



Norah Smyth

THE HOMES THEY FOUGHT FOR
East End children come out to play with my dog "Jim."

THE GERMAN PEACE NOTE

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of times during the War. But the family has a weakness ; they like going to prison."

I was to serve another term in Holloway ; but not yet.

The Entente Governments had indicated their contemptuous rejection of the Peace Note, though the official Allied answer had not yet been given. Lloyd George had refused Parliament an opportunity to discuss it.

Bonar Law, the new Chancellor of the Exchequer, secured another war credit of four hundred millions and disclosed that the War was now costing £5,710,000 a day ; enough, complained the poor old Liberal, Sir William Byles, to provide every family in the British Isles with a comfortable cottage and two acres of land.

On December 20th President Wilson, acting at last without the procrastinating Colonel House, issued his long-belated summons to the belligerent nations to make peace. The Press here received it with a howl of fury, denouncing especially his statement that the concrete objects for which the War was being waged had not been defined by either side, and that, as stated in general terms by their leaders, the objects of the belligerent governments on both sides appeared the same.

Despite the chorus of newspaper repudiation directed by the Government Press Bureau, great hopes were raised. The I.L.P. sent President Wilson a letter of gratitude, which appeared fulsome when read later on, after Wilson had become the war leader of America, at the head of a government which was persecuting American Conscientious Objectors, and had flung into jail the old Socialist, Eugene Debs.

The Central Powers replied to Wilson's Note, by proposing "an immediate meeting of delegates of the belligerent States at some neutral place" and expressed their willingness to collaborate with America in the prevention of future war.

The House-Wilson plan to join the Entente in the War, on the plea of Germany's refusal to accept America's call to peace, had miscarried—for Germany had accepted ; the Entente had rejected the call. It is true her Government had not openly made an avowal of her terms as Wilson had demanded, but the terms were conveyed to the President confidentially. Wilson declared them inadmissible. The best that can be said of them is that they were a bluff to ascertain how much Germany could obtain by bartering and manœuvre. In the confidential negotiations then taking place between the Entente Powers, the Tsar's Government offered to France and Britain "perfect freedom in drawing up the Western frontiers of Germany" in the expectation that they would allow the Russians "equal freedom in drawing up" their "frontiers between Germany and Austria."¹ The German Emperor's Government regarded frontiers and peoples in the same light as the Tsarist. Could it be otherwise ? Do my readers desire to believe that the Kaiser's Government was more enlight-

¹ Telegram of Sazonoff. Petrograd, February 24th, 1917.

ened than those of Britain, France, Italy, and Russia? All, in fact, were animated by the same spirit. Thus it was not surprising that the German terms¹ conveyed by Bernstorff to Wilson, indicated clearly enough, though with diplomatic reserve, a desire to extend Germany's boundaries as far as possible—both east and west, to add to her colonies, to secure improved trading agreements, and any war indemnities she might be able to obtain from her adversaries. Nevertheless the terms contained phrases which indicated that the Germans were prepared to be reasonable, if necessary, and to treat with their adversaries at the Peace Conference, if not as brother-angels, at least as fellow-plunderers. Despite decided hints of aggression contained in the terms, had they been countered by opposing claims from Powers of not inferior strength, as would have been the case had negotiations then been opened, a settlement could have been arrived at less heavily fraught with suffering to both sides than has been brought about by the treaties the victors ultimately imposed.

In conveying their terms, the Germans thanked Wilson for his peace effort and begged him to continue it, announcing at the same time that they were recommending their ruthless submarine blockade.

The answer of the Entente Powers could be inferred from their Press. The Russian Prime Minister was the first of their official spokesmen to utter a public reply. He delivered a brusque rebuff. The War must continue until a decisive victory had been won. To Wilson's assumption that all nations now deprecated sectional alliances and desired a League of

¹ Restitution of German Upper Alsace occupied by the French.

Gaining of a frontier protecting Germany and Poland economically and strategically against Russia—a polite method of inferring a piece of Russia should be sliced off.

Restitution of German Colonies in form of agreement giving Germany colonies "adequate to her population and economic interest"—a delicate manner of saying that these should be added to.

Restitution of the parts of France occupied by Germany under reservation of strategic frontiers and financial compensation—annexation and indemnity is suggested here if Germany can compass it.

Restitution of Belgium under special guarantee for safety of Germany which would have to be decided on by negotiations with Belgium—a proposal which suggests negotiation between the lion and the lamb.

Economic and financial compensation on the basis of exchange of territories conquered and to be restituted at conclusion of peace. This shows Germany in reasonable mien. As realists her statesmen see that they are not dealing with conquered foes or defenceless small nations; they will give and take in the effort to get the best terms they can without further sacrifice.

Compensation for German business concerns and private persons who suffered by the War—an effort to get as much as possible and off-set claims coming from the other side.

Adjustment of economic agreements and measures which would form an obstacle to normal commerce and intercourse after the conclusion of peace and instead reasonable treaties of commerce—All this, whether for good or evil, would depend on the negotiators; were they far-sighted and reasonable, and the power equally matched on either side, the situation might be bettered considerably.

The Freedom of the Seas.

Agreement to enter a second international congress after the Peace Conference on the basis of Wilson's proposals for a League of Peace.

Nations, he replied, that so far from this being the case, the military alliance between Britain, France, and Russia would be cemented after the War and reinforced by a close economic union. The joint reply of the Entente was a definite refusal to entertain peace negotiations, and an indication that the War must continue till the whole of Europe had been "reorganised." Reorganisation by the tank and the machine-gun in the interests of big business! Alas, how great a mockery!

So died the Wilson peace effort. Capitalist civilisation was too deeply impregnated by its never-ceasing contest for wealth and power to find emergence from the strife through an appeal to reason and righteousness. Till crowns were overthrown and empires disintegrated, it persisted in the ignoble contest. Wilson himself, in the high arc of his oratory, was uttering ideals of international righteousness he would fail to implement when his professions were put to the test. Indeed, they were only half real to him.

Its ill-reception by the Allied Governments notwithstanding, the Peace Talk had stimulated and emboldened the pacifist movement. On Christmas Eve the Peace Negotiations Committee held a service of prayer in Trafalgar Square for the coming peace. It was a strange, sad scene. Men and women pacifists fervently sang the hymns. A crowd of colonial soldiers, marshalled and prompted by those same middle-aged civilians we had recognised for years at such work, broke in with strident yells and ribald songs. Dr. Orchard, a slight figure in black cassock, led the prayers, his low voice reaching surprisingly through the din. After the service people lingered for hours in the Square, discussing the hope of peace. The story that the event was paid for by Germany had been industriously circulated amongst the soldiers, but many of them came to the literature sellers to express their longing that the peace talk might bear fruit.

"I think you are going to make me sad, girly," an Australian soldier said to me when I offered him a paper. "I came ten thousand miles to do my bit. I'd rather not be discouraged; but I'll read it."