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THE GERMAN WAR RESOLUTION

Let us give notice to the world that in this Republic of ours at least that we are all American citizens of equal rank, character, and quality, whether that citizenship be lately acquired or whether it be by birthright, and that in the defense of our flag and country we recognize no distinction of wealth or position; and that we shall be guided in our actions with the one common thought of victory in the conflict that we are now entering.

SPEECH

OF

HON. ISAAC SIEGEL

OF NEW YORK

IN THE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

APRIL 5, 1917



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HON. ISAAC SIEGEL.

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union had under consideration the joint resolution (S. J. Res. 1) declaring that a state of war exists between the Imperial German Government and the Government and the people of the United States and making provision to prosecute the same.

Mr. SIEGEL. Mr. Chairman, on March 1 I voted for the armed-ship resolution. I pointed out then that under international law and under the very terms of the treaty existing between the United States and Germany we were acting strictly within our rights. I expressed the hope that the effect of the passage of the resolution might be the means of saving us from being participants in the most terrible conflict that man has witnessed. It is, however, now evident that merely arming our ships is of no avail. At the very moment that the President was delivering his message came the news that the *Aztec*, supposedly protected by having naval guns and gunners on board, had been torpedoed at night without warning and a number of American citizens killed. Is there any Representative here who can truly deny that the German Government has committed many wrongful acts against our people; that it has tried to create trouble for us with Japan and Mexico; that it has permitted its submarines to torpedo our vessels, killing Americans regardless of whether they were men, women, or children and, according to its own announcement, is prepared to sink American ships on their way to Europe and return without notice and without warning, whether in the restricted area or without?

Let me call your attention to an additional fact, not generally known. At my request we sent the cruiser *Des Moines* and the collier *Caesar* to Alexandria, from which port they were to proceed to Beirut to rescue about 1,000 women and children in order to have them reembark in Spain for the United States. Does Germany guarantee the safety of these American women and children? No. She declines to expressly guarantee their safety from attack by her submarines. I have been repeatedly asked for months whether this intolerable condition was to be endured forever. Let me say to the credit of the men in the Department of State that they have begged and beseeched for action. They have shared our belief that Americans abroad must be protected. Weighing all these facts, is there any man who can upon his conscience say that these acts do not constitute war? It does not require any legal acumen or stretching of the reasoning powers to immediately reach that conclusion. What more shall we allow Germany to do before recognizing the true state of affairs?

The lives of our citizens have been systematically taken from us, our commerce has been violently interfered with, and our rights as men and citizens have been trampled upon. History will record that we were extremely patient under these most trying circumstances. The mission of the United States is peace. I have come from a people that for thousands of years

have been taught to love peace. I can not shut my eyes or close my ears to the fact that, though we cry peace, Germany answers by warring against us.

No man who will cast his vote here to-day has given more consideration and deliberate thinking to this most serious problem than I have. I shall not hide the fact that I have spent several sleepless nights pondering over what was the best course to pursue in this great crisis. My final decision was greatly strengthened by these words of Col. Roosevelt:

We are the citizens of a mighty Republic consecrated to the service of God above, through the service of man on this earth. We are the heirs of a great heritage bequeathed to us by statesmen who saw with the eyes of the seer and the prophet. We must not prove false to the memories of the Nation's past. We must not prove false to the fathers from whose loins we sprang, and to their fathers, the stern men who dared greatly and risked all things that freedom should hold aloft an undimmed torch in this wide land. They held their worldly well-being as dust in the balance when weighed against their sense of high duty, their fealty to lofty ideals. Let us show ourselves worthy to be their sons. Let us care, as is right, for the things of the body; but let us show that we care even more for the things of the soul. Stout of heart and pledged to the valor of righteousness, let us stand four-square to the winds of destiny, from whatever corner of the world they blow. Let us keep untarnished, unstained, the honor of the flag our fathers bore aloft in the teeth of the wildest storm, the flag that shall float above the solid files of a united people, a people sworn to the great cause of liberty and of justice, for themselves, and for all the sons and daughters of men.

That there is no other alternative is now being recognized by all men who have the best interests of the Nation at heart, and although they may have heretofore differed regarding the policy to be adopted with Germany, they are now united, and one striking example of that is shown in the attitude of the New York American, which yesterday printed a long editorial upholding the President and closing with these words:

The American has stood for the postponement of war to the last possible moment of postponement. The President has declared convincingly that the last moment has passed.

We are now for the strongest and most effective war that it is possible for our great Nation to make.

When the President, with all the information that we can have and with other information that we can not have, solemnly declares that the German Government means to make war upon us at a moment which will be most opportune for it, the only possible course of sense and safety is for us to make war at the moment which is most opportune for us.

That strategic moment is now.

War it is. So be it! Let us make ready with all possible haste, counting no cost, to wage a powerful war, an overwhelming war, a war that will bring victory to our standards and, please God, universal freedom and permanent peace to the inhabitants of the world.

Mr. Chairman, the American Hebrew of this week will contain the following editorial statement by Herman Bernstein:

Not with hatred, nor with malice, not with vengeance nor with greedy lust for greater power, is the United States entering the war.

America goes into the war for the sake of peace, for the sake of establishing a lasting universal peace based upon justice, liberty, and equality.

America now takes its place beside the democracies of the world against the autocracy which has deliberately misled even its own people into this universal slaughter.

America is entering the war for the purpose of liberating the world from the menace that is threatening the peace of the democratic lands on both sides of the Atlantic.

By defending the rights of America she will also protect the rights of mankind everywhere.

Our great peace President has exhausted every means at his command to bring about peace among the warring nations; he has been supremely patient, strong, and energetic in his efforts to end the European catastrophe.

Now, the cup of patience is full. The head of the American people can no longer tolerate the German policy of duplicity and subterfuge, a policy which has meant the killing of innocent babies and women, of the destruction of the lives of noncombatants without any warning upon the seas, the spreading of hatred, and the stirring of nation against nation—the policy pursued by the Kaiser's Government systematically, deliberately, and efficiently.

America is entering this war with clean hands and a clear conscience, with the highest purpose and the loftiest ideals for which men ever shed their blood.

America is entering the struggle to war on war, to war on the forces that stand in the way of the liberation of the world, to war on a system that in its blind arrogance is sacrificing millions of human lives even now that Germany's alleged excuse for the war is removed by the overthrow of the Russian autocracy.

The unprecedented sacrifices made in this war have already been partly justified by the liberation of the Russian people.

Russia has become a democracy before America enters this war, so that now we can throw our powers on the side of the democracies for the liberation of the world, the emancipation of the peoples, for a lasting peace.

The freeing of mankind from a system that, through mere caprice or whim, can hurl millions of human beings into slaughter, is the only justification for America to enter the war. Such a cause is worthy of our greatest sacrifices.

It is hardly necessary to say that the Jews of America love America and her ideals with an undivided love.

I feel certain that American Israel is ready for any sacrifices the American people may be called upon to make for the sake of American rights, for the sake of justice, liberty, and equality.

We are entering this war without a desire of spoils or conquest, and the spirit is best exemplified by the words of Abraham Lincoln, when said:

The issue before us is distinct, simple, and inflexible. It is an issue which can only be tried by war and settled by victory. The war will cease on the part of this Government whenever it shall have ceased on the part of those who began it. * * * We accepted war rather than let the Nation perish. With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, and to do all which may achieve a just and lasting peace among all nations.

Mr. Chairman, whether one is in private or public life he must be imbued with the idea that his duty to his country is paramount and above all other considerations. During this week intimations have come to me that political expediency required me to cast my vote against this resolution, and that contrary action on my part would mean a general effort from now on to end my congressional career. If such it be, I shall at no time regret having performed the duty that I had hoped would never fall to my lot. I would be unworthy of American citizenship were I to be deterred from acting by such warnings.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that I know the citizenship of my congressional district far better than the gentlemen who have seen fit to tell me what is going to occur there. I know that the twentieth congressional district is just as loyal and just as devoted to American institutions and our country as any in the whole of the United States. The records of the War Department and of the Navy show that this district has more than furnished its quota in times of peace, and when the clarion note of duty is sounded by Congress and the President that it will not fail the Nation in its day of need.

I say to my colleagues who are now hesitating as to what they shall do that by their acts the people will know whether they are for this great land of freedom and religious liberty or whether they are going to be guided simply by the selfish question as to whether they will obtain more votes in 1918 by standing on the side of our foe. I say to them that the time

has arrived for American citizens to realize that with the common benefits and opportunities which this great and prosperous country affords them comes the common duty and obligation to serve it in every way in its hour of danger. Let us give evidence to the world that we are united and standing shoulder to shoulder, prepared to make those sacrifices which a free people are called upon to do, to sustain their very existence as a nation. It is not a time for hesitancy. It is a time to go forward, placing reliance in God, who is the final arbiter of the destinies of both nations and men. [Applause.]

Let us give notice to the world that in this Republic of ours at least that we are all American citizens of equal rank, character, and quality, whether that citizenship be lately acquired or whether it be by birthright, and that in the defense of our flag and country we recognize no distinction of wealth or position; and that we shall be guided in our actions with the one common thought of victory in the conflict that we are now entering. Mr. Speaker, we shall not rest until we shall have achieved those objects which we are seeking, namely, the same equal rights for all men whether on land or on sea. God grant that the struggle may be short; but, no matter how long it may last, let us constantly bear in mind that the duty of the hour requires us to be courageous and firm in our convictions that America is right, and "that wrong backed by might" must fail.

Let me also add that I have many intimate friends and associates of German descent among the people of my city, and you will find them loyal in every respect.

Mr. Chairman, I can not conclude without reading two poems which I hope will stir American youth into action. They are entitled—

"EACH AMERICAN'S OFFERING."

[By Calvin Dill Wilson, Glendale, Ohio.]

Great land for which our fathers bled,
That men might live with unbowed head,
Now to thine altars, without price,
I bring my all for sacrifice.

For thee, America, I'd die
And with thine elder soldiers lie;
That harm be far from thy blest shore
I offer here my life and store.

That thy pure flag be free from stain
I'll stand where all the bullets rain.
What is my life or what am I
That I should fear for thee to die?

Accept me in thine hour of need;
Give me the joy for thee to bleed;
Great mother, hear my earnest prayer
And let me boldly do my share.

Give me a heart, an iron will,
That's worthy of the fathers still,
As son of them who cast out kings
And died that men be more than things.

In thy wide bosom grant a grave,
A resting place among the brave,
And near thy heart, where heroes slept,
That thou in hour of stress be kept.

Avert, O God, the need of sword;
But, called, may I not shrink, O Lord.
Forever, fronting both our shores,
May taintless flag guard all our doors.

"AMERICA, MY COUNTRY."

[By Jens K. Grondahl.]

America, my country, I come at thy call,
 I plight thee my troth and I give thee my all;
 In peace or in war I am wed to thy weal,
 I'll carry thy flag through the fire and the steel;
 On sea nor on land shall it suffer disgrace,
 Unsullied it floats o'er our peace-loving race;
 In reverence I kneel at sweet liberty's shrine—
 America, my country, command, I am thine.

America, my country, brave souls gave thee birth,
 Who yearned for a haven of freedom on earth,
 And when thy dear flag to the winds was unfurled
 There came to thy shores the oppressed of the world;
 Thy milk and thy honey flow freely for all—
 Who takes of thy bounty shall come at thy call,
 Who quaffs of thy nectar of freedom shall say,
 "America, my country, command, I obey."

America, my country, thy flag I adore,
 It glories in peace but it fears not in war;
 When tyrants would trample its folds in the dust,
 Old Glory, undaunted, is true to its trust;
 Its stars ever twinkle from liberty's dome
 A message of hope to mankind through the gloom;
 And children of men bless the red, white, and blue—
 America, my country, the tried and the true.

America, my country, now come is thy hour—
 The Lord of Hosts recks on thy courage and power;
 Humanity pleads for the strength of thy hand
 Lest liberty perish on sea and on land;
 Thou guardian of freedom, thou keeper of right,
 When liberty bleeds there is task for thy might;
 "Divine right" of kings or our freedom must fall—
 America, my country, I come at thy call.

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