

satisfied with local Democratic and Republican candidates. In New York voters sent Socialist Meyer London to Congress. And in Washington the NAWSA and the Congressional Union prepared to implement their "Winning Plan" of lobbying Congress to pass the Nineteenth Amendment. Demonstrators from the Woman's party picketed the White House during the winter, carrying signs asking MR. PRESIDENT! HOW LONG MUST WOMEN WAIT FOR LIBERTY?²⁰

FOR A MOMENT toward the end of 1916 it seemed that the war might come to a negotiated end. The German government announced a peace initiative at about the same time that Wilson invited the belligerents to state their war aims at a peace conference that would include the United States. But all prospects for a negotiated settlement disappeared in the face of German demands that vast territories in Europe and overseas (including the Belgian Congo) be ceded to Germany as the price of peace. German demands and Allied determination to defeat Germany and exact reparations made peace unlikely.

During Christmas week *The New Republic* ran an editorial by Walter Lippmann arguing that the President should reject the German peace proposal, which was nothing more than a grab for spoils. The German offer, if accepted, Lippmann warned, would mean "peace without victory," a bad thing. In late January 1917 President Wilson used Lippmann's phrase in a speech before the Senate in which he vowed to persevere in his attempt to end the war through a negotiated settlement based on the principles of equality, self-government and self-determination for all nations, freedom of the seas, and an end to great armies. Even though it was not a belligerent the United States had the right to help shape this enduring peace among equals, a peace without humiliation, a "peace without victory," a good thing.

In Europe the war was going badly for Germany. Its peace initiative having been refused, the German government prepared to wage all-out war in the hope of finally defeating the Allies. At the end of January Germany announced the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare as of February 1. Wilson

²⁰In Anne Firor Scott and Andrew MacKay Scott, *One Half the People: The Fight for Woman Suffrage* (1982), p. 40.

had stated clearly in the *Sussex* note that unrestricted submarine warfare would mean breaking diplomatic relations, and he recalled all United States diplomatic personnel in Germany.

DURING THIS uncertain twilight between peace and war, proponents of peace desperately pressed their point. A coalition of peace organizations formed the Emergency Peace Federation and called on the President with three demands: to defer all disputes with belligerents (e.g., losses caused by submarines) until the end of the war; to bar Americans from the war zone where submarines were active; and to go to war only after the declaration had been approved in a popular referendum instead of requiring merely a congressional declaration. Rather than take the country into the war, the Emergency Peace Federation argued that the government should keep Americans out of the war's way. The Socialist party advised workers to refuse to work if war was declared because "the six million men whose corpses are now rotting upon the battle-fields of Europe were mostly workingmen" and American workers would suffer a similar fate. William Jennings Bryan, who had been canvassing the country in the cause of peace, redoubled his efforts. At Madison Square Garden in New York, Bryan evoked America's mission to lift the morals of the world. "We will not get down with you," he thundered to the belligerents in Europe, "and wallow in the blood and mire to conform to your false standards of honor."²¹

After the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare fewer Americans agreed with Bryan, and the exchanges grew heated. The *New York Tribune* accused antiwar activists of colluding with the German government. Food riots in Manhattan and Brooklyn in February were said to have been staged by the Central Powers. Charges and countercharges of war mongering and pacifist treason increased in stridency. German submarines sank several merchant vessels, shippers canceled Atlantic crossings, and goods piled up on the docks. Everyone feared that soon plants would close and workers would lose their jobs, and who could say what kinds of social unrest would follow widespread unemployment? To get shipping moving again, the President asked for authority to arm merchant ships (an act for

²¹*Literary Digest*, vol. 54 (February 10, 1917), p. 453.

which he had recently criticized the British) and to take any steps necessary to protect American lives and goods on the seas. Congress balked at handing him a blank check and began a filibuster. The President played his trump.

Wilson released a document he had held nearly a week, the text of a telegram that Arthur Zimmermann, the German foreign minister, had sent the German ambassador in Mexico, which the British had intercepted and decoded. Seeking to exploit the poor state of Mexican-American relations, Zimmermann instructed the ambassador to suggest to Carranza a Mexican-German alliance that would regain for Mexico the "lost territories" of New Mexico, Arizona, and Texas should the United States declare war on Germany. The ambassador was also directed to prompt Carranza to approach Japan to form a three-way alliance against the United States. This news enraged Americans, who took the Zimmermann note as a signal for national unity against Germany and for war, against pacifists and for 100-percent-Americanism.

The Zimmermann telegram moved Congress to pass the armed ship bill, but before the United States could begin arming merchant ships, German submarines sank three American vessels on March 18. Many Americans regarded the sinking and the consequent heavy loss of life and property the overt act that must take the United States into the war. Theodore Roosevelt called for war before 12,000 cheering supporters at Madison Square Garden. The ranks of the nation's most avowedly antiwar political party split, as several prominent Socialists repudiated the Socialist party national executive committee's antiwar resolution. The American Union Against Militarism fell apart, some members favoring war while others stood firm as pacifists.

In the midst of argument about the war, news arrived of the Russian Revolution against the czar, Europe's most despotic ruler, which seemed to bring some good out of the slaughter. Russian Jews, Poles, and Scandinavians in the United States now supported the Allied side enthusiastically. The Russian Revolution also seemed to presage a similar move toward democracy in Germany, perhaps elsewhere in Europe as well. Events in Russia held the promise that the European masses were ready at last to throw off the yoke of parasitic aristocrats. The war was now a war of the people against the autocrats,

and Russian troops, fighting for a free Russia, would surely triumph over the Germans on the battlefield.

Otherwise, the news from the Allies was awful. The war on land had bogged down, and German submarines were taking a heavy toll on Allied shipping. In France the Aisne offensive failed, and the government of Aristide Briand fell in March 1917. Peace advocates distributed leaflets to troops bound for the trenches in which millions had died. On the front ten French divisions mutinied. Unable to raise sufficient volunteer manpower, the British government resorted to conscription to fill the ranks and was even considering the desperate strategy of conscripting Irishmen, which would have torn Ireland apart. Food was rationed in Britain. The Russian Revolution became a civil war in which Russians fought other Russians instead of the Germans. It seemed likely now that Germany would win the war, an outcome most Americans equated with the ruin of civilization.

ON APRIL 2, 1917, President Wilson asked Congress for a declaration of war to make the world safe for democracy, outlining the ideals that he would later amplify in the "Fourteen Points": democracy, self-government, rights for small nations, freedom of the seas, free trade, open diplomacy, and a league of nations that would provide collective security.

Despite the applause, the declaration of war did not pass unanimously. In the Senate the resolution passed with six dissenters, including those of Robert M. La Follette, James K. Vardaman of Mississippi, and George Norris of Nebraska. In the House of Representatives the fifty votes cast against the declaration of war included those of Jeannette Rankin of Montana, the only woman in Congress, and Claude Kitchin of North Carolina.

Kitchin spoke for many dissenters inside and outside Congress when he said he was unwilling to take his country into a war that had made a slaughterhouse of half the civilized world. Calling the United States the last, best hope for peace, he predicted that American entry into the conflict would make the universe "one vast drama of horrors and blood, one boundless stage upon which will play all the evil spirits of earth and hell."²²

²²Ibid., (April 14, 1917), p. 1044.