

GERMANY'S MOVE
AND
BRITAIN'S ANSWER

Speech by The Right Hon.
EARL CURZON OF KEDLESTON
On December 19th, 1916

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GERMANY'S MOVE AND BRITAIN'S ANSWER.

I do not think it necessary to say anything about the circumstances in which the change of Government has taken place. I am not one of those who regard the experiment of the Coalition Government as having been at all a failure; nor do I believe that that will be the reading of history in the future on the experiment in which several of us of both sides of the House have taken part during the last eighteen months. On the contrary, I believe that we were in many respects a very efficient Administration; and I have heard Mr. Asquith say more than once that in his long political experience he never had a seat in a more competent or efficient Cabinet than that over which he has just ceased to preside. The Coalition Government did enable men and parties who had hitherto been sharply divided, who had spent perhaps the greater part of their political life in opposing each other, to co-operate in the interests of the State. Both parties and men were united under a Prime Minister whom—and I know that I am speaking for my colleagues in the late Government on both sides—we regarded with profound respect, and whose services to the Government and to the country in the prosecution of this war appear to me to be in danger of receiving insufficient recognition. Nor do I think that the record of the Coalition Government is one of which they need feel ashamed. They raised Armies in quality and in numbers undreamt of at any previous period of British history and unanticipated at the commencement of the war; they introduced, amid an assent which little more than a year ago would have been deemed impossible, compulsory military service in Great Britain; they retrieved the fortunes of the war in the first year of fighting and converted them into the notable and glorious victory

of the Somme ; they maintained intact, and they greatly added to, the strength of the Navy, which still holds command of the seas ; and they paved the way, as we hope, for the victory which will ultimately be obtained.

Well, my Lords, in these circumstances it may be asked, Of what spirit or feeling is the change in the *personnel* of the Government the outcome ? I hope I shall not be wrong if I state my belief that the friendly welcome which has been accorded to the present Government, not least by your Lordships' House, has been due to the conviction that a greater and more concentrated effort, a more effective and universal organisation, a more adequate and rapid use of the resources, not of ourselves alone, but of the Allied Powers in conjunction with us, are required if we are to carry the war to the successful termination that we all desire. This country, my Lords, is not merely willing to be led, but it is almost calling to be driven. No one doubts what the people of the country want. They desire the vigorous prosecution of the war ; a sufficient, an ample return for all the sacrifices that they have made ; reparation by the enemy for his countless and inconceivable crimes ; security that these crimes shall not be repeated, and that these sacrifices shall not have been made in vain. They desire that the peace of Europe shall be re-established on the basis of the free and independent existence of nations, great and small ; they desire, as regards ourselves, that our own country shall be free from the menace which the triumph of German arms, and still more the triumph of the German spirit, would entail. It is to carry out these intentions that the present Government has assumed office, and by its success or failure in doing so will it be judged.

Your Lordships may, perhaps, expect me to say something about the constitution, if not the composition, of the present Administration. It will not be denied that the reconstruction of the Government has been attempted on novel lines, and I expect the writers of constitutional history text-books in the future will have a good deal to say about the proceedings that occurred in December, 1916. The only times during the last 150 years of our history in which there have been Cabinets of numbers as low as ten were in the great War Administration of Mr. Pitt from 1783 to 1801, and the short-lived Administration of Mr. Perceval in 1810. Only four times in the same period has the number of the Cabinet been as low as twelve, the last occasion being the famous Administration of Mr. Disraeli in 1874. The whole of the rest of the Ministries of the past century and a half have varied in numbers—I speak of the Cabinet—from thirteen upwards, culminating in the figure, not always spoken of with reverence, of twenty-three of the Coalition Government to which some of us recently belonged. Now

we have a Cabinet of five, or, as it finds itself not infrequently in session, of four.

Public opinion will, I think, have recognised the principles upon which the Prime Minister has formed his Administration. They are three in number. The first is the concentration of executive authority in the hands of a small number of persons, the majority of them not holding portfolios, the object, of course, being to secure promptitude in decision and vigilance in action. The second principle has been the prominent part assigned to labour. My Lords, without labour this war cannot be won. Without the organisation of labour it cannot be effectively pursued. Labour is entitled, therefore, to a powerful voice in its direction. The third principle has been the employment of expert ability in high official positions and in important Departments, whether or not it has been previously connected with Parliamentary associations. This also is to some extent a novel departure.

My Lords, as regards the mechanism of Government, that is rapidly taking shape, and in less than a week things are in fairly good working order. Perhaps your Lordships may allow me to give you a brief explanation of the main features of the Government as it exists in the minds of those who have framed it. The supreme executive authority for the conduct of the war is, as I have explained, vested in the small Committee or body of men whose names are familiar to your Lordships. That Committee sits every day, and sometimes two or three times in the day. It is in truth, as it is called, a War Cabinet. There is no other Cabinet constituted as a body and meeting regularly under the presidency of the Prime Minister with collective responsibility for all the acts of Government. This does not, of course, mean for one moment that the members of the War Cabinet are divorced from close association with their colleagues, or that the Departments of Government not directly represented in the War Cabinet will be run on independent lines. An effective *liaison* between the two must obviously be maintained by means of conferences and meetings intended to bring about a common action and a common aim. Similarly as to the conduct of the war, no one would imagine for a moment that the War Cabinet can act independently or without constant and almost hourly consultation with its technical advisers.

In all matters affecting the conduct of the war by land and by sea the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir William Robertson, and the First Sea Lord, Admiral Jellicoe, are invariably in attendance. It is also obvious that there must be many occasions when the policy of the two great fighting Departments, the War Office and the Admiralty, must come under discussion, and when it can only properly be so discussed and determined in the presence of the Secretary of

State for War and the First Lord of the Admiralty. Similarly, it is difficult to imagine an occasion when there are being discussed in the War Cabinet our relations with foreign Powers, or our dealings with our Allies on the Continent, at which the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the Permanent Under-Secretary of that Department should not be present. On other occasions it will be the Secretary of State for India, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the President of the Board of Trade, or the head of some other important Department who will attend. The plan adopted is really closely analogous to the plan of a body with which the noble Marquess opposite is, I am sure, very familiar—namely, the Committee of Imperial Defence. That body was set up now fifteen or twenty years ago by Mr. Balfour, and the plan upon which it has always proceeded has been a small nucleus continually replenished by Ministers coming in from other Departments when their advice was needed or their attendance required. But the essence of the arrangement as applied to the Cabinet is that these high officials of whom I speak will come when they are required, and will go when their work is completed. The one body that is in permanent session and is finally responsible is the War Cabinet, under the Presidency of the Prime Minister.

I said just now that this was a novel arrangement. So it is. I do not say that in practice it will always be an easy arrangement to work. It is like the Government itself, somewhat in the nature of an experiment; but I think we may count upon the public spirit and patriotism and individual self-abnegation which have characterised the inception of this venture to give it a fair chance of continuing with success. At any rate, my Lords, this tribute has been paid to the soundness of the principles upon which the Government has proceeded, that no sooner was it announced that this change had taken place in this country than the Governments of our Allies seem to have recognised the immediate necessity for a corresponding substitution of a very small executive body for the larger and old-fashioned Cabinets which had previously existed in their countries just as in ours. I do not say that they have done it in the same way or precisely on the same lines, but France and Italy, as your Lordships may have seen from the newspapers, have greatly contracted the size of their Cabinets, and I shall not be surprised if we find that a similar change takes place before very long in Russia.

Now, my Lords, I come to the problem with which the Government have to deal, and it may be stated, I think, in a very few words. We have to keep up our Armies in the field and to give to our commanders in all the theatres of war—in France, Flanders, Salonika, Egypt, Mesopotamia—the men whom they require to maintain their

forces at full strength and to provide for the greater work that lies before them in the future. Secondly, we have to keep or to obtain the men, and I think I may add also the women, who will give us increased supplies of food, munitions, and shipping, and who will maintain the essential industries of the nation. Thirdly, we have to organise our resources in manhood, material and money, so as to devote them along with our Allies, with whom I think there must be even closer co-operation and co-ordination in the future than there has been in the past, to the successful prosecution of the war.

How can these objects be attained? I do not conceal from your Lordships that far greater sacrifices will be called for from our people than any to which they have hitherto submitted; that far greater restraints upon individual conduct and personal liberty will be entailed than those to which the assent of Parliament has yet been given. We shall have within the next few months to revise many of our ideas and much of our practice. I wonder if the country has at all fully realised the extent to which the British people, the most liberty-loving, the most individualistic, and in some respects the most independent in the world, have already during the past two years parted with their traditional rights and privileges, as they would previously have described them, and handed them over to the State? Early in the war we took over the principal railways of Great Britain. We have now done the same, for reasons into which I need not enter, with the railways of Ireland. The merchant shipping of the country has now for more than a year been practically entirely under Government control. The compulsory acquisition of property has become a matter of almost daily occurrence. We are all familiar with the general and stringent control of the Press. Under the Munitions Act we were introduced to compulsory limitation of profits, compulsory arbitration, compulsory prohibition of strikes and lock-outs, and compulsory fixing of wages. I remember being responsible for introducing and explaining that Bill in your Lordships' House, and I confess that, making the best case for it I could, I little anticipated at the time how small the dislocation would be that the national life would have to experience, and how smoothly and with what general consent the powers would be wielded. Recently, my Lords, we have begun to control the raw materials of industry and articles of common consumption. Sugar and imported wheat are under Government control; the same is true of steel, wool, and leather. We began to ration with petrol, and I shall be very much surprised if my noble friend Lord Devonport does not before long take us a good deal further. Last night those of us who dined at clubs found no difficulty in accommodating ourselves to the modest

exigencies of a three-course repast, and I have no doubt that we shall all be the better in a short time for the one meatless day in the week which I see is promised. Prices have already been arbitrarily fixed for many articles of food. Finally we took, early in the present year, the step to which I alluded a little while ago and which has worked on the whole with so much smoothness—the step of applying the principle of compulsory military service to men of military age in this country. This is only a brief, and I daresay quite an incomplete, summary of the measures of restraint to which the country has cheerfully submitted, but it gives some idea of the progress that has already been made. It began with the Liberal Government who were in power when the war commenced, it went on with the Coalition Government, and it will, I expect, find new developments and proceed with greatly accelerated speed under the Administration which is now in office.

Now, my Lords, I ask the question, Does anyone complain of this great change in the procedure and practice of our everyday life which has been brought about by the circumstances of the war? I think not. I remember some twenty or thirty years ago the late Sir William Harcourt uttering the remark, "We are all Socialists now." What that eminent man would have said had he lived to the present moment I can scarcely conceive. I think he would have gasped at some of the encroachments on personal liberty to which we are now contentedly submitting. But the fact is that there is no surrender of traditional convention, no sacrifice of personal comfort or convenience to which the people of this country are not ready to submit provided they can be assured that they will not be in vain.

Your Lordships will now expect me, after these general hints and indications, to pass on to some of the developments of this policy to which the new Government propose to ask the consent of Parliament and the nation. The first is in regard to shipping. There has been appointed an experienced and eminent shipowner to the post of Controller of Shipping. He sits as president of a Committee of whose operations I can speak with first-hand authority because I have had the honour of occupying its chair for nearly a year myself, and I know, therefore, some of its labours. That Committee consists of one member of your Lordships' House, Lord Faringdon, and three other shipowners of acknowledged influence and position in the trade. We have during the past year wielded silently but without objection very large, and in some respects almost dictatorial, powers. These powers are now being regularised and placed in the hands of a chairman better qualified to perform the duties than was I. He is in consultation with his colleagues, and it would be premature to discuss the actual form

which their joint recommendations will take. The two great problems are, of course, the utilisation of all available shipping to the best advantage, and shipbuilding, ship manufacture, so far as labour and material can be obtained, to make up the wastage. It is in contemplation by the Government to nationalise the shipping of the United Kingdom, and if this be successfully carried out one result, I hope, among many that I need not mention will be the reduction of the extravagant freights that have in so many cases undoubtedly contributed to high prices in this country.

The second illustration that I would give is that of mines. One of the latest acts of the last Administration was to take over the South Wales coalfields. I am not quite sure, but I think I am right in saying that when the late Government decided upon that step they had in view the extension of the proceeding over a much wider area. Anyhow, that intention is to be carried out by His Majesty's present advisers, and they propose to take over the whole of the coal mines of the country. The third illustration that I would give is that of food. The real danger, of course, in this matter is the failure of our crops, and drastic action is required to meet this deficiency. That action must be twofold in character—firstly, as affecting distribution; secondly, as affecting production. Both are likely to involve compulsory methods of a somewhat severe character. As regards distribution, it is essential that the excess consumption of the affluent should not be allowed to create a shortage for the less well-to-do. That will be the basis of the methods of distribution. As regards production, it means the utilisation of every available acre of land and all available labour for the production of food. One of the difficulties, of course, is the dearth of skilled men, drawn away, sometimes taken away, by the action of Government for other spheres of work in connection with the war; but by a proper distribution it would seem that one skilled man working with unskilled labour under him may be able, in the case of farms, for instance, to do the work, not of one farm alone, but, by a system of co-operation, of several. In the organisation of food production your Lordships may, I am confident, if you are willing, as you will be, play a very prominent part. There is a good deal of ornamental land in this country that might be used for the production of food. Still more, there is a good deal of ornamental labour in the country that might be converted to more practical uses. I speak of the men who are concerned with what I may call the familiar amenities of country life—men who are keeping up gardens and looking after hothouses and lawns, and so on, or very likely engaged in some cases in the preservation of game. I am very well aware of the great sacrifices that have already been made by many in the position of your

Lordships, and of the surrender that you have voluntarily given of so many of these amenities to which I refer; but in the months that lie before us, when every man will be required, there are some cases in which, I think, the operation can be carried further, and I feel certain of the co-operation of your Lordships with His Majesty's Government in their attempts in that direction.

But, my Lords, we must proceed much further than this. I spoke just now about organising the entire population of the country. Now, what is being done at this moment in Germany? At the very moment when she is talking of peace she is making the most stupendous efforts to prosecute the war. To find men for her Armies she is squeezing positively the last drop out of the manhood of her nation. She is compelling every man, woman, and child between the ages of sixteen and sixty to enter the service of the State. At the same time, with a callous ferocity and a brutal disregard to all international obligations and practice, she is driving the population of the territories which she has occupied into a compulsory serfdom in her own country. She is even trying to get an army out of Poland by offering it the illusory boon of a semi-independent kingdom. That is the nature of the challenge that we have to meet. How is it to be done?

The problem can, I think, be stated in simple terms. Nearly a year ago we decided that, in order to maintain our Armies in the field, the nation must have complete control over all its military resources in men; but it is impossible to take a man into the Army without taking him from some civil employment of greater or less utility, and it has been our object—an object which we are more and more perfectly attaining as time goes on—to establish such a system of recruiting as will ensure that no man is taken into the Army who is capable of rendering more useful service in industry. To complete our plan, to make our organisation of the national resources perfect, we ought to have power to see that every man who is not taken into the Army is really employed on work of national importance. At present it is only the man who is fit for military service and who has not established a claim for exemption on whom the nation has a call. The unfit man and the exempted man are surely under the same moral obligation. But the State has no means of enforcing this obligation. It is with this imperfect organisation of our industrial man-power that we are called upon to confront an enemy who is not only exercising to the full his right to levy his whole population, but, in the manner that I have just described, has introduced a practice, unknown hitherto to civilised warfare, of removing the civilian inhabitants of occupied territory in order to make good the shortage of labour in his own factories. We need—and I think your Lordships' cheers just now

encourage me in the remark—we need to make a swift and effective answer to Germany's latest move ; and it is surely not too much to ask of the people of this country that they should take upon themselves for a few months and as free men obligations which Germany is imposing upon herself.

As our Armies grow, our need for munitions grows. But a large part of our labour for munition purposes is at present immobile. There may be a surplus in one factory and a shortage in another, but we have no power to transfer a man from one side of the street to the other. As the months go by the cost of the war increases ; our purchases in neutral countries become more difficult to finance. Yet there are thousands of men occupied in industries which consume our wealth at home and do nothing for our credits abroad. But we have no power to transfer them from places where they are wasting our strength to places where they could increase it. These are the powers that we must take, and this is the organisation that we must complete. The matter is not new. It was considered in the last week or two of the life of the late Government by the War Committee of that Government upon the simultaneous but independent recommendation of the then Ministry of Munitions, the Man-Power Board, and the military members of the Army Council ; and it was unanimously decided by them that the time had come for the adoption of the principle of universal national service. It was one of the first matters taken up by the present Government, and the present War Cabinet have unanimously adopted the conclusion come to by the preceding War Council. We believe that the plans we have in view will secure to every workman all that he has a right to ask should be assured to him.

I now come to the plan, about which your Lordships will not expect me to give more on the present occasion than a general outline. In order to carry out this object it is proposed to appoint a Director of National Service, to be in charge both of the military and civil sides of universal national service. The civil and military sides of the Directorate will be entirely separate, and there will be military and civil directors responsible to the Director of National Service. The military director will be responsible for recruiting for the Army and will hand over to the War Office the recruits obtained. I need not elaborate that aspect of the case, because no substantial alteration is suggested in the methods of recruiting for military service. As regards civil service, it will be proposed that the Director of National Service shall proceed with the scheduling of industries and of service according to their essential character during the war. Certain industries will be regarded as indispensable, and the Departments concerned will indent upon the Director of National Service for the labour which

they require for those services. The other services will be rationed in such matters as labour, raw material, and power. The labour thus set free from non-essential and rationed industries will be available to release potential soldiers who are at present protected from military service, and to increase the available supplies of labour. This labour will be invited to enrol as workers and to be registered as war workers on lines analogous to the existing munitions volunteers, with similar provisions as to rates of pay and separation allowances. The Government have no doubt that when it is realised how essential to the life of the nation it is that the services of every man should be put to the best use we shall secure an adequate supply of volunteers. We are taking immediate steps to secure by these means the men we want. We shall begin as soon as may be to classify industries and to invite the enrolment of volunteers. But if it be found impossible to get the numbers we require, we shall not hesitate to come to Parliament to ask for relief from pledges given in other circumstances and to obtain the necessary powers for rendering our plans effective. The nation is fighting for its life and is entitled to the best service of its sons and daughters.

Let me add another but not unimportant point. While the nation is making such enormous sacrifices as those to which I have referred, it is not tolerable that any section of the community should be permitted to make exceptional profits out of the sacrifices of others, and by that means actually to increase the burden which is borne by others. A good deal has already been done, as your Lordships know, to arrest unfair profiteering, as it is called, arising out of the war. But the Government have come to the conclusion that even more drastic steps will have to be taken. There are several ways of dealing with this problem. One is to annex all war profits; the other is the cutting down of prices so as to make excessive profits impossible. The Munitions Act adopted both those expedients—90 per cent. of the profits, as your Lordships know, in the controlled firms were annexed. In addition to that, there has been a most searching revision of prices in the controlled firms and enormous reductions have been achieved. The problem is now being carefully examined by my right hon. friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and others, and we hope to be able to make an announcement shortly as to the course which the Government intend to adopt. It is evident that when the nation is being asked to make further sacrifices in order to win the war, the road should be cleared by action of this kind.

I have so far dealt—not, I hope, at undue length, certainly as concisely as I could—with the domestic programme of the Government. Your Lordships may expect me, before I conclude, to say

something about the military and political situation abroad. I am not one of those who believe in painting too rosy a picture of affairs. The facts and the inferences to be drawn from those facts are known to everybody. That does not mean that we ought now, or at any time, to take a gloomy view of matters, but it does mean that we ought to take a stern view of the realities of the case. You will never get the best out of the people of this country—and that is the task upon which we are engaged—by feeding them with sweetmeats or by putting blinkers across their eyes. There is no use in concealing the fact that the enemy by his military successes has obtained a position of vantage in some of the main and in many of the minor theatres of war. He still remains in occupation of almost the whole of Belgium and of a large portion of Northern France. He has swept the Serbians and the Montenegrins out of their country; he has appropriated Russian Poland; he has broken down the resistance and captured the capital of Rumania. But your Lordships must not think that he has gained all the successes even in Rumania that the words of the Imperial Chancellor, quoted in the newspapers during the last few weeks, would appear to suggest. Great felicitations have been heard as to the capture of the supplies of oil and wheat, and so on, in Rumania, but it may be of interest and of consolation to your Lordships to know that, by action which His Majesty's Government were mainly instrumental in bringing about, the whole of the oil-wells, refineries, and stocks in that part of Rumania which is now in the occupation of the Germans were destroyed before the invasion took place. Again, although a considerable part of Rumania is overrun by the enemy, the larger portion of the Rumanian Army is still intact, and will be re-formed for resumption of warfare in the early spring.

The most vain and futile thing would be if I were to attempt here—indeed, it would be an invidious task—to discuss the causes of Rumania's failure. It is one of the tragic incidents of the war; and really if you look at it the failure has been inherent in, or at any rate is explained by, the geographical position of that country. The only military Power which could come to the assistance of Rumania was Russia, and with energy and self-sacrifice and devotion Russia, hard pressed herself, has done what she could in those respects. But if you look at our position you will realise at once that we could not put armies into Rumania. The utmost we could do was to dispatch guns, and rifles, and munitions to Rumania; and bear in mind that they had to pursue a circuitous route thousands of miles in length, crossing the Northern Ocean to Archangel and then finding their way down by long railway tracks to Rumania in the South. The utmost we could

do was to send these supplies to Rumania, to help them with loans and advances of money, as we did, and to engage the common enemy by an active offensive from our military base at Salonika. That assistance we endeavoured to the best of our ability to render. It may be said that this is a depressing picture. Yet the spectacle of the successive victories of the Central Powers over the petty States who surround them like a fringe, dramatic and overwhelming as it may appear at first sight to be, represents only a corner of the canvas. The late Lord Salisbury once told us all to acquire proportion by looking at large maps. May I suggest to your Lordships that in this war we ought to endeavour to take the larger view. You do not win a game at chess by sweeping the small pawns off the board; their fate does not determine the ultimate issue of the game.

I ask your Lordships for a moment to reflect what changes in the external aspect of the war this last year has produced. Just as the first year of the war saw the failure of the main German offensive against Calais and Paris, so the second year has witnessed the practical abandonment of the offensive against Russia, at one time thought to be not only imminent but dangerous, the collapse of the Austrian offensive against Italy, the colossal and re-duplicated failure of Verdun—a failure on Germany's part which constitutes the most extraordinary tribute to the heroic vitality of our Allies and will always remain an imperishable incident in the history of the Army of France. But even more reassuring omens may, I think, be drawn from what I described almost in my opening sentences as the great and notable victories on the Somme. Now, why did I use that language? The success of our operations there—by "our" I mean the French combined with our own—is not to be measured by the positions taken, or by the number of miles of ground recovered; it is to be measured by the moral and material effect produced upon the two fighting forces. I distrust statistics, at any rate of casualties in war, and I say nothing about the casualties which the German Armies are alleged to have suffered, although about one thing I think there is very little doubt, and that is that they have been greatly and almost overwhelmingly superior to our own. Neither do I attach too much importance, although it is not insignificant, to the fact that since July 1 to the present date the combined Armies of France and England, on the Front to which I am alluding, have taken 105,000 German prisoners, and 150 heavy guns, 200 field guns, and 1,500 machine guns belonging to the enemy. There have been much more important consequences than these. In these encounters, as your Lordships will hear from any General Officer or private serving at the Front, the Germans have been a defeated, and the Allies have been a victorious, Army. Large forces of the German

Army have been defeated, not once, but twice and thrice. The Allies have established an incontestable superiority, not merely in the fighting strength and stamina of their men, but in artillery and in the air; and the achievements of our airmen at the Front during the last five or six months constitute in reality one of the most glorious and creditable episodes of the entire war. Above all, there is irrefutable evidence, from the wholesale and voluntary surrender of Germans, from the statements made by prisoners, from the evidence of orders and papers found in the German trenches, that their *morale* is greatly shaken, that their forces are sick of fighting, and that many of them are hopeless of ultimate success. And when we add to this the evidence, accumulating every day, of the interior condition of Germany, the increasing strain on her resources, the depletion of her supplies, the food riots and strikes, so successfully kept out of the newspapers, the admitted hunger, amounting in some places almost to starvation, the progressive physical deterioration of her people, there is good ground for believing that the outlook is not quite so good for the Central Powers as they would have us believe, and that our attitude need not be one of despondency or alarm.

It is at this moment that Germany has come forward with offers of peace, or rather I cannot fairly use the word "offer," but rather let me say vague adumbrations and indications of peace. I ask your Lordships to observe what has been the course of events. First, there was the speech of the Imperial Chancellor in the Reichstag, which has been published in the newspapers and upon which I shall have to comment in a few moments. Next there was the Note to the Powers. The text of that Note has also been published in the Press, although in its official form it only reached His Majesty's Government through the American Ambassador yesterday morning. Now what does this Note contain? I ask your Lordships' close attention to the words. First, it proclaims the "indestructible strength" of the Central Powers; it claims that Germany is not only undefeated but undefeatable. Secondly, once again it advances the plea that Germany was constrained to take up arms for the defence of her existence and the freedom of national development. Thirdly, it avows German respect for the rights of other nations. Fourthly, it says that the Central Powers do not seek to crush or annihilate their adversaries. Fifthly, it expresses their desire to stem the flow of blood and to bring the horrors of war to an end. And finally, after this somewhat remarkable preamble, they declare that they propose even now—observe the implication of the words—"even now," in the hour of their "admitted triumph," they propose as an act of condescension to enter into peace negotiations. As to what form these negotia-

tions should take, as to the terms that may be in the minds of Germany or her Allies, not a word has been said.

I do not comment—it would really be too cheap to do so—upon the terms of the Note which I have quoted. I say nothing about their curious history and their even more curious morality. Both may be left to explain themselves, and every man can form his own judgment of their value. Neither will I pause to discuss the motives by which this action on the part of the Central Powers may have been actuated. But, my Lords, as regards peace, is there a single one of the Allied Powers who would not welcome peace if it is to be a genuine peace, a lasting peace, a peace that could be secured on honourable terms, a peace that would give guarantees for the future? Is there a single Government, or statesman, or individual who does not wish to put an end to this reign of Satan which is turning half the world into a hell and wrecking the brightest prospects of mankind? But in what spirit is this proposal put forward, and from whom does it come?

Here I must turn, as I said I would just now, to the speech of the Imperial Chancellor by which it was introduced to the world. Let me read a few passages from that speech. He begins by a tribute to Field-Marshal Hindenburg:—

“This unparalleled genius has made possible things which were hitherto considered impossible. And Hindenburg does not rest; military operations progress.”

Secondly, as regards supplies, he says of Germany—

“We could have lived on our own resources, but now” [after what had passed in Rumania] “our safety is beyond question.”

Thirdly—

“To these great events on land heroic deeds of equal importance were added by our submarines.”

My Lords, the deeds are unquestioned; heroism is not, perhaps, precisely the epithet we would all of us seek to apply. Fourthly—

“The spectre of famine which our enemies intended to appear before us now pursues them without mercy.”

Fifthly, there is the familiar invocation of a Higher Power—

“Our strength has not made our ears deaf to our responsibility before God, before our own nation, and before humanity.”

And lastly, we have the statement that during these long and earnest years of war the Emperor has been moved by a single thought

—how peace could be restored so as to safeguard Germany—not to safeguard anybody else—so as to safeguard Germany after the struggle in which she has fought victoriously.

I ask only—Is this the spirit in which your Lordships think that peace proposals should be made? Does it hold out a reasonable prospect of inducing us to lay down our arms? Is there any indication in the remarks of the Chancellor of the desire of those with whom he is allied to make reparation, to propose restitution, to give guarantees for the future? No, my Lords. So far as we can judge from that speech—and it is all we have to judge by at present—the spirit which prevails in every word and line of it is the spirit of German militarism, unrepentant, arrogant, still indulging in the same travesty of facts, in the same blasphemous appeals to a Higher Power, in the same protestations of injured innocence, in the same menace and threats against the foe. While that speech was being made the Belgian deportations were going on, and an even more active resumption of submarine atrocities is being prepared. We know that the peace of God passeth all understanding. I am not sure that the same may not be said in a different sense of the peace which commends itself to the minds of the authors of that speech and that Note.

The first answer to this movement has already been given by the Ministers of France and Russia, and has been read by your Lordships in the newspapers. Their speeches have appeared at length. An answer is being given in another place at this moment by the Prime Minister of this country. I doubt not, my Lords, that it will be the desire and the intention of the Allied Powers to return a reasoned reply to the Note which has been presented to them. They will doubtless deal with the allegations which are contained in the Note and to which I have referred, and they will want to know where we stand. It is said that the Germans have formulated certain terms upon which they are prepared to negotiate, and which before long we may see. We know nothing of that. We have had no indication of it whatsoever. We only have the ominous tone of the Note itself and of the speech that accompanied it.

Let me put one more reflection before your Lordships. Let no one think for a moment that it is merely by territorial restitution or by a reversion to the *status quo ante* that the objects for which the Allies are fighting will be attained. We are fighting, it is true, to recover for Belgium, France, Russia, Serbia, and Rumania the territories which they have lost, and to secure for them reparation for their cruel wrongs. But you may restore to them all and more than all the losses they have experienced; you may pile indemnities upon them such as no Treasury

in Europe could produce, and yet the war would have been in vain if we had no guarantees and no securities against a repetition of these things in the future. That is what we are fighting for. We are not fighting, as I sometimes see represented in German papers, to crush or to destroy Germany. Such an idea I do not believe has ever entered into the minds of a thinking human being in this country. But we are fighting to secure that the German spirit shall not crush the free progress of nations, and that the armed strength of Germany, augmented and fortified, shall not terrorise the future of mankind. We are fighting that our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren after us shall not have, in days when we have passed away, to go again through the experience of the years 1914 to 1917. This generation has suffered in order that the next may live, and that the next but one may be free. We are ready enough for peace when these guarantees have been secured and these objects have been attained. Until then we owe it to the hundreds of thousands of our fellow-countrymen and our Allies who have shed their blood, many of whom may at this very hour be giving up their lives for us, to be true to the trust of their splendid and uncomplaining sacrifice and to endure to the end.

