
President Wilson Has Heard the “Voices of Humanity That Are in the Air” and Declares in Favor of Democratic Settlement of War

by Louis Kopelin

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Unsigned front page editorial attributed to editor Louis Kopelin.

To the Readers of *The Appeal*:

President Wilson has heard “the voices of humanity that are in the air.” The cry of the plain people of every nation that “the war shall not end in vindictive action of any kind” has brought forth a full and frank answer. The democratic formula, “No annexations; no contributions; no punitive indemnities,” has been espoused by the President of the United States.

Readers of *The Appeal* since the war began are well aware of the importance of President Wilson’s splendid contribution to the early and just ending of the international conflict. Until our President delivered his address to Congress last week the democratic slogan of “No annexations; no contributions; no punitive indemnities” was practically sounded by the Socialists and liberals alone, while the reactionary elements condemned this slogan as being tainted with pro-Germanism. Now we have the chief executive of the richest and strongest member of the Allies proclaiming in unmistakable tones that this “just idea” should be “brought under patronage of its real friends.”

After our entrance into the world war *The Appeal* realized that it would be foolish and unworthy of us to attempt to obstruct the war. Once in, the United States could not in honor and in fact withdraw. A separate peace was out of the question. In spite of the charges of the reactionaries no rational Socialist or liberal could entertain such a step. We therefore devoted our efforts to the fostering of public sentiment that

would unite the common people of all countries, including the people of Germany and Austria-Hungary, against the military group of Prussia that more than any other single factor was responsible for the international carnage, and thus hasten the end of the war.

Democratic Terms as a War Measure.

As a newspaper devoted to the interests of the working people in field and factory, we felt that the first step to bring about unity among the Allies and dissension in the Teutonic countries was to convince the working people that the Allies had no selfish or greedy motive in waging war against their enemies. On May 12 [1917] we declared:

The reason the Socialists of Germany and Austria-Hungary are fighting for their governments is because they feel convinced that their enemies lust for conquest and indemnities.

And in *The Appeal* of May 26 [1917] we said:

The way to show the German people that we are their friends is by renouncing aggressive intentions upon their territory and resources. Russia has already told the Allies that it will not fight for annexation and indemnity for anybody. The United States has publicly declared that it does not want land and money for itself. However, it has not definitely stated that it will not fight for the remaking of the map of Europe and the imposing of heavy indemnities upon the German people for the benefit of other nations. It now remains our great and urgent duty to influence our government to publicly renounce any intention to fight for

annexation and indemnity for any nation.

That our campaign to secure a statement of the aims of the war was prompted mainly by an intense desire to unite the liberal forces of the world in a moral offensive against the autocratic Prussian rulers is shown by the following extract from our issue of June 30 [1917]:

Not only will a clear and definite statement from our government based on the aims of the war bring unity and understanding in Allied countries but it will bring dissension and antagonism in Teutonic countries.

It is true that the substance of a democratic peace was advocated by the President in his Senate address last January — while we were still a neutral nation. On the other hand the addresses and notes of President Wilson subsequent to our participation in the world conflict were principally devoted to the military aspects of the war. Not until the President's excellent reply to the Pope's peace proposal could the liberals make use of an official declaration against what might be called an imperialist settlement of the war. In that reply the President revealed that he was still in the ranks of the world's liberals. "Punitive damages, the dismemberment of empires, the establishment of selfish and exclusive leagues," were roundly denounced by President Wilson as being no basis for an enduring or just peace. Excellent as this declaration was it still was stated in general terms. Specific application of this democratic doctrine was not yet made. The lack of a specific statement of war aims with concrete applications still failed to enlist the support of many of the Socialists of this country and — as recent history has shown — of an influential group of Socialists in Russia.

Press "Plays Down" Liberal Declarations.

It may be stated here that reactionary newspapers then made matters worse by needlessly emphasizing the belligerent preamble of the President's reply to the Pope while giving narrow interpretations of the liberal conclusion which was the substance of that reply. And you will note that the same method is now being used by the reactionary press in America. An incidental and expected outcome of the war against

Germany — namely, a declaration of war against its principle ally — was featured in blazing headlines as the main and important part of the President's memorable address before the reconvened congress. On the other hand it "played down" the specific statement of war aims for which practically all the world had been intensely longing, although the President saw fit to devote nearly two-thirds of his address to this statement.

And how did the President answer the voices of humanity? Read his reply:

We do not wish in any way to impair or to rearrange the Austro-Hungary Empire. It is no affair of ours what they do with their own life, either industrially or politically. We do not purpose or desire to dictate to them in any way. We only desire to see that their affairs are left in their own hands, in all matters, great or small

We shall hope to secure for the peoples of the Balkan peninsula and for the people of the Turkish Empire the right and opportunity to make their own lives safe, their own fortunes secure against oppression or injustice, and from the dictation of foreign courts or parties.

And our attitude and purpose with regard to Germany herself are of a like kind. We intend no wrong against the German Empire, no interference with her internal affairs. We should deem either the one or the other absolutely unjustifiable, absolutely contrary to the principles we have professed to live by and to hold most sacred through our life as a nation.

The people of Germany are being told by the men whom they now permit to deceive them and to act as their masters that they are fighting for the very life and existence of their empire, a war of desperate self-defense against deliberate aggression. Nothing could be more grossly or wantonly false, and we must seek by the utmost openness and candor as to our real aims to convince them of its falseness. We are in fact fighting for their emancipation from fear, along with our own, from the fear as well as from the fact of unjust attack by neighbors or rivals or schemers after world empire. No one is threatening the existence or the independence or the peaceful enterprise of the German Empire.

The wrongs, the very deep wrongs, committed in this war will have to be righted. That is of course. But they cannot and must not be righted by the commission of similar wrongs against Germany and her allies. The world will not permit the commission of similar wrongs as a means of reparation and settlement.

The foregoing is only a small part of President Wilson's wholehearted avowal of a democratic peace. The entire address is reprinted elsewhere in this issue and we commend it to your careful reading. You will note that the President cautions the statesmen of other nations to the necessity of daylight diplomacy and full recognition of the desires of the common people. He

frankly admits that a specific statement of the war aims at this time is desirable and should have even been made much earlier. "I cannot help thinking," said President Wilson, "that if they (aims of the war) had been made plain at the very outset the sympathy and enthusiasm of the Russian people might have been once for all enlisted on the side of the Allies, suspicion and distrust swept away, and real and lasting union of purpose effected."

Kaiser Still Silent on Peace Terms.

This is not only true of Russia but of all Allied countries, particularly Italy. It is now recognized that the recent defeat of the Italian army was due in a great measure to the lowering of the morale by German propaganda charging that the Allies were waging a war of conquest and indemnity. Until President Wilson's address of last week this charge was not definitely met and specifically denied. In America the lukewarmness and indifference of many of the liberals toward the war were due to the same cause. Belated as this statement of war aims may be, it is highly welcome and heartily endorsed. We trust it is not too late to save the situation in Russia for no Socialist or liberal group can now consistently and honestly make terms with the Kaiser — for be it remembered that the Kaiser, autocrat of Germany, has not yet specifically renounced conquest and indemnity.

The nearest to a German renunciation of conquest and indemnity was the Reichstag resolution of last July. Through a combination of the Socialists, Catholics, and National Liberals, a resolution was then adopted declaring against "forced acquisition of territory and political, economic, and financial violations." However, this resolution was not endorsed by Chancellor Michaelis nor by his successor, the present Chancellor. And without a Chancellor's endorsement the resolution means nothing. In Germany the Chancellor represents the Kaiser, not the Reichstag. The Reichstag has practically no power. And to make matters worse this resolution has lately been repudiated considerably by the leading members of the Catholic and National Liberal Parties. The German Socialists still stand solidly behind that resolution.

Intimations Are Prussians Want Indemnity.

So leaving the past out and considering only the present we find that a responsible spokesman of the Allies has definitely renounced imperialist aims while no responsible spokesman of the Teutonic powers has yet uttered even a syllable smattering of a democratic peace. Indicative of the attitude of the German rulers is the recent statement of Foreign Minister Von Kuehlman suavely assuring us that the German demands are not large.

In the opinion of *The Appeal* the situation today is so remarkably different from conditions that obtained in the past that in all candor and sincerity our attitude towards the world war must be revised. Last spring some of us believed that the Allies had sufficiently whipped Germany and that a peace was possible if the latter country and its allies were assured of their territorial and financial integrity. Today we find that the Prussian military machine still is menacing the world. Since that time Teutonic troops have invaded Russia and Italy. No soil belonging to Germany and Austria-Hungary is today occupied by Allied soldiers. To make peace with the Teutonic powers while they are victorious and while they are silent on the terms of ending the war is to surrender almost unconditionally. The Allies have put their cards on the table. The Teutonic powers have not. Not until this impossible situation changes can any lover of liberty and democracy do else than vigorously support the position President Wilson has taken. This is our candid view.

The fact that American reactionaries are also urging that the war be prosecuted means nothing when you consider the essential facts. It means *<illeg.>* the fact that Lord Lansdowne, the well known British Tory and reactionary, is now in favor of an immediate negotiated peace. The important point to remember is that the Allies today are repelling invaders with no aim of conquest in view.

The Appeal to Reason believes that the time has passed absolutely for the discussion of how we got into the war or how we could have kept out of the war. We are in it now. Even Morris Hillquit admits in the current *New Republic* that "a simple return to the state of things as they existed before our entrance into the war is obviously impossible" and that he would vote against

America's withdrawal from the world war if a referendum of that question were now held. The thing to do is to hasten the end of the war through united effort since the menace of imperialism has been removed by the public espousal of a democratic peace on the part of our President.

German People Must Enforce Their Will.

Let the German Socialists and working people realize that the Socialists and workers in the Allied nations stand solidly behind President Wilson's recent address to Congress. Let them know that blessed peace may be enjoyed by them and the strife-torn world just as soon as they remove from their midst the dark powers which govern them and menace the world. As Karl Liebknecht declared, "Consider well the fact: as long as the German people do not rise and enforce their will the assassination of the people will continue." The Germans need no longer think they are fighting for the safety of their fatherland. The integrity of their country and of their allies is assured. Liberal thought has definitely triumphed over the imperialist elements of which they — and we — have been afraid.

In recognizing the claims of liberalism, President Wilson has tremendously aided the cause of the Allies. We believe that his restatement of the aims of the war is more important than any military victory scored by the Allies this year. The clearing of the atmosphere from the taint of suspicion and distrust will in our judgment do more to hasten the end of the war than the crushing of several German divisions. Wars today are fought by peoples, not armies. The morale of the people is as important as the morale of the armed soldiers. President Wilson's latest address has raised the morale of the Allies and may even save Russia for the Entente. In due course of time, the full meaning of the President's peace program will become known among the German people and the Prussian regime will have a taste of a propaganda to which they have been accustomed.

Undoubtedly you, readers of *The Appeal*, have also come to the same conclusion in regard to the significance of the President's address. Men and women who are progressive and intelligent can come to no other conclusion. We never were fanatics or cranks and some would have the world believe. We profoundly

believe in democracy, here and abroad. When we recognize the genuine article we are quick to acclaim it.

Cooperation of All Liberal Forces Needed.

Not being bound by any dogmas or formulas, *The Appeal* is fortunately in a position to recognize the truth no matter where it shines. We are interested in the substance, not the phrases. We are not so narrow as to believe that only certain elements organized in a certain way or labeled in a certain manner are the sole devotees of peace and democracy. All the world longs for these essentials to life and liberty. No one has a patent method to attain them. Whoever advances the cause of democracy and peace heartily deserves our undivided support as long as he is engaged in that laudable pursuit.

In lending our moral support to the prosecution of the war we are enabled not only to help bring about an early and just peace but we are also enabled to battle for the things that are dear to our hearts — democracy in government and industry. The world war has done more to stimulate the socialization of industry than a century of propaganda. A new era is dawning. The exigencies of war are dethroning all the sacred gods of capitalism. Government ownership and operation of the principle industries is now in sight. What we have been fighting for a score of years is now coming to pass. We can greatly accelerate these tremendous changes and have them permanently benefit the masses if we adjust ourselves to new conditions and take advantage of our opportunities.

Times Favorable for Constructive Efforts.

Strange as it may seem a destructive war is bringing constructive social effort in America. *The Appeal to Reason* has for years carried on a propaganda of negation against private ownership of industries socially necessary. We have exposed, criticized, and denounced. That we have done this job well will be attested by our enemies as well as by our friends. But things are different today. We are living in a time when society is ready to listen to the argument of efficiency and economy for the common good. That there is a readiness and willingness on the part of men and women of all political faiths to join in the work of socialization and

democratization is shown in the recent successful convention of the Public Ownership League at Chicago, which we so fully reported last week.

Hereafter we shall make a *New Appeal*.† *The New Appeal* will be to national unity and social consciousness for the establishing of fundamental democracy in political, industrial, and international relations. *The New Appeal* will be constructive, positive, educational. All hail *The New Appeal*.

Appeal to Reason.

†- Effective with the next issue, whole no. 1,151, dated Dec. 22, 1917, the name of the *Appeal to Reason* was changed to *The New Appeal*. The previous editorial line of aloofness to the war effort (which had enabled the publication to avoid government censorship through postal rate discrimination, non-mailability rulings, or outright prosecutions) was set aside in favor of a new line of Social Patriotic cheerleading for Woodrow Wilson and his war. The publication continued under this name until issue no. 1,213, dated March 1, 1919, when then old moniker *Appeal to Reason* was restored to the masthead.

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport.

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