

The Breaking Off of Peace Negotiations with Abd el Krim.

By Rousset (Paris).

"Now at last we shall have peace!" Such were the exclamations of hope and joy with which delegates of the Riffis, who passed through the lines three weeks ago on their way to enter negotiations, were greeted by those who had undergone great sufferings in the trenches. For twenty days they heard news of the Conference. They welcomed as a happy omen the fact that the representatives of France and Spain had consented to receive Abd el Krim's envoys Azerkane, Cheddi and Haddou in Ujda.

Then, when they had already got used to the idea of peace and to the prospect of returning home to their families, there came, to their surprise, the announcement that negotiations had been broken off.

"Bad faith and lack of good will on the part of the Riffis are the only cause of the negotiations being broken off", with such words all the newspapers in the service of the imperialists of France and Spain, briefly and tersely gave their explanations on the day after the failure of negotiations.

A short review of events between the 11th and 25th of April will make it possible to indicate who was really responsible for the resumption of hostilities.

France and Spain, having suffered severe defeats on all fronts, had to consent to their plenipotentiaries entering into negotiations with those of the Riffs. They resolved to organise this cynical farce of Ujda which, should it fail, would at least serve to throw the responsibility for future fighting on the Riffs.

France and Spain had come to a complete agreement, which continued during the negotiations. The absurd conditions, the so-called preliminary conditions, which General Simon communicated to the representatives of Abd el Krim were, briefly summarized, as follows:

1. France and Spain negotiate with the envoys of the Riff tribes and not with Abd el Krim.
2. Abd el Krim must immediately leave Islamic soil.
3. The allied troops advance their present front by seven kilometers.
4. The French and Spanish prisoners are returned to the allies unconditionally.

Without giving a final answer to these "preliminary conditions", Abd el Krim's representatives pointed out that they were hard beyond the possibility of acceptance, and that it was at least unusual for those wishing to come to an agreement to determine the basis for it finally before discussion with the interested parties. Although not one of the preliminary conditions was accepted by the Riffs, negotiations were continued after Haddou had conferred with Abd el Krim.

Two weeks passed between the first meeting and the opening of the Conference of Ujda. At what stage had negotiations arrived by this time?

France and Spain had abandoned their claim to advance their armies by seven kilometers along the whole front. They made these concessions because the General Staffs of the allies had broken their word while the Riffs were discussing peace, and had had strategical points of the greatest importance occupied.

Abd el Krim was not to be banished immediately from Riff territory. France and Spain made this concession, but also in their own interests; Azerkane had pointed out that Abd el Krim's authority was paramount over the Riff tribes, and the allies feared anarchy and ill effects in the territory of Islam if the generally revered leader was driven out of Morocco.

The negotiations at Ujda were to deal with three main questions: the question of prisoners, the question of disarmament and the question of the future administration of the Riff. Azerkane and his fellow-envoys constantly made new proposals with regard to these three important points, which might have led to an agreement and to peace. All these proposals were rejected!

When the allies demanded of Abd el Krim's representatives that the Riffs should proceed to a general disarmament, Azerkane answered: "We will disarm in order to prove to you our will for peace! We wish to live on good terms with our neighbours." General Simon replied: "We however demand the right of control." And the delegates of the Riffs even consented to the appointment of controllers. Thereupon the allies put up the claim: "But our controllers must be accompanied by a strong military escort to ward off any attack." This was demanding too much for it meant that France and Spain, under the deceitful pretext of control, would proceed to a final occupation of the Riff. In order to prove their good faith, the representatives of Abd el Krim offered to remain as hostages in the enemy camp during the process of disarmament, but they could not accept the claims of the allies. They spoke however to deaf ears!

When the delicate question of the future of the Riff and the authority of the Sultan was submitted to Azerkane, he gave the envoys of France and Spain to understand that concessions might be made in these two points. The spiritual authority of the Sultan would be recognised. The form of the administration of the Riff could be examined with the understanding of the authorities of France and Spain. This did not satisfy General Simon who gave Azerkane to understand that France and Spain intended to have the right to nominate the functionaries of the Riff State. This measure which was incompatible with the sovereignty of Abd el Krim's State, could not of course be accepted by Azerkane.