



The Western World

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L. D. FELSHEIM, Editor
JAS. H. HOWE, Bus. Mgr.

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A DISCOURSE ON PEACE

The United States did not enter into this war unadvisedly, hastily, under stress of heat or passion, says a government communique. We took the step calmly, soberly, reluctantly, with a full sense of the awful responsibilities involved, the sacrifices demanded, the magnitude of the task.

President Wilson did not advise in his war message, nor did Congress act in declaring a state of war between the United States and Germany without giving the most solemn consideration to what the action meant. They knew it meant the death of thousands of brave Americans; they knew it meant suffering and wounds and the disabling for life of hundreds of thousands of our young men. They counted to the full the human cost and the material cost. Every development since has justified and proved the wisdom and imperative necessity of America's participation. Every German success and every German failure have shown how necessary to our own welfare and peace, how necessary to the safety and peace of the world the defeat of Germany is. Every foot of ground Germany has been forced to give up, every foot of land she has seized, have demonstrated the imperative necessity of defeating that sinister thing called Germanism.

Germanism is 3,000 miles away. It must come no nearer. Let this war result in anything but the defeat of Germany, let her emerge with her power unbroken and her kultur still dominant and it is but a question of time until we alone will be fighting Germany instead of warring against her with our Allies on our side.

Lincoln said that this country could not exist half slave and half free. All Americans now recognize that truth. The events of the last few years have shown equally clear that this world can not exist half free and half autocratic. There is no peace for America except a just peace, a peace that means a world fit for free people to live in. German ideals, German purposes, and German practices are the antitheses of Americanism. The beliefs we love and honor and uphold are contemptible to them; the objects for which they will to death millions of their own men and millions of their enemy are abhorrent to our ideas of right and justice; their methods and practices in warfare are an abomination and horror to us.

The American who now advocates or wishes for peace, except a just peace, is either carelessly misguided or a traitor to America's future and America's past to all things American—the things which have made our country great and free which hundreds of thousands of Americans have died to maintain, and for which Americans now are dying in France.

There can be no peace with honor or safety to ourselves or to posterity, except a just peace, and there can and will be no other peace. Work for peace accomplishes nothing but the hamstringing of the Nation's efforts.

Western World is in receipt of a bit of patriotic poetry which it regrets it is unable to publish until the writer discloses his identity, not necessarily for publication. It is one of the usages of newspapers everywhere that communications from unknown sources are to be consigned to the waste basket; partly as a matter of protection to the paper's interests—partly because the average communication, the writer of which desires to remain unknown, is hardly worth printing. If you have anything you want to see in print don't be super-sensitive.

In view of the fact that the Coos Bay Times has been supporting Geo. J. Armstrong as county commissioner during his entire eight years incumbency, it sounds rather inconsistent to hear that paper say: "In all those years he has not shown any evidence of either efficiency or economy."

Col. Leader's review was a much-enjoyed event to the boys of Bandon's company, Coos Guard.

WAR PROFITEER PUBLIC NUISANCE

No Extortion to Be Tolerated, but Liberal Disposition Toward Business Needed.

Shrinkage of Values Would Curtail Capacity to Provide Sinews of War.

"Conscription of Men, Conscription of Money," Analyzed.

By OTTO H. KAHN.

Much is being said about the plausible sounding contention that because a certain portion of the young manhood of the nation has been conscripted, therefore money must also be conscripted. Why, that is the very thing the government has been doing. It has conscripted a portion—a relatively small portion—of the men of the nation. It has conscripted a portion—a large portion—of the incomes of the nation. Capital and business pay more than four-fifths of our total war taxation directly and a large share of the remaining fifth indirectly.

If the government went too far in conscripting men the country would be crippled. If it went too far in conscripting incomes and earnings the country would likewise be crippled.

Results of Conscription of Capital.

I would ask those who would go further and conscript not only incomes, but capital, to answer the riddle, not only in what equitable and practicable manner they would do it, but what the nation would gain by it?

It is true that a few years ago a capital levy was made in Germany, but the percentage of that levy was so small as to actually amount to no more than an additional income tax and that at a time when the regular income tax in Germany was very moderate as measured by the present standards of income taxation.

Only a trifling fraction of a man's property is held in cash. If they conscript a certain percentage of his possessions in stocks and bonds, what would the government do with them?

Keep them? That would not answer its purpose, because the government wants cash, not securities.

Sell them? Who is to buy them when every one's funds would be depleted?

If they conscript a certain percentage of a man's real estate or mine or farm or factory, how is that to be expressed and converted into cash?

Are conscripted assets to be used as a basis for the issue of Federal Reserve bank notes? That would mean gross inflation, with all its attendant evils, dangers and deceptions.

Would they repudiate a percentage of the national debt? Repudiation is no less dishonorable in a people than in an individual, and the penalty for failure to respect the sanctity of obligations is no different.

The Thrifty Would Be Penalized.

The fact is that the government would gain nothing in the process of capital conscription and the country would be thrown into chaos for the time being. The man who has saved would be penalized, he who has wasted would be favored. Thrift and constructive effort, resulting in the needful and fruitfying accumulation of capital, would be arrested and lastingly discouraged.

I can understand the crude notion of the man who would divide all possessions equally. There would be mighty little coming to any one by such distribution, and it is, of course, an utterly impossible thing to do, but it is an understandable notion. But by the conscription of capital for government use neither the government nor any individual would be benefited.

A vigorously progressive income tax is both economically and socially sound. A capital tax is wholly unsound and economically destructive.

It may nevertheless become necessary in the case of some of the belligerent countries to resort to this expedient, but I can conceive of no situation likely to arise which would make it necessary or advisable in this country.

More than ever would such a tax be harmful in times of war and post-bellum reconstruction, when beyond almost all other things it is essential to stimulate production and promote thrift, and when everything which tends to have the opposite effect should be rigorously rejected as detrimental to the nation's strength and well-being.

There is an astonishing lot of hazy thinking on the subject of the uses of capital in the hands of its owners.

The rich man can spend only a relatively small sum of money unproductively or selfishly. The money that it is in his power actually to waste is exceedingly limited. The bulk of what he has must be spent and used for productive purposes, just as would be the case if it were spent by the government, with this difference, however, that, generally speaking, the individual is more painstaking and discriminating in the use of his funds and at the same time bolder, more imaginative, enterprising and constructive than the government with its necessarily bureaucratic and routine regime possibly could be. Money in the hands of the individual is continuously and feverishly on the search for opportunities—i. e., for creative and productive use. In the hands of the government it is apt to lose a good deal of its fruitfying energy and ceaseless striving and to sink instead into placid and somnolent repose.

There need not be and there should not be any conflict between profits and patriotism. I am utterly opposed to those who would utilize their country's war as a means to enrich themselves. The "war profiteer," as the term is generally understood, is a public nuisance and an ignominy. Exorbitant profits must not be tolerated, but, on the other hand, there should be a reasonably liberal disposition toward business and a willingness to see it make substantial earnings.

For, taxation presupposes earnings. Our credit structure is based upon values, and values are largely determined by earnings. Shrinkage of value necessarily affects our capacity to provide the government with the sinews of war.

The Conscription of Men.

Reverting now to the subject of the conscription of men, I know I speak the sentiment of all those beyond the years of young manhood when I say that there is not one of us worthy of the name of a man who would not willingly go to fight if the country needed or wanted us to fight. But the country does not want or call its entire manhood to fight. It does not even call anywhere near its entire young manhood. It has called or intends to call in the immediate future perhaps 25 per cent. of its men between twenty and thirty years of age, which means probably about 4 per cent. of its total male population of all ages. But it has called from incomes, business profits and other imposts falling principally on the well to do, approximately ninety per cent. of our war taxation, not to mention the contributions to the Red Cross, the Y. M. C. A. and other war relief activities.

Let me add in passing that the children of the well to do have been taken for the war in proportionately greater numbers than the children of the poor, because those young men who are needed at home to support dependents or to maintain essential war industries are exempted from the draft.

Our Laws Favor Sons of the Poor.

The draft exemption regulations discriminate not, as in former wars, in favor of the rich man's son, but in favor of the poor woman's son.

I realize but too well that the burden of the abnormally high cost of living, caused largely by the war, weighs heavily indeed upon wage earners and still more upon men and women with moderate salaries. I yield to no one in my desire to see everything done that is practicable to have that burden lightened. But excessive taxation on capital will not accomplish that; on the contrary, it will tend to intensify the trouble.

Taxation must be sound and wise and scientific and cannot be laid in a haphazard way or on impulse or according to considerations of politics, otherwise the whole country will suffer. History has shown over and over again that the laws of economics cannot be defied with impunity and that the resulting penalty falls upon all sections and classes.

The question of the individual is not the one that counts. The question is not what sacrifices capital should and would be willing to bear if called upon, but what taxes it is to the public advantage to impose.

I do not say all this to plead for a reduction of the taxation on wealth or in order to urge that no additional taxes be imposed on wealth if need be. There is no limit to the burden which in time of stress and strain those must be willing to bear who can afford it except only that limit which is imposed by the consideration that taxation must not reach a point where the business activity of the country becomes crippled and its economic equilibrium is thrown out of gear, because that would harm every element of the commonwealth and diminish the war-making capacity of the nation.

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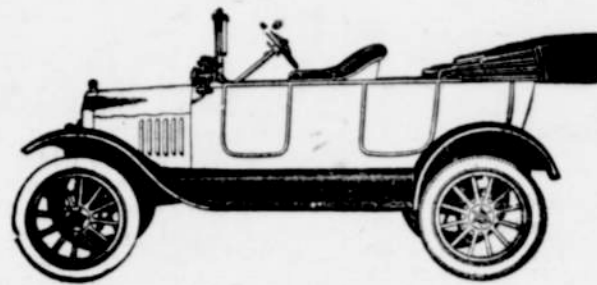
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If sent for now the present office help can get these statements out, thereby saving expense of extra help and rush of work toward the last of March.

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