

'LET US SPEAK'

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SCARCELY ever before in her history has England stood in greater need, than at this moment, of a strong Government to defend her vital interests; and scarcely ever, we suppose, has she had a weaker one. We can take no exception to Mr. Bonar Law's personal view of the Franco-German struggle; but the burden of responsibility seems to be greater than he can bear. He should have said either less or more than he has said. If he believed that the present policy of the French Government was right, or at any rate that it was not very wrong, or that it could do no vital injury to this country, or that it was legal, or that it might succeed, or indeed that it could lead to anything but disaster for all Europe, then indeed he might pursue a policy of inaction without sacrificing the prestige and influence of Great Britain.

But he believes none of these things and with his usual candor he has uttered what is in his mind. In view of what he has said, the inaction of his Government amounts to a confession of humiliating impotence such as no previous British Government has ever made. 'It is a disaster,' he wails, 'but what can I do?' The answer is that either he should pretend that it is not a disaster or else he should make up his mind to act. His present policy, if he continues to pursue it, can end only in the destruction and disappearance of all British influence in Europe.

We do not wish to be unfair to Mr. Bonar Law. It is not he, but his predecessor, who is to blame for the terrible situation which he has to face. We have no desire either to blame him or to weaken in any way his authority

as the fully accredited spokesman of Great Britain. But if he is to retain that authority he must speak, and speak not in an apologetic whisper, but in the tones which Europe is accustomed to hear from British Prime Ministers when vital issues are at stake. He is not, by nature, a great man or a great leader, but the present is an occasion to which even the most mediocre of statesmen should be able to rise.

In the present crisis Great Britain has something to say and it is the plain duty of Mr. Bonar Law to say it. We are sure that he knows perfectly well how to say it, and that he would say it if he were willing to lead instead of to follow. It is not only this country, but all the rest of Europe, outside France, that is waiting for the lead which no one save he who occupies the position of Prime Minister of Great Britain can give.

His hesitancy is all the more inexplicable in that he is notoriously lacking in personal ambition. He could afford to take a risk, if any risk were involved. But he should know that there is no risk and that whenever he decides to speak out he will have the whole country behind him as it was behind Mr. Asquith and Lord Grey in 1914. Is it Lord Rothermere whom he fears? A strong lead would make our Rothermeres change their tune in a night.

The facts are not in dispute. The leaders of all parties, and an overwhelming majority of the House of Commons, are in agreement upon the main issues. We suppose that for practical purposes the following series of propositions may be regarded as beyond serious

dispute among thoughtful and responsible people of all parties in this country:—

(1) That the French occupation of the Ruhr will not increase but certainly diminish the amount which can be extracted from Germany by way of Reparations during the next few years.

(2) That the main object of the French Government in occupying the Ruhr is to gain not money, but 'security,' by a permanent occupation of the Rhine frontier, by the destruction, if possible, of German industry, and by the definite disintegration, political and economic, of the German Republic.

(3) That this policy, if successful, would give France the complete hegemony of the Continent of Europe.

(4) That such a policy cannot conceivably be successful, and that if it could Great Britain would be bound to oppose it by every means in her power.

(5) That such a policy, successful or unsuccessful, leads logically, not merely to the destruction of all the hopes of civilized Europe for an era of peaceful reconstruction, but to the definite prospect of another Great War.

(6) That in such a war Great Britain does not be on the side of France.

(7) That the interests of Great Britain and of the whole world require the immediate evacuation of the Ruhr and the complete abandonment of all plans for the industrial ruin of Germany.

There may be, even in the House of Commons, men who would dissent from some of these propositions, but that they represent with general accuracy the sober views of Lancashire and of London, of the Universities and of the Trade Unions, of the City and of Whitehall—in short, of Great Britain—there is no doubt whatever.

Doubt can arise only over the question of whether the moment for action

has yet arrived. We are definitely of opinion that it *has* arrived. The situation in the Ruhr is becoming rapidly more dangerous. Each day sees the French Government plunging deeper and deeper into a bog from which already it is powerless to escape.

If there were any prospect of France coming to her senses and abandoning, next week or next month, or even in three months' time, the policy to which she is at present committed, it might be wise to await her conversion. But there are no signs of any such possibility. All the signs, indeed, point in exactly the opposite direction. French public opinion is being prepared for a prolonged struggle. The Paris newspapers give us to understand that the French Government is prepared to maintain a state of war *vis-à-vis* Germany for a decade or more if the Germans do not surrender at discretion and pay sums which everyone knows they are utterly incapable of paying.

In the meantime steps are being taken by the French military governor of the Ruhr, which cannot be retraced except at the cost of an utter destruction of French prestige. Three months or six months hence, if Great Britain does not act, the situation will quite inevitably be not better but far worse. If, therefore, we are to act at all—and upon the eventual necessity for that everyone seems to be agreed—the sooner we act the better. There is very much to be lost by delay and nothing at all to be gained—except perhaps the coöperation of America. But can we afford to wait even for that? And will it ever come if we make no move?

The date on which the French advance into the Ruhr began was one of the decisive dates of modern European history. It marked the final breach between France and the Anglo-Saxon world. What is now within our power is not to heal that breach but to prevent

its becoming the cause of a second Great War. Delay in making our position clear can only result in further and deeper misunderstandings. M. Poincaré's Government is deliberately facing the prospect — created by its own policy — of a quite indefinite prolongation of virtual war in Europe.

There can be no possible doubt as to what will eventually be the attitude of the British people, and of any British Government, toward such a programme — we will pay any price to defeat it. But the longer we wait the heavier that price is likely to be. Some people in England have not yet realized what M. Poincaré's policy means, but we cannot afford to wait for the laggards; they will follow.

The present inaction of Mr. Bonar Law is in reality nothing more than hesitation to take a plunge which sooner or later, as he himself recognizes, will have to be taken. Such hesitation is explicable, but we cannot think that history will regard it as excusable; for time is of the essence of the question — which is whether British influence is to be exerted before it is too late.

What we want is a definite public declaration of the uncompromising hostility of Great Britain, not merely to the French occupation of the Ruhr, but to all the aims and motives which lie behind and have inspired that enterprise.

The obvious first step is to address a formal request to the French Government to state precisely the terms upon which it will consent to cease hostilities and withdraw its troops from the Ruhr. If these terms are practicable, there

will at once be material for negotiation and we can throw all our influence into the scale to oblige the German Government to negotiate. If, on the other hand, they are manifestly impracticable, then we shall know where France stands and must follow our declaration of disapproval by steps designed to hinder in every possible way a policy which will thus have been shown to be purely predatory and destructive.

Certain steps which might be taken in the Cologne area are obvious enough. There are others which might be taken with reference to the increasingly serious plight of unoccupied Germany. The well-known American review, the *New Republic*, has suggested that there should be a joint communication from Great Britain and the United States announcing the suspension of all diplomatic relations with France pending her evacuation of the Ruhr. It may come to that; but until the preparatory steps have been taken it is unnecessary to discuss the precise forms which later action will take.

What is immediately necessary is for the public to grasp the issue: which is *not* whether Great Britain should or should not take strong action to avert the disaster with which French policy is threatening Europe — for quite certainly she will presently be forced to do that unless she is to deny all her most vital interests and contradict all the lessons of her own history — but whether she should act promptly and firmly, or in the alternative should nervelessly postpone the evil day. Can any single sound reason for procrastination be found?

THE DISPOSITION OF SALONIKI

BY CHARLES VELLAY

[We leave to M. Vellay the responsibility for his conclusions, merely reminding our readers that the hinterland of Saloniki is entirely Slav.' Note by the Editor of *L'Europe Nouvelle*.]

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AMONG the questions, domestic and foreign, that occupy Hellenic public opinion at present, there is one that, in particular, touches upon the domain not only of diplomacy but of economics and of domestic policy — the problem of Saloniki, which has lately entered an acute stage. Upon its solution undoubtedly depend, in great part, the future relations between Yugoslavia and Greece.

We know that for a long time Serbia, hampered commercially by Austria's pitiless policy, sought an outlet to the sea. After vain attempts on the Adriatic coast, she believed, in 1914, that she had found one at Saloniki. During the first months of that year she had obtained from Greece extensive commercial facilities in the Ægean. But when the Government of Austro-Hungary became cognizant of the arrangement it intervened brusquely, and demanded of the Greek Government, in a tone not to be misunderstood, equal advantages for its own commerce.

Thus the old dream, the *Drang nach Osten* that was urging the Teutonic Powers toward Saloniki, was a secret no longer. At Athens, as elsewhere, it was well understood that Austria awaited only the favorable moment to establish herself, in one way or another, on the Ægean coast, and that, if this should ever take place, all Serbia, all the lower valley of the Vardar, and

Saloniki itself would henceforth be nothing more than a political and economic annex of the dual monarchy. There was but one means of preventing that danger, and this was precisely the one chosen, as by common accord, by the Governments of Belgrade and Athens. Serbia renounced the original arrangement, which was replaced by a vague and meaningless convention which included Austria-Hungary and contained none of the dangerous points of the original.

This was the situation when the Great War broke out in 1914, and the question was — like so many others of minor importance — indefinitely postponed, and did not again appear on the tapis until after the Armistice. Negotiations between Belgrade and Athens were then renewed; but Serbia considered that the advantages offered her were insufficient, and refused to sign a new convention. It was related at the time that the Serbian negotiator was so irritated at his failure that he tore in pieces with his own hands the document which his Government refused to ratify. Whether this story be true or not, it is certain that the document could not be found, and that when, after the political convulsions incident to the reign of Constantine had subsided, the question was once again taken up, the pourparlers had been lost in the shades of the past.