

Assembly Hall,
June 8, 1918;
10 A. M.

Facts behind the War 120

DR. JOHN A. WIDTSOE.

My fellow workers,-- It seems almost unnecessary, after the vivid address of our Australian friend, to discuss, at this late hour, the facts behind the war. There is only one great fact in our minds, after hearing our friend from the trenches speak-- the fact that we are at war; that we are in the business of winning the war; that we must remain in the war until it is ended; and that we must come out of the war victoriously, so that the world may be free. With President Grant's permission, therefore, in view of the message given us by our soldier friend, and because of the far spent time, I shall not attempt to give you the outlined talk that I brought with me this morning, but call your attention to some of the outstanding facts that may be used in the war programs that may be given throughout the Church.

I suppose every Mutual worker and all the members of the Church are familiar with the few simple facts upon which rests our attitude with respect to the war. If these facts are not understood, they should be known by every member of the Church; for there is no organization in the world that has a deeper interest in the progress and the outcome of this great world war than the organization known as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Though we may know well the facts upon which President Wilson rested his message to Congress, and as a result of which war was declared with Germany, it may be helpful to review ⁱⁿ the various Wards and Stakes of Zion these facts, that our courage may not grow faint and that our loyalty may remain undimmed and untarnished.

I may remind you that this great war is an effect of many causes-- some very evident and near, some not so evident, and remote. This war did not come out of a clear sky. It did not simply happen, but came as a result of things that have occurred through generations of time. When the war broke out in 1914 the people of this country were occupied in their ordinary pursuits-- a peaceful and peace-loving people. We desired no quarrel with the world. We attempted to keep out of all kinds of disputes with our neighbors. We did not maintain an elaborate spy system; we had no involved secret diplomacy; for a democracy does not lend itself easily to the spy system or to secret diplomacy. Such things are confined to monarchical forms of government, the forms of government that are passing out of existence and will be largely of the past when this war is ended. We were going about in our own way to develop our natural resources and contending simply for the right to work out on this land, in this hemisphere, our form of government-- a government by the people, so that the people may be free-- a government which does not depend upon a king or upon a military class, but which does depend, for its power and influence, upon the will of the people governed. That was all we asked of the world; and we were determined, as we are determined today, that no power on earth shall come in and destroy our experiment in free government. On that point we are all united. We propose to stand together to the last in behalf of this great experiment in free government which we believe, and which all sane thinkers of the world today believe is a solution of the social difficulties that vex the world today, we had said to the world.

During all these years, in order to maintain our right to work out our experiment in free government, we had asked the world to recognize three things, three main principles. If the American people will keep them in mind, it will be easier to understand the causes back of this war:

First: We insisted upon the recognition of the Monroe doctrine, which simply meant that we would not permit any European or foreign power to come to these shores, or to this hemisphere and become a power here, so that our work for the freedom of the world might be endangered. At the same time we agreed that we would keep out of Europe; we would not attempt to interfere with European politics. We wanted to be left free to work out our big experiment for the good of mankind.

Second: We insisted that the world recognize the freedom of the seas, so that we might carry on commerce with the world. In spite of the fact that we were located thousands of miles away from the older and more thickly settled domain of the world, we might still, by the use of the seas, have free communication with our neighbors in every part of the world.

Third: We insisted that all our disputes with other nations should be settled by the method of arbitration.

If you will read the history of the last hundred years, you will find that the United States of America has simply asked that these three principles be recognized-- the Monroe Doctrine, the freedom of the seas, and the arbitration of difficulties that might arise between us and other nations.

Let me now call your attention to the fact that the German government, which stupefied this country when it began the war

in Europe, has been unwilling to recognize any of these fundamental principles upon which we rest our claims with respect to the world.

We tried to be neutral when the war broke out. We refused to be drawn into it. Our President issued a manifesto asking all the good citizens of the land to remain strictly neutral. It was difficult to be neutral when a power across the sea invaded small countries, murdered innocent children and women, killed the manhood of a country and destroyed the heritage of the past by burning and wrecking great buildings, libraries, pictures, monuments to the thought and skill of generations of men. We were loath to believe that the German government could lend itself to such practices; yet we all know, whether we like it or not, that the German government, which is controlling the German people, has lent itself to every possible outrage that can be devised by the human mind. In spite of the insults to civilization, that were hurled at us, this country attempted to remain neutral, but we were not allowed to remain so.

Almost at the beginning of the war an anti-United States propaganda was started by the German government at home and abroad, based largely upon the claim that we were furnishing munitions to other countries; and we were asked to stop our trade with other nations. We were requested to remain here, as if we were on an island of the sea, quiet and subservient, taking orders from a power which was showing itself unfit for leadership among the nations of the world.

We soon learned that spies, sent out by the German government, were honeycombing our country and other countries. They were down in Mexico, over in Japan, in the Latin republics of America.

They had one message to deliver: "Let us all get together and destroy the United States of America." The Monroe doctrine was being ignored absolutely by the German government in its propaganda. You will all remember the Zimmerman note, so-called, in which the German government proposed to Mexico that if she would join with Japan and certain other countries, to fight this country, Texas and New Mexico and Arizona would be ceded to Mexico. These things became known, little by little, as the war went on. The German government, within the first three years of the war said, in actions if not in words, "We do not believe in the Monroe Doctrine. We shall not respect it; we shall do all we can to overthrow it."

Soon after the war broke out, sea troubles also began. Unprotected zones were established within which U-boats and other destructive craft might operate, even to the extent of destroying vessels of neutral countries and drowning or destroying passengers on neutral ships, who were on their way to neutral countries. After some time this submarine warfare became ruthless, until there was nothing left but to believe, at least as far as our government was concerned, that the freedom of the seas was no longer a principle held in respect by the German government. It said in substance: "We do not believe in the freedom of the seas. We shall keep you on your sea-bound continent and make you separate and apart from the rest of the world."

Long before the war broke out, in spite of our repeated requests, the German government, almost alone in its views among the great powers of the world, had said to us defiantly: "We will not submit any of our difficulties to a treaty of arbitration; we will not have such a treaty."

In other words, all the things for which we have stood, sacred rights to us because upon them depends the future of popular government, were all dishonored by the German government. There was nothing else for us to do than to declare war on such a government, that we, ourselves, and the great cause of our land, might live and be protected.

The steps that led immediately to the declaration of war may be followed in the President's so-called War Message, which is printed in the first number of the war information series and entitled "The War Message and the Facts Behind It", containing the annotated speech of the President on April 2, 1917.

There are other great and grave causes back of which the time does not permit me to discuss. It is an uncivilized warfare, and many of us doubt if we may in justice remain neutral in the face of a return to barbarism. There has been also a distinct attempt for many years on the part of the German government to impose German "Kultur" upon all the world, that is, to make the world see as they see. If this were the place and time I could give you my own personal experience to show you how vigorous yet subtle was the attempt in all parts of the country to impose German Kultur upon us. As one American, I refuse to have anybody's kultur imposed upon me. I live in a free country, and am free to express myself and to belong to the majority or the minority as the case may be, from year to year, but always to let the popular will rule me and my actions in a governmental way.

Finally, we may as well remember that the great big overwhelming cause of the war, the reason why we are in the war and

wish to remain in it to the end, is that one great system of government is opposed to another system of government. The one system says that a man, ordinarily in power because he is born of a certain father, shall stand at the head of a nation, and through a controlling, self-protective military machine, shall speak to the people and compel their obedience. The people under this system shall have little or no voice in the management of their own affairs. The other system declares that within the majority of the people lies the power of government, and that they may select men to govern them for one, or twenty, or a hundred, or a thousand years, but that the power remains with the people. This latter system says that there is no place in this world for war; that this is a world in which justice and peace must reign; and that our governments must be so established that cannons and rifles and poisonous gases will be removed from the possibility of destroying human life; that there is nothing more precious upon the face of the earth than human lives, and that these lives must be guarded and guided and allowed to develop, to serve the God they worship, and to develop the earth which has been given them. Shall autocracy rule, or shall democracy prevail, that is the question.

We are fighting today, in a small way, the fight that was waged in the heavens, according to our own doctrine, long before we came to the earth. We were assembled, in a great gathering, to discuss the journey to the earth and the life we were to lead here. The Father of the race laid before us His plan. "I will send you down there. I am the master of men, because I am the possessor of the largest knowledge; and we shall so arrange things that you, my children, may know the Law; and as you succeed in

obeying and living the Law, so shall your greatness before me be." It was not wholly an inviting program, because men are likely to fall, always, when they have the freedom of choice, but it was God's plan, a pure and perfect plan. Then Lucifer arose and said: "I have a better plan. I will take these people with me. I shall be the master. I shall see that every one of them shall live in joy and happiness. They shall have all they want to eat and fine houses to live in, and I shall see to it that the life journey is a beautiful, happy one, and I shall save every one of them without any effort on their own part." By God's plan every soul would be obliged to earn its own salvation; by Lucifer's plan, salvation will be forced upon every one, irrespective of deserts. God's plan is natural and wholesome-- Lucifer's plan was unnatural and forbidding. One was good; the other was evil.

Today the world is fighting out the age-old issue. Shall man govern himself, though he make mistakes at times,-- or shall government be imposed upon him, even though the government be of perfect precision? We of this land and church have long since answered the question. Government by the people is right; government imposed upon the people is wrong. We shall remain with the right. Though our life blood be shed, we mean to fight for the right to be free against any evil power, like that of Lucifer's, that would impose its sugar-coated bitterness, its "Kultur", upon us.