Essential Conditions of Peace

In the discussion which has been proceeding fitfully in Great Britain about the terms of a possible treaty of peace, the accomplishment of two different objects has been urged as essential to any satisfactory adjustment. The Allies are, it is said, entitled to obtain sufficient security against a repetition of the German attack, and such security they cannot get unless the German nation is taught a much needed lesson, unless it is made to realize and repent of its mistake. But this is not all. The Allies have not proposed merely to beat Germany. They have appealed for the sympathy and support of neutrals on other grounds. They have been fighting, as Mr. Asquith himself has declared, "to enthrone public right" in the European system. In the new Europe which was to emerge after the war, not only would the Allies themselves feel secure, but their feeling of security would be shared by all other nations willing to keep the peace.

As soon, however, as the terms of peace which would accomplish both of these objects began to be defined, difficulties were encountered. It is, of course, easy enough to propose terms which would render the Allies secure against a renewal of German aggression in the immediate future. The Allies, if victorious, could strip Germany of her defenses and leave her even more helpless in her isolation than France was after 1871. But how could such an object be reconciled with the declared object of enthroning public right in the constitution of Europe? Any authentic system of public right must be made for the security of Germany as well as that of Belgium and France just in so far as the German nation shows any disposition to share by all other nations willing to keep the peace; and what would become of German security, in case the Germans were left more defenseless than France was after 1871? In so far as the two divergent objects were irreconcilable, which would be sacrificed?

A significant but sinister expression of opinion on this matter has recently been published in the Round Table—a magazine which is the mouthpiece of a moderate and liberal group of English political thinkers. In its September issue the essential condition of peace is declared to be the destruction of Germany's political and military control over her neighbors. "The number of non-Germans under the control of Berlin must be so reduced that it ceases to be possible for Germany to think of conquering all Europe in arms." As to the "enthronement of public right," that has become of secondary importance. After Germany's political and military control over her neighbors is destroyed, then the Allies will seek
"an adequate guarantee of public right in the world." They do not wish to be distracted by considerations of public right until after the treaty of peace is signed.

If the foregoing statements of principle had been made in the London Times or the Morning Post they would not provoke any surprise, but it is discouraging to find a magazine like the Round Table, whose editors attach so much importance to effective international organization, cheerfully sacrificing manifest international values to the rigors of exclusive national policy. They advocate a treaty of peace determined by one overwhelming consideration—fear of Germany. It is to be determined, that is, by a military object, the supposed necessity of diminishing the fighting strength of the Central Powers as compared with that of the Allies. Just as Germany retained Metz in 1871, in order to render future French resentment less dangerous, so the purpose underlying the coming treaty must be that of forestalling German revenge by condemning it to impotence.

Thus the Allies are not to take any chances about the German state of mind after the war. They do not want to find out whether the German nation will keep the peace. Whatever the Germans think, they are to be prevented from being dangerous to their neighbors by being deprived of the power. They are to be made the subject of a special discrimination in the European international system. Russia is to be allowed to exercise military control over many millions of non-Russians, such as Finns, Poles, Armenians, Persians and Mongolians. France will have hordes of subject peoples in Africa and Asia whom she can arm for the accomplishment of her political purposes. Great Britain will control in part the military and industrial resources of hundreds of millions of Indians and other Orientals. But Germany is to be denied a similar privilege. Because she has made the mistake which all powerful nations have made at some period in their history and presumed to be dangerous to her neighbors, she is to be converted into a permanent suspect among nations. Europe is to be organized essentially for the purpose of denying to Germany opportunities for expansion, to which all other great nations consider themselves entitled. German insecurity and impotence is to be considered the cornerstone of European security.

The Germans ought to feel flattered at such a tribute from an enemy to their own military, political and racial vigor. The Entente Allies exert by far the most formidable collection of military and naval power ever subject to one control in the history of the world. In population, in wealth and in military and naval resources they already possess a substantial superiority over the Central Powers. When the war broke out the inhabitants of Germany and Austria-Hungary numbered approximately 120,000,000, of which less than 80,000,000 were of German blood. Omitting from consideration the divided Balkans, there are in the ranks of the Allies about 170,000,000 Russians, 30,000,000 Italians, 38,000,000 Frenchmen, and 45,000,000 British. The enumeration omits, of course, the French and English colonies and self-governing dominions. If, consequently, the principle proposed by the Round Table is to determine the treaty of peace, if the Germans are to be deprived of the military assistance of as many non-Germans as may be necessary to render the Germans comparatively impotent, the Allies will have an interesting calculation to make. How many millions have to be deducted from 120,000,000 men, chiefly Germans, in order to make over 280,000,000 non-Germans safe from their aggressive ambitions? If you take away the 30,000,000 Slavs now subject to the Austro-Hungarian Empire and add them to the population of Russia and her allies, there would be a total of over 310,000,000 anti-Germans as against 90,000,000 Germans and Hungarians. Would a preponderance of three and one-half to one be sufficient to protect the non-Germans from German aggression?

Surely the calculation is unnecessary. If the Allies win the war it will not be the Allies who will be endangered by the Central Powers, but the Central Powers who will be endangered by the Allies. Assuming that the Allies hold together, their future preponderance over their present enemies would be incontestable. Germany would not dare to strike unless she succeeded in breaking up the Alliance, and in that event such calculations about comparative resources would become worthless. By virtue of victory itself the Allies would have made the Germans sufficiently realize the futility of an attempt to conquer Europe in arms. The treaty of peace should be framed not as a new embodiment of an essentially military organization of Europe, but as the first step toward an improved substitute. We fully realize, of course, the impossibility of asking the Allied nations to return the Central Powers to their former place in the European system as soon as the war is over. The latter will remain suspect for a while; but during this transitional period nothing should be done to prevent, at a later date, that "enthronement of public right" to which the Allied governments are explicitly committed. The essential condition of peace proposed by the Round Table would place, if embodied in the treaty, an insuperable obstacle in the way of the establishment for an indefinite period of a valid system of public right.
By adopting the proposed policy the Allied nations would, indeed, be teaching the Germans a lesson, but it would be a lesson which the Germans do not need to learn. The German nation understands fully the logic of weakening an enemy because you are afraid of him, and the application of the policy to themselves would merely confirm in their minds what inclination they have to believe in the reign of superior force. Liberal Germans, who would be glad to use German failure in the war as a proof of the tragic futility of militaristic ambitions, would be deprived of effective ground for agitation. The ruling classes in Germany could claim that Europe was conspiring to deprive Germany of independence, and the accusation would be sufficiently true to convince the vast majority of self-respecting Germans. They would believe that the real object of the Allies in postulating German weakness as an essential condition of peace was different from its declared object. They would attribute the peace terms of the Allies to the German weakness as an essential condition of the proposed policy. All they had urged was the establishment of a government strong enough to crush a people not oppressed by alien rule has never been conceived of as itself justifying for-