

The Commoner

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VOL. 17, NO. 12

Lincoln, Nebraska, December, 1917

Whole Number 704

A Powerful Document

In this issue will be found the full text of the President's annual message. It is a powerful document. While the request for a declaration of war against Austria will command immediate attention and action, the parts which are most vital and far-reaching are the appeal to the German people and the reference to the Russian situation. The argument addressed to the masses whom the Kaiser is using to forward his ambitious plans ought to be translated into the German language and distributed by airships. If the assurance given does not stir revolt against autocratic authority, the people must be strangely blind to their own welfare.

The President is patient with Russia and hopeful that her people now freed from despotism will yet use their power to check the land-hunger of Germany's militarists. It is the clearest statement yet made of the terms of peace and ought to make a profound impression on the world.

W. J. BRYAN.

MASSACHUSETTS' OPPORTUNITY

The constitutional convention now in session in Massachusetts has decided to submit to the people for ratification an amendment embodying the initiative and referendum. Good; now let the people of the bay state improve their opportunity and put their constitution in harmony with the progressive thought of the day. The initiative and referendum will enable the people to rule in Massachusetts—that is why the predatory interests oppose it.

With New Jersey adopting local option Pennsylvania is left without a rival as the state most completely controlled by the breweries — and that, too, in spite of the fact that Pennsylvania brewers confess themselves criminals by pleading the criminal's excuse for refusing to testify.

New Jersey has declared for local option—heretofore no local unit in that state, however small, could vote on the saloon question. The liquor interests were in such complete control that they could deny the people even this right, but things are changing. The saloon will soon be banished from New Jersey.

At last November's election one hundred and twenty-two New York towns went from wet to dry. Query: If so great a change occurred when only men voted, what may we expect at the next election when the women vote?

The Halifax disaster is unspeakably sad but it will give our people an opportunity to show their neighborly sympathy, and the opportunity is already being improved.

The war is still on and the country is standing unitedly behind the government.

President's Address to Congress

Recommends Declaration of State of War Against Austria-Hungary

Following is the full text of President Wilson's annual address before the regular session of congress at Washington, December 4, 1917:

Gentlemen of the Congress: Eight months have elapsed since I last had the honor of addressing you. They have been months crowded with events of immense and grave significance for us. I shall not undertake to detail or even to summarize those events.

The practical particulars of the part we have played in them will be laid before you in the reports of the executive departments. I shall discuss only our present outlook upon these vast affairs, our present duties and the immediate means of accomplishing the objects we shall hold always in view.

OUR DUTY IS ACTION.

I shall not go back to debate the causes of the war. The intolerable wrongs done and planned against us by the sinister masters of Germany have long since become too grossly obvious and odious to every true American to need rehearsal. But I shall ask you to consider again and with a very grave scrutiny our objectives and the measures by which we mean to attain them; for the purpose of discussion here in this place is action and our action must move straight towards definite ends. Our object is of course, to win the war, and we shall not slacken or suffer ourselves to be diverted until it is won. But it is worth while asking and answering the question when shall we consider the war won?

From one point of view it is not necessary to broach this fundamental matter. I do not doubt that the American people know what the war is

about and what sort of an outcome they will regard as a realization of their purpose in it. As a nation we are united in spirit and intention. I pay little heed to those who tell me otherwise. I hear the voices of dissent — who does not? I hear the criticism and the clamor of the noisily thoughtless and troublesome. I also see men here and there fling themselves in impotent disloyalty against the calm, indomitable power of the nation. I hear men debate peace who understand neither its nature nor the way in which we may attain it with uplifted eyes and unbroken spirits. But I know that none of these speaks for the nation. They do not touch the heart of anything. They may safely be left to strut their uneasy hour and be forgotten.

WHAT THE WAR IS FOR

But from another point of view I believe that it is necessary to say plainly what we here at the seat of action consider the war to be for and what part we mean to play in the settlement of its searching issues. We are the spokesmen of the American people and they have a right to know whether their purpose is ours. They desire peace by the overcoming of evil, by the defeat once for all of the sinister forces that interrupt peace and render it impossible and they wish to know how closely our thought runs with theirs and what action we propose. They are impatient with those who desire peace by any sort of compromise—deeply and indignantly impatient, but they will be equally impatient with us if we do not make it plain to them what our objectives are and what we are planning for in seeking to make conquest of peace by arms.

I believe that I speak for them when I say two things: First, that this intolerable thing of which the masters of Germany have shown us the ugly face, this menace of combined intrigue and force which we now see so clearly as the German power, a thing without conscience or honor or capacity for covenanted peace, must be crushed, and if it be not utterly brought to an end, at least shut out from the friendly intercourse of the nations; and, second, that when this thing and its power are indeed defeated and the time comes that we can discuss peace—when the German people have spokesmen whose word we can believe and when those spokesmen are ready in the name of their people to accept the common judgment of the nations as to what shall henceforth be the basis of law and of covenant for the life of the world — we shall be willing and glad to pay the full price for peace and pay it ungrudgingly. We know what that price will be. It will be full, impartial justice

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