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Let the Peace Conference Convene.

ADDRESS DELIVERED BY DR. J. L. MAGNES

CONSTITUENT MEETING
PEOPLE'S COUNCIL OF AMERICA

Chicago, Sunday, September 2, 1917.

The President, in his message to the Pope on August 29, has summed up, in impressive language, the peace terms of the Russian Revolution, of the German Reichstag majority, and of the Pope.

The President has declared for a peace through negotiation. The Peace Conference might be called forthwith if acceptable guarantees of the honor and good faith of their present rulers could be secured from the German people themselves.

Thus once and for all the quietus is given to the theory calling for a war to the bitter end, a knock-out blow, a fight to a finish, a war pour la victoire integrale. If acceptable guarantees of good faith are forthcoming from the German people, the Peace Conference, in the view of the President, can be held on the following basis:

1. The return to the territorial "status quo ante bellum," "with no dismemberment of empires," "and the territorial claims of France and Italy, and the perplexing problems of the Balkan states, and the restitution of Poland to be left to such conciliatory adjustments as may be possible in the new temper of peace, due regard being paid to the aspirations of the peoples whose political fortunes and affiliations will be involved."

2. "No reprisals" and "no punitive damages," but a "general condonation" and the "intolerable wrongs done in this war by the German government to be repaired, but not at the expense of the sovereignty of any people."

3. "The equal right of all peoples great or small, weak or powerful, to freedom, security and self-government."

4. "No selfish and exclusive economic leagues," or "revenge," "but a participation upon fair terms, by all peoples in the economic opportunities of the world."

5. "A concert of the nations" based upon "the rights of peoples, not the rights of governments," and agreeing to "disarmament," setting up "arbitration instead of force," establishing the "freedom of the seas," agreeing to "restitutions of small nations."

This is the peace without victory, the peace between equals, the proper basis for an enduring peace.

Thus through a specific statement of war aims and peace terms on the part of the President has the war been brought that much nearer to its close. Thus has America assumed the leadership of the nations associated with it in this war.

It will strengthen the liberal and democratic purposes among the great peoples of the Central Powers to realize, doubtless to their amazement and relief, that the war treaties and conventions looking to a redistribution of much of their territory among their enemies and to an economic war after the war have now as war measures been repudiated through the President. This must give gratification no less to the whole world. It shows that the world is coming to understand that territorial boundary lines, while important, are much less important than freedom of political, economic and spiritual development on all sides of these boundary lines, much less important than freedom of economic and spiritual communication between peoples everywhere politically free. Be it said to the lasting glory of the Russian Revolution that it first of all gave utterance to contempt for territorial annexations and monetary indemnities as the important objects of this unparalleled war. It was clear to Revolutionary Russia that though the world might return to the territorial status quo ante bellum, the world could never again return to the spiritual status quo. If all nations and peoples and nationalities are guaranteed political, economic, spiritual freedom, there is no need of forcible annexations and punitive indemnities in order to enthrone justice and maintain the peace.

All the nations at war therefore and all the neutral nations as well are agreed that a "covenanted peace" is desirable upon the basis outlined by the President.

Why then does not the Peace Conference convene and the carnage end? Why are not the treaties of settlement drawn up?

Because, says the President, they would to-day be treaties drawn up by "the present rulers of Germany," by "the ruthless

master of the German people," without guarantees of the German people themselves. The issue between the President and the German people may be stated thus: The peace conference will be convened as soon as the German people move on from the measure of democracy they now have to the measure of democracy which the President thinks they ought to have.

It is at this point where, to our regret, we must take issue with the President. The peace conference, we contend, ought to be convened at once on the terms outlined by the President. The bases of peace as outlined by the President are substantially agreed to by all the belligerents. The difference between the present measure of German democracy and the President's measure of the future German democracy is not so deep, so essential, so vital that the slaughter should on that account be continued one day, one moment longer.

Indeed, the very message of the President to the Pope impels us to ask: Since there is substantial agreement among all the belligerents as to the terms of peace, why not meet together in conference now? English commissioners, headed by Lord Newton and German commissioners, headed by General Frederic, met officially in July at The Hague in the same room and across the same table, and, in behalf of their Governments, came to agreements concerning the treatment and exchange of prisoners of war. No one was contaminated by this meeting. The British Commissioner is reported to have said to the House of Lords on July 31 that "contrary to the opinion of all his friends, he had always maintained that the most practical and efficacious plan was to enter into direct communication with the enemy, because he held very strongly that they could do more in a few hours' conversation, than with weeks and months of writing." The President does in effect enter into indirect communication with the enemy through the Pope. Why not meet with the representatives of the German Government and the German people and talk with them face to face? We ask, with H. G. Wells: "Why, then, does waste and killing go on? Why is not a Peace Conference sitting now? Manifestly, because a small minority of people in positions of peculiar advantage, in positions of trust and authority prevent or delay its assembling."

But if, unhappily for the human family, the prayer of all the peoples for peace shall not now be answered, and the peace con-

ference shall not be called forthwith, it becomes the duty of every one to consider all possible ways of securing such "conclusive evidence of the will and purpose of the German people themselves" as will satisfy the President of the United States.

We ask, first of all, that the President be more specific than he has been as to the nature of the conclusive evidence which, in his opinion, the other peoples of the world would be justified in accepting. It may be difficult specifically to outline the nature of such concrete evidence. But difficult as such a plain, explicit, matter-of-fact description of the conclusive evidence undoubtedly is, there is no doubt that the President is capable of giving it. What are such difficulties when the fate of millions, of Western civilization may hang upon a clear understanding of the President's words?

The liberal and democratic forces of Germany who are to give the guarantees and evidence required need in all fairness such a clear pronouncement for their encouragement and guidance. It will give them a definite goal towards which to work. Who knows how near they may now be to that goal? They have already made headway in securing the reform of the Prussian electoral law. They have overthrown the Imperial Chancellor on questions of peace and war and democratization. They have adopted in their Reichstag through their majority bloc, since augmented by the addition of another important political party, a peace resolution calling for a peace through "a mutual understanding and lasting reconciliation among the nations" very much upon the same basis as outlined by the President. They have secured the appointment of a semi-parliamentary commission with which the present Chancellor is pledged to co-operate as to German policy. The German answer to the Pope is to be drawn up or approved by this commission and not by one man. There is agitation for another change of Chancellors because of an equivocal statement by the present Chancellor concerning the Reichstag majority resolution for peace and democracy. Minority Socialists openly advocate a German republic. Majority Socialists return from conferences with enemy Russians and with neutrals at Copenhagen and Stockholm with the message to the German people that democratization is the one hope of peace for Germany. The liberal and democratic forces have reduced the junkers and militarists and imperialists to a small minority in increasingly shaky positions

of authority and trust. What are the additional steps for democratization required by the President? The President's message does not call for the dethronement of the Kaiser, despite newspaper headings; nor of any of the present rulers of Germany. The President will take the word of the present rulers or of any rulers of Germany if, and only if, this word of the rulers is explicitly supported by the German people in ways acceptable to the other peoples of the world. What are these ways? To this, is the issue between the belligerents now resolved. Then let this issue be clarified from every angle, in every way, so that the German people can give clear answer, Yes or No.

But it is not a President alone to whom the American people address themselves in peace and war. We turn therefore in the next instance to the Congress—the elected representatives of the people of America. Is it not now their duty to devise ways and means whereby they can get into touch with the elected representatives of the German people? Of course, this is unprecedented. But so is this war, and so is the need and the yearning for peace unprecedented. Let the Congress in harmony with the President's aspirations for the German people address the majority bloc of the German Reichstag. Let their representatives meet together upon neutral soil so that the elected representatives of the American people may test at first hand the guarantees offered by the elected representatives of the German people.

If, furthermore, it is the "rights of peoples, not the rights of governments" that are to be the determining factors in the peace and after, non-governmental representatives of the peoples must come together to consider how the war shall be ended for the benefit of the peoples. Let the governments of the world give evidence of the sincerity of their phrases concerning the rights of peoples, by encouraging rather than suppressing the Stockholms and such other international meetings of non-governmental representatives as the peoples themselves may arrange. This is a people's way of helping to secure the guarantees that will restore the "confidence of all peoples everywhere in the faith of nations and the possibility of a covenanted peace."

And as to the people of the United States themselves. They are, "of course, included" among the peoples of the world who

are to weigh the evidence of the will and purpose of the German people. But how can a democratic people weigh evidence except through free political discussion? Several weeks ago when our war aims and peace terms were not so clearly outlined as now they are, the Secretary of State warned the American people against the discussion of peace terms for fear they might be of enemy origin—and this, despite the fact that the peace terms under discussion at the time had their origin in the revolutionary aspirations of the new-born Russia. The President's peace terms are not of enemy origin. They are put forward by the President in the name of the American people. The American people demand that they be guaranteed their constitutional rights of free press, free speech, peaceable assemblage and the right of petition that they may freely discuss and act upon these peace terms put forward in their name. Is it contended in good faith that the President alone shall determine whether or not the guarantees of the German people are acceptable to the American people? We cannot believe that the President is undesirous of hearing the views of the American people. Making peace is not a military act alone. It is an act political, economic, spiritual. The successful military conduct of the war does not require that the American people be shut off from a discussion of the political, economic, spiritual aspects of the war and of the peace to come. Through free discussion the American people might while helping democracy throughout the world develop rather than restrict our democracy here at home. Is it worthy of a democracy that citizens holding divergent views be driven from place to place to find the opportunity of discussion? That they be threatened with imprisonment, that they be spied upon and maligned because in these miraculous days of change, of death and of life, of misery and of hope, as lovers of America and their fellow-men they speak and labor and struggle for democracy and for peace?

What with the revolutionary peace terms of the new-born Russia, Stockholm, the British Labor Party, the Reichstag resolution, the declaration of the Austro-Hungarian government, the Pope's message, and now the President's answer—the backbone of the war is broken. Peace is in sight "with healing on its wings." Why then go on with the war? To make the world safe for democracy by effecting a final change in the political structure of Germany? As though changes in political

structure alone, in Germany or elsewhere, could by themselves make the world safe for democracy! Certainly these political changes in Germany, in America, in every land of the world are essential. The common peoples of the world must come to realize their political power, and in fact as well as in name take their political destinies into their own hands. The foreign policy of the world's governments must not be hidden from the eyes of the world's peoples. Above all things no government must again make war without first receiving a direct mandate from the people themselves. But it is not politically alone that the people must rule. They must govern as well their economic destinies. They must establish the economic democracy of the peoples of the world. They must dethrone both the political and industrial imperialists who seek political and industrial empire among the weaker peoples both at home and abroad. But not only politically and industrially but also spiritually must the peoples of the world rule their own destinies. Nations must be permitted to be themselves, to think their own thoughts, to speak their own language, to develop their own national and spiritual cultures without let or hindrance. White peoples and black and brown, Occidental and Oriental, small and great, they must be free to nurture the intimate things of the spirit unshackled—their religion, their literature, their art, their ways of living and of thought.

A world made safe for democracy—political, economic, spiritual. Does the war for such a world in reality depend upon the indeterminate changes in Germany's political structure which the President now demands? Such an issue would seem trivial indeed were it not for the vast and tragic consequences that hang upon it every hour, every second. But trivial or essential, because the consequences are so momentous, because a world made safe for democracy depends upon the deeper and more important changes in the world's structure, we cry enough to the slaughter and we ask that the Peace Conference be convened at once.

