

June, 1915

Bernard Shaw's Terms of Peace

A letter written by G. Bernard Shaw to a friend in Vienna is published in the Münchener Neueste Nachrichten and in the Frankfurter Zeitung of April 21, 1915. Mr. Shaw says:

WE are already on the way out of the first and worst phase. When reason began to bestir itself, I appeared each week in great open meetings in London; and when the newspapers discovered that I was not only not being torn to pieces, but that I was growing better and better liked, then the feeling that patriotism consists of insane lies began to give place to the discovery that the presentation of the truth is not so dangerous as every one had believed.

At that time scarcely one of the leading newspapers took heed of my insistence that this war was an imperialistic war and popular only in so far as all wars are for a time popular. But I need hardly assure you that if Grey had announced: "We have concluded a treaty of alliance with Germany and Austria and must wage war upon France and Russia," he would have evoked precisely the same patriotic fervor and exactly the same democratic anti-Prussianism, (with the omission of the P.) Then the German Kaiser would have been cheered as the cousin of our King and our old and faithful friend.

As concerns myself, I am not unqualifiedly what is called a pan-German; the Germans, besides, would not have a spark of respect left for me if now, when all questions of civilization are buried, I did not hold to my people. But neither am I an anti-German.

Militarism has just compelled me to pay about £1,000 as war tax, in order to help some "brave little Serbian" or other to cut your throat, or some Russian mujik to blow out your brains, although I would rather pay twice as much to save your life or to buy in Vienna some good picture for our National Gallery, and although I should mourn far less about the death of a hundred Serbs or mujiks than for your death.

I am, even aside from myself, sorry for your sake that my plays are no longer produced. Why does not the Burgtheater play the "Schlachtenlenker"? Napoleon's speech about English "Realpolitik" would prove an unprecedented success. If the English win, I shall call upon Sir Edward Grey to add to the treaty of peace a clause in which Berlin and Vienna shall be obliged each year to produce at least 100 performances of my plays for the next twenty-five years.

In London during August the usual cheap evening orchestra concerts, so-called promenade concerts, were announced in a patriotic manner, with the comment that no German musician would be represented on the program. Everybody applauded this announcement, but nobody attended the concerts. A week later a program of Beethoven, Wagner, and Richard Strauss was announced. Everybody was indignant, and everybody went to hear it. It was a complete and decisive German victory, without a single man being killed.

