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Contents

Editorial Notes.....	165
Leading Editorials	
A White Peace and Its Consequences.....	168
The Failure of the States.....	170
Republican Resurrection.....	172
General Articles	
The Kingdom of Poland.....H. N. Brailsford	174
Sovereignty and Centralization.....Harold J. Laski	176
Chicago—December 5th.....Walter Lippmann	178
A Question of Quality (Immigration in the Light of History: III).....Max Farrand	179
Poetic Education and Slang: II.....Max Eastman	182
American "Society": I.....Elsie Clews Parsons	184
Correspondence.....	186
After the Play.....F. H.	189
Reviews of Books	
A Vanished Arcadia.....H. J. L.	190
Military Verse.....Edith Wyatt	191
Gift Books All.....H. S.	192

THE German peace proposals, so long expected and so long delayed, have finally been launched. Before discussing them on their merits, let us find out, if we can, what they mean. Of one thing we may feel sure. They are not, as certain Englishmen and Frenchmen profess to believe, a symptom of German weakness. We all know that the Central Powers are stronger now than at any time since last May, and that the prospect of inflicting a decisive defeat on their armies has become indefinitely remote. Germany is proposing peace negotiations, not because her power of resistance is anywhere near exhausted, but because by proposing them she can sharply distinguish the strength of her position from the weakness of that of her adversaries. As a result of moving for peace and submitting terms that look moderate to the Central European peoples, she strengthens herself at home and throws upon the Allies the burden of continuing the war. Thus the joint note, while addressed to neutral governments for transmission to her enemies, is plainly intended for home consumption. By consenting to its publication Germany is placating her allies, who in

the event of a prolonged war must submit to increasingly complete subjugation, if not by Russia then by Germany, while at the same time she is convincing her own people of the moderation of their national ambitions and of the aggressive designs of their opponents. She is taking advantage of what may be described as her interior diplomatic lines. She is in a position to operate freely both on a peace front and on a war front and to change quickly from one to another. She can afford to be apparently candid and from the point of view of the military situation apparently moderate. Her enemies, on the contrary, are condemned by their recent military reverses and by their declared need of a decisive victory to be consistently bellicose, to insist upon fighting until they regain some of their diminished prestige. They cannot be candid about terms, because they are divided among themselves as to the political objects for which they are willing to fight until the bitter end. It is this situation, superficially so much to the advantage of Germany, which the peace proposals are intended to expose, yet the Germans characteristically began an ostensibly conciliatory negotiation in words which have been selected as peculiarly and emphatically unconciliatory and offensive.

EVEN, however, though the joint note of the Central Powers plainly belongs to the diplomacy of war rather than to the diplomacy of peace, it submits to the Allies a proposal which it would be costly and dangerous wholly to reject. The proposal to negotiate raises two different but related questions. It raises in the first place the question whether any specific terms which the Central Powers are ready to submit should be considered acceptable. If Englishmen and Frenchmen answer this question in the negative, they may well be sustained in so doing by the disinterested opinion of neutral countries. At this writing the definite terms on which the Germans will make peace are not known, but the details which have transpired look in the direction of a net German

advantage from the war amounting perhaps to ten or fifteen per cent. If the Allies have any sufficient prospect of reducing this percentage and of preventing the war from ending with German arms clearly in the ascendant, they have sound reasons, associated with the ultimate organization of peace, for continuing to fight. But the German note raises not only a question about specific terms, but also the question of whether the war shall be terminated by a dictated or by a negotiated peace. The Allies would, we believe, make a grave mistake in refusing to negotiate on the ground that peace must be dictated. They may in their own minds postpone serious negotiations until they have achieved an important military success. But if they refuse to negotiate at all they will be adopting a policy which in the long run cannot be sustained, and which will mean a prolongation of the struggle under conditions of constantly increasing bitterness and desperation. They could not adopt a policy better designed to unite Germany in the conviction that it is fighting for the mere right of existence and to divide the peoples of the Allied countries into pro-war and anti-war parties. They have nothing to lose by negotiation except the vain hope of a peace dictated to an utterly beaten and humiliated enemy; and the abandonment of such a hope would be a gain rather than a loss. Negotiation means the beginning of an attempt to resume contacts, to define conflicting issues, to vitalize public opinion, and to substitute, if not peace for war at least the methods of peace for the methods of war. We hope for the sake of the French and British peoples that the French and English governments will not refuse.

ASSUMING that the war continues, every friend of Great Britain will hope devoutly that the new British government will be able to introduce increasing energy and success into its prosecution. If what Great Britain has lacked is a sufficiently united and vigorous executive, the new government should certainly be able to supply the deficiency. The War Council is practically a committee of public safety, to whose keeping is confided not only all executive initiative, but the determination of the national policies. It brings into existence a new plural monarchy resting on a parliamentary plebiscite. The organization of the new executive is revolutionary. The Council contains only one departmental head, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and he is included apparently rather for personal than for administrative reasons. It excludes the First Lord of the Admiralty, the heads of the War and Foreign Offices—the three departmental chiefs most immediately concerned with the successful prosecution of the war. The consolidation of

executive leadership is accompanied by a disintegration of the Cabinet. It will apparently cease to exist as the executive committee of a parliamentary majority. It has been increased to thirty members, and has consequently become too large to exercise any collective executive functions. It will consist of heads of departments, many of them trained specialists, whose relation to the War Council will not differ essentially from that of an American cabinet minister to the President, and who will be associated one with another chiefly in order to guarantee to the War Council the support of Parliament. In this way a semi-dictatorship has temporarily been grafted on a group of parliamentary institutions, which had been laboriously constructed chiefly to avoid any such concentration of sovereign power. The government of the British Commonwealth is being confided to Lloyd George and his associates almost as completely as the government of France was confided to the first Napoleon.

A DICTATORSHIP is a form of government which depends for its success upon the ability of the dictator. In the case of the new British War Council the ability necessary to success will have to be very extraordinary. To an outsider it looks like a dangerous attempt to improvise victory—a desperate device of the British rulers to escape from their own difficulties by a tour de force. That Mr. Lloyd George and his associates can accomplish much merely as a consequence of their ability to act more promptly, more decisively and even more ruthlessly is probably the case. The food, liquor, and submarine problems will all stand much more drastic treatment than they have been obtaining. But the War Council cannot lead the nation successfully out of its difficulties merely by virtue of power to make prompt and capable decisions. Its success depends less upon its ability to organize the war than upon its attitude towards the more difficult job of planning peace. The British Empire is fighting for certain political objects which have never received any candid or exact definition and to which military and naval operations have been imperfectly adjusted. If the War Council shapes these political objects in conformity with the permanent interests of the commonwealth and if it avoids placing an excessive strain upon the physical and moral resources of the country, it will have done most of all to justify its own creation. But in that case it will have behaved better than any other dictatorship of history. Dictators are, for the most part, the victims rather than the masters of the crisis which has brought them into existence. The British War Council like former dictators runs this danger. If it

does not keep its war measures subordinate to sound political policy it will fail in the end, because it will be seeking to accomplish an impossible task. That the task of emerging with credit from the war has become an impossible one for the British government we do not, of course, for one moment believe; but it could be made impossible by a War Council which in the effort to win the war should allow the better purposes of the English nation to be submerged.

NOT the Sussex pledge, but its administration, is what plagues us. For Germany continues to make mistakes, and the two governments are consequently involved in a perpetual debate over questions of intention, good faith, what is a warning and what is safety. The main outlines of the situation are probably these: the party of Bethmann-Hollweg abides by the pledge, but is willing to take certain risks in the actual application of it. That is where the margin of error lies, and it can never be eliminated while the rules of warfare on the sea are what they are. A navy without harbors cannot raid commerce without constant peril to non-combatants. Submarines cannot conduct "cruiser warfare," because they lack the chief quality of a cruiser: incontestable superiority to the ship attacked. Until submarines cease to be so vulnerable their action will necessarily be panicky. Add to this the fact that transports and merchant ships are indistinguishable at a distance, and often indistinguishable except by the subtlest international lawyer, and it is evident why a foreign office may make a pledge, and find it violated intermittently. With no port to which the prize can be conveyed, with no crews to man the prize, with a vessel that can be sunk by a small gun acting against an enemy who has all but abolished the distinction between warships and merchant ships, it is no wonder that Washington is forever asking plaintively about the pledge. And on top of it all comes the well authenticated report that the new British government intends to arm all merchant ships fore and aft, thus making them at least semi-offensive vessels. The business of being a neutral, the business of trying to enforce rules which inventions and geographical facts have rendered obsolete, looks even more than ever like holding the winds with a net.

ONCE again are the safety of the American Republic and the perpetuity of its institutions threatened. The passage of an amendment to the federal Constitution, which would prevent any state from denying to women the right to vote, would, according to Mr. Elihu Root, undermine "the right of self-government," "overthrow

the principles of liberty upon which the American union was established," "create a condition of intolerable tyranny," and "destroy the nation." Mr. Root has a considerable reputation for political sagacity, but when he breaks out in eruptions of this kind we cannot help considering how far he deserves it. What political sagacity he has must by his own report have been sorely tried by the necessity of casting his ballot at the last election. One candidate was condemned by all Republican speakers, including Mr. Root, as indifferent to vital national interests, while his opponent, Mr. Hughes, was participating in a conspiracy to destroy the nation and to establish an intolerable tyranny. The offence on Mr. Hughes's part was the more heinous because as Justice of the Supreme Court he had been expounding Constitution for over five years and had actually failed to discern what the principles of liberty were upon which the American Union was based. How Mr. Root would vote and advise his fellow-citizens to vote for a man who was seeking to destroy the nation, and why he did not protest during the campaign would be difficult to understand, were it not for one fact. Like so many defenders of the Constitution who during the last three generations have considered every proposal to change it as destructive to the nation, he does not actually mean more than ten per cent of what he says.

THE enfranchisement of women by federal amendment would, in Mr. Root's opinion, be utterly disastrous, because it would subject the "local affairs" of one section of the country to the "dictation of vast multitudes of voters living in other parts of the country." But how are we to distinguish local from national affairs? The South considered slavery to be a "local affair" and so it was; but it was the kind of local affair which when controlled by localities in their own interests really endangered the safety of the Republic. The denial of votes to women does not bring dangers as serious as those which resulted from the denial of freedom to Negroes; but surely the franchise is a matter more of national than of local concern. The American nation is supposed to be a democracy. In a democracy few aspects of the political organization are of greater intrinsic importance than the right to vote. The right is important, however, less because of the political power which it confers on the voter, than because of the ensuing political responsibility. The exercise of this political responsibility by the adult population attaches them to the state and is essential to their political education. If the Fathers had attributed the same importance to democracy and to voting that we do, the nation

would from the beginning have decided for itself whether or not any class of citizens should be authorized to vote for federal officials.

ONE of the matters to which Congress should give early attention is that of the status of labor unions under the Sherman law. It is most dangerous to leave this subject in its present state of uncertainty. We have previously expressed the opinion that the labor sections of the Clayton act, generally believed in labor union circles to exempt trade unions from the Sherman law, did nothing of the kind, and were most artfully drawn so as to give the appearance of changing the law while in fact they left it as it was. In a letter last week, Mr. H. LaRue Brown, a lawyer for whose ability and experience in labor matters we have a high respect, suggests that another part of the act, to which we did not specifically refer, has perhaps effected some change in the law. We had supposed that the section in question was a very succinct summary of the things which it has always been lawful for labor unions to do. Indeed, it seemed rather to enforce than to refute the argument that the law was intended to appear to make changes, and yet change nothing. Mr. Brown does not affirm that it makes any changes; he merely suggests that it may. Surely this doubt, if it is no more, is enough to condemn the act, and to make its revision by the present Congress an act of duty. With labor in its present frame of mind, it is of the highest importance that no opportunity should be given for impugning the good faith of Congress in its treatment of labor problems.

A White Peace and Its Consequences

IT was manifest that the collapse of Rumania would exercise a powerful influence on the duration and outcome of the war, and the announcement of proposed terms of peace by Germany is beginning to indicate what that influence may be. How far will it modify the political objects which are shaping the policy of the several belligerents? How far will it accelerate or delay the coming of peace? These are the questions which thoughtful people both in belligerent and neutral countries are asking, and to which they are obtaining some unexpected answers. Until lately, for instance, the New York *Tribune* has argued that the Allies could win a decisive victory, and that a victory of this kind was the indispensable condition of a satisfactory and enduring peace. Since the collapse of Rumania the *Tribune* has abandoned any expectation of such

a victory. It predicts an inevitable stalemate. "The Marne," it says, "abolished vain German hopes; the fall of Bucharest must put an end to equally colossal Allied expectations. We are marching towards a draw, but a real draw"—one based upon the map of Europe of July, 1914, not of December, 1916. Thus it implicitly advises the Allies to recognize the limitation of their power and to adapt their political objects to it. They should fight for nothing more than the status quo ante—for what is known in Europe as the white peace. But these maximum terms should also be the minimum. Since anything short of the status quo ante would mean a net victory for Germany and a dangerous alteration of the balance of power in her favor, they are justified in continuing to fight regardless of consequences until the white peace is secured. They are justified, according to the *Tribune's* interpretation, in rejecting the German terms.

Ever since the fall of 1914, when the Germans were beaten back from the Marne and repulsed at Ypres, a strong case could be urged in favor of the white peace. On January 1st, 1915, their victories had conferred on the Allies a great opportunity. They could have announced to the world that considering the hideous suffering which a prolonged war would involve, they were ready to make peace with the Central Powers on the basis of the status quo ante, but that the offer of these terms would not hold beyond a short specified period. If their overtures were rejected they would then have felt free to impose any terms on the Central Powers which the interests of the Allied nations suggested and their military and naval power could extort. The submission of such an offer would have placed them in an impregnable moral position. Thereafter, no reasonable neutral or German could have suspected them of harboring aggressive designs against the Central Powers; and if peace had not supervened they would have been justified in demanding compensation from Germany for their subsequent expenses and losses. Not only would the offer have probably resulted in peace, but after the terrible slaughter and apprehension of the first black months, the restoration of peace might have encouraged some attempt to organize international security along the lines suggested by Lord Grey in his negotiations at the end of July with the German Chancellor.

But the offer was never made. After January 1st the Allies began to wage a war the object of which was no longer primarily to protect themselves against German attack or to secure the rights of small nations, but to alter in their favor the European balance of power. This second phase of the contest has been continuing for two