that destructive avowal was not only made in a diplomatic document, but it was reiterated, emphasized, and expanded in a series of speeches by highly-placed officials, speeches couched in the most inflammatory and wounding terminology, speeches apparently intended to exasperate and enrage, since they were spread broadcast over the world. Perhaps this is a matter of psychological rather than of political interest, but none the less it was a procedure that must have filled with dismay the minds of pacifists everywhere who were inclined to exult at the appearance of anything that by the wildest flight of the imagination could have been construed into something having the likeness of an olive branch. It must remain one of the apparently insoluble puzzles of these critical and tremendous days.

BUT we need not expect that there will be any definite or complete statement of peace terms from either side. That President Wilson should ask for such a thing is inexplicable. It is still more inexplicable that it should seem to him to be desirable. For this is war, and not a lawsuit, with its formal and inclusive pleas and rejoinders, claims and counter claims. A complete statement of terms would postpone the day of peace until the Greek Kalends. It would be a proclamation, at least to some of the combatants, that they have nothing to hope for from peace and that the only straw at which they can clutch is in the continuance of war. Of what value would be a peace conference based on a proclaimed German determination to retain Antwerp? Or to partition Roumania? Or to demand an

Since there are so many uncompromising conditions to peace on both sides, we may look forward to increasing renewal of war in the spring. Allies are well prepared for this. Shipping of Canadian railroad lines and Sir Douglas Haig's report point in that direction

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indemnity from Russia? Would Turkey assent to a peace conference after a statement of the Allied intention to expel her from Europe bag and baggage? Would Bulgaria enter such a discussion if she had been warned in advance that Russia intended to plow her under? The aim of a pacifist diplomacy should be to keep in the shadows all peace terms that would be regarded by any of the combatants as non-disputable and rather to seek for some few contentions that would be considered by all of them as disputable, and on the basis of these alone to seek a conference. The fatal error of much of American comment is in its failure to recognize that some of the principal belligerents are entertaining intentions that their adversaries would regard as non-disputable. The Allies, for example, will not meet Germany on any theory whatsoever of a German victory, and they can hardly be blamed for this, seeing that from the military point of view Germany is in no sense the victor. France will not abandon her claim to Alsace-Lorraine, and she will not discuss that claim. Neither France nor England will consent to any argument based on a continuing German influence over Belgium, whether that influence be political, military, or commercial. None of the Allies will tolerate a German control of the international railroad in the Balkans. And none of the Allies will entertain any proposal involving loss to Roumania, Serbia, or Montenegro. Of what avail, then, is it to insist upon a statement of intentions that would instantly preclude all further argument? Surely the part of wisdom would be to conceal all those intentions that any of the belligerents would regard as beyond the pale of discussion and to seek for some few points

that would be considered by all as properly controversial.

So far as the principal belligerents have been persuaded into an avowal of their terms it may be said that such an avowal in no way discloses the possible existence of a bridge, but rather the fact that there is no bridge. From the "peace at any price" point of view it would have been better that those avowals had not been made. From the side of the Allies, for example, we have a pledge that Russia shall possess Constantinople, that Serbia shall be independent, and that Alsace-Lorraine shall be restored to France. Of course, there

are other pledges to which an unbeaten Germany might possibly, and even probably, agree, such as the payment of an indemnity to Belgium. But there are three items to which an unbeaten Germany can never agree, since to acquiesce in any one of them would be to admit defeat. On the German side it is equally easy to select three avowed peace conditions that present an equally hopeless prospect. For example, we have the creation of a Polish kingdom under the control of Germany. We have the assertion of German dominance in the Balkans, and we have the preservation of Turkish rule in Europe under German direction. The creation of a Kingdom of Poland is conceivably disputable, but the other two certainly are not. We can conceive of nothing that Germany could offer that would make those conditions tolerable to the Allies, or even disputable by them. Here we can find no common standing ground, no point of departure for argument. The cause of peace except on the basis of a military victory has not been advanced by the disclosure of these demands. To applaud an effort for peace merely because it is an effort for peace is childish. It would be as intelligent to applaud an effort to cure a sick man by administering drugs taken at random from the shelf without reading their labels or considering the nature of the malady. If Germany is willing to evacuate and indemnify Belgium, as she seems to be, it is because she is the more resolved to retain her control of the Balkans and Asia Minor. Without the Balkans and Asia Minor she would leave the war with empty hands, which is, of course, exactly what the Allies intended that she shall do. Thus we see that there are at least three

items upon each side of the account that do not come within the sphere of arbitration, or compromise, or bargain. There are no equivalents that can be offered. Like the virtue of one's mother they do not come within the sphere of discussion.

WE may, therefore, be fairly certain that the war is about to break out with redoubled fury, and it would already have done so but for winter and soft roads. At the moment of writing come bulletins speaking of terrific British bombardments on the Somme which must certainly be intended as the prelude to attack. Sir Douglas Haig speaks confidently of his ability to pierce the German lines, and of his belief that he would already have done so but for unfavourable weather. Sir William Robertson expressed himself similarly some two months ago. The requisition of rails from Canada and the tearing up of Canadian roads in order to fill that requisition with the utmost possible speed are eloquent of the new effort that is pending. When it comes we shall probably find that it is on a much wider front. Nothing is easier than to criticize military operations at a distance of thousands of miles, and in nearly complete ignorance of local conditions, but there can be no doubt that a wider front in the Somme offensive, had it been possible, would have been far more conducive to success. It must be even more important now than it was a few months ago when that offensive opened. Rightly or wrongly, the Allied command is obviously acting on the theory that Germany's man power has reached its limits, and that the mileage of German lines that can be defended against a simultaneous offensive is steadily dwindling, or is now on the point of doing so. German communications that run parallel with their lines and to their rear, are known to be so well planned that defensive forces can be brought with the utmost rapidity to whatever point may be threatened, and the only way to counteract this mobility is to



The War Pup: "No wonder the Huns don't like us chaps."

—By G. E. Studdy, in The Sketch.