

New York Peace Speech

[Following is Mr. Bryan's speech before the Peace Meeting at Madison Square Garden, New York, Feb. 2, 1917.]

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen: I am very glad to take part in this meeting, and I confess to my surprise at the size of this audience. I expressed a very strong preference for Carnegie hall, because I was afraid that at such a time as this, with no campaign on, and no means of reaching the public except the notice that would go through the press, that we could not interest enough people to justify the use of this hall. It certainly is evidence of the deep interest that you feel in the subject under consideration that you are here in such numbers tonight. I feel justified in the trouble that I have taken to come, traveling from Atlanta, where I turned back from my trip down to the south, that I might join these friends of our own country and the friends of all the countries in this expression of sentiment tonight, and I am glad to speak in behalf of the resolutions that have been presented for your consideration, and upon which your vote will be asked at the conclusion of my address.

The President is the servant of the nation. And the President desires as much as any President ever did to reflect the wishes of the people for whom he speaks. It is important, therefore, that the President, and those who act with him at Washington, shall have an opportunity to know what the desire of the people is. Everyone in an official position is influenced by public opinion, and that means by THE public opinion that comes to his notice, and he is not to blame if, hearing but one side, he is misinformed as to what the people really want. Ordinarily, the only way in which the President can gather public opinion is from the daily press, and the daily press does not always accurately reflect the sentiment of the times.

In saying this I do not intend a reflection upon those who edit our papers. I just want to remind you that the man who edits a paper is just simply a man; he has the frailties of man, and the limitations of man; the man who sits in the editorial office does not always know what the people desire, and the business office may have an exaggerated opinion of the importance of news that can be stated in large headlines.

The sensational item generally finds a place on the front page. I found a few months ago, when we were negotiating treaties, that sometimes a sensational news item of no great interest to any considerable number would have a place of importance on the front page, while the notice that a treaty had been made that might protect our country from war with another nation would be so inconspicuously mentioned that you would have to search for it.

IMPORTANCE OF MEETINGS

If the subject under discussion is one where there are great financial interests on one side, there may be a pressure, even an unconscious pressure, on the side that represents the money involved. But whatever reason you may give, or whatever explanation, the fact remains that a public official who relies upon the metropolitan press for information as to what the people want is apt to be woefully misled. And for that reason it is important that meetings like this should be held in the great centers, that the common man may have a chance to speak in tones that will be heard, and thus have a part in the molding of the public opinion that controls official action.

I am glad, therefore, to be here to join in the support of this resolution that has been read to you. No one in this country was happier than I when a few weeks ago the President called upon the nations at war to state in explicit terms what it was that, being done, the world might have peace.

It was the first step, and it was exactly the right step. These rulers have, from the very beginning of this war, denied responsibility for its commencement. When the President in the beginning suggested mediation they all, with one accord, denied responsibility, and the answers were so much alike that one answer might have served for all. Every one of them said in substance: "I am not guilty; I did not want this

war; I did not begin this war; somebody else started it."

And the world is to be congratulated that we have at last reached the time when no ruler of a civilized land dares to admit to the world that he either began the war or wanted the war.

But, while no one was willing to admit responsibility for beginning it, none of them were willing to tell the world what it was they were fighting for; each side announced that it was striving to preserve its own integrity, and for the defense of its own rights; but they would not state in explicit terms what it was that they insisted upon as a condition precedent to peace. When the President presented this request to them it was based on two assumptions—first, that they must know what they were fighting for or they would not continue fighting; and, second, if they knew what they were fighting for, they must be willing to tell the public, for it would be unfair to assume that they were fighting for secret ends that they were not willing to disclose to the world.

PRESIDENT'S COURAGEOUS ACTION

The President's action was just the action that was necessary in the case, and when answers came back that were not satisfactory—answers that, while they went into specifications in some respects, yet were not a complete statement that could be taken up and accepted or rejected by the other—the President then presented his epoch-making appeal to the conscience of the world.

It was a courageous act. It was an heroic act, and it places the President among the nation's immortals forever. It presents a basis upon which the world may build a peace with the hope that it will endure, and I so highly appreciate and so fully endorse the basis of peace which he has asked the world to adopt that it is with reluctance that I dissent from one part which I shall not discuss, because at this time discussion of it is not necessary.

I have not reached the same conclusion that the President has with regard to agreement with other nations in the enforcement of peace in Europe, if that construction can be placed upon his message. I rather prefer to leave the question until he himself has presented his views more in detail in the hope that when he does so present them we may find that there is no reason for difference.

But, my friends, I do believe that the President has presented to the world a platform upon which the world can afford to build its hope of future peace; and in order that I may present this matter as it appears to me, I ask you first to consider what this war really is and the injury that it is doing to neutral nations of the world.

I do not call this war the greatest war that the world has ever known, because the word "great" has in it a suggestion of something more than bigness. When we speak of a great movement, or a great institution, we are not thinking of its size alone. I believe there have been greater wars than this, but none so big.

It is the biggest war that the world has ever known, if we measure it by the population of the nations engaged in the war. Never before have anything like so many people lived in belligerent nations. It is the biggest, too, if we measure it by the number of enlisted men who face each other on its many battlefields. The estimates run from twenty-one millions to thirty-one millions; if to avoid any possible exaggeration we take the lowest estimate we are appalled to find that if all the people in this country who had ever voted on an election day in all the states were brought together in one place the concourse, vast as it would be, would fall millions short of the number of men actually fighting in this war.

It is biggest if you measure it by its fatalities. More than six millions of human beings have been killed. A few days ago one of the nations issued a statement to the effect that it had lost two millions of men. More than ten millions have been wounded, in addition to those whose wounds have been fatal.

In expensiveness it is also the biggest the world has ever known.

They are spending more than \$400,000,000

every week on this war, and when you remember that that is what it cost us to build the Panama canal, the greatest engineering feat that man has ever accomplished, you will realize that since this war began they have squandered over there, killing each other, enough money to build more than one hundred Panama canals—so much more expensive is the work of destruction than the work of construction. And they have added forty billions to the war debts of the world. If we count the war debts that have come from all the wars of history as thirty billions, which is, I think, something more than the actual sum, you will see that since this war began they have added to the war debt of the world more than ten billions of dollars more than the entire war debts were when the war began. Five hundred years from now little children will be born in Europe with their necks under a yoke of debt that this generation has fastened upon posterity.

This is the war that is going on in Europe. If you measure it by the population of the nations engaged, if you measure it by the enlisted men, if you measure it by what it is costing, and if you measure it by the implements employed, nothing so horrible has ever been known before.

They used to be content to use the earth's surface for the manoeuvres of the army, but now they have taken possession of the air, and thunderbolts more deadly than the thunderbolts of Jove fall as if from the clouds on unsuspecting people; and they have taken possession of the ocean's depths, as well, and deadly torpedoes rise from out of the darkness to multiply the perils of the sea.

They have substituted a long-range rifle for a short-range rifle, a big-mouthed gun for a little-mouthed gun, a dreadnaught for a battleship and a superdreadnaught for a dreadnaught, and to these they have added the submarine, and now they pour liquid fire on battle lines and suffocate the soldiers in the trenches with deadly gases.

They have exhausted human ingenuity to find new ways in which man may kill his fellow man. And these are not barbarous nations; they are among the civilized nations of the earth. They are not heathen nations; they are among the Christian nations of the globe. They all worship one God, and nearly all approach Him through the same mediator. They kneel and offer their prayers to a common Heavenly Father and then rise up to take each other's lives. It would be bad enough if the penalties of this war fell only on the guilty, but a great majority of the men who die and the women who weep have had neither part nor voice in determining whether there should be peace or war.

BURDENS BORNE BY NEUTRALS

It would be bad enough if the burdens of this war were borne only by the nations at war, but like a mighty flood it has inundated the entire world and neutral nations as well as belligerent nations are suffering. Every neutral nation in the world is bearing a burden of taxation that would not be necessary but for this war. Every neutral nation finds that its fiscal system has been disturbed by the war. It is compelled to resort to unusual methods of taxation, and every neutral nation finds its commerce disturbed and interrupted, and our nation, the greatest of neutral nations, and one with the most foreign commerce, is suffering more than any of the rest.

When this war began one side drove the merchantmen of the other side into harbors and compelled them to intern there. That is international law, and according to international law there they must remain idle and useless while this war lasts, no matter how much we suffer for lack of ships; and according to international law the nations that deprive us of these vessels are under no obligation to furnish ships to take the place of those they drove from the sea. On the contrary, according to international law, they can first deprive us of the merchantmen of their enemies, and then withdraw their own ships for transport service, and to some extent they have done so, still further crippling the carrying trade of the ocean. Because of the scarcity of ships, and because of increased risks of the sea, it has sometimes cost us seven times as much to carry a bale of cotton across the ocean as it cost before the war began. Last March our secretary of commerce announced that it was at that time costing four times as much to transport provisions, five times as