

NOTES ON ECONOMY AND DISARMAMENT

BY SAMUEL W. McCALL

THERE is probably nothing related to government that is advocated more and practised less than economy. It is a theme that lends itself easily to discourse which rarely, if ever, materializes in action. The party that is out is always bewailing the extravagance and criminal wastefulness of the party that is in. And when the people show themselves credulous enough to entrust the critics with power, the only difference likely to be seen is in an increased extravagance and waste. The fervor of the promise is usually found to be in inverse ratio to the amount of performance that is vouchsafed.

There has never at any period been a greater demand, or a more alluring opportunity, for economy in government than in that period which began when the World War came to an end, November 11, 1918. Expenditure had never attained a higher peak. Our great wealth and the tremendous stake involved, which was nothing less than the freedom of nations and the continuance of civilization, had justified an expenditure colossal beyond all precedent.

It was not merely that all money that might be needed should be expended, but all money that might seem to be needed, even if in the end it should appear that it was wasted. A prudent government could take no chances of losing the war by spending too little, if any of the money, that was saved might do good. Subject to the imperative demand for honesty, the resources of the country were all to be employed,

if only they might be of use, even if, like so many shells that were fairly fired at the enemy and did not reach him, much of what was expended did not appear to have any influence upon the result.

The need of such vast expenditure came abruptly to an end on the day of the Armistice. It became then at once necessary that all the energy previously employed in spending should be devoted to saving. And when Congress was in session the following spring, and our soldiers had returned to this country and been disbanded; when our munition factories had ceased their operation, and employment was dwindling, and the mass of our people was beginning to feel the first keen pinches of excessive taxation, it became the paramount duty of Congress ruthlessly to cut expenditure to the bone. But to pass over the debatable transition period when deficiencies were to be met, and to make no exalted demand upon the first Congress after the war, surely 'normalcy' in expenditure must be indeed a coy creature if she cannot be prevailed upon to show herself by the Congress that emerged from the throes of the last presidential campaign, and convened nearly two years and a half after fighting had ceased. The expenditure of the present fiscal year should be little greater than the normal expenditure of the government, with the exceptions to which I shall hereafter refer. Not to show results at this time would be wholly without justification, and those results should not be

expressed in a few coppers saved here and there, — a paltry reward for so much eloquence about extravagance, — but should reach into billions.

At the end of the Civil War the South was impoverished and was an unfruitful field for the tax-gatherer. A fifth of the present population of the country was at the moment staggering under a burden of expenditure as great, when the difference in wealth is considered, as that which rested upon us after the World War. And yet the statesmen of that period resolutely cut down expenditure and taxation, attacked our enormous debt, and put it in process of extinction. We should do well now to imitate the spirit they then displayed.

At the beginning of the World War the operation of all the machinery of our government cost, in a round sum, a billion dollars. That this amount was not generally regarded as representing an economical basis may be inferred from what the leaders of each party said about the other when each party had in turn expended substantially a like sum. But as against this billion, we are told that, for the fiscal year which runs through the winter and well into the summer of the fourth year after the Armistice, four and a half billions are needed. There would appear to be little need of our having more government now than before the war; but granting that fifty per cent more government is necessary, an additional five hundred million dollars would be required, which is more than the total annual cost of the government under Cleveland. We should add to that the billion dollars necessary to pay the interest upon the war-debt; and then, to be generous, if not, indeed, extravagant, five hundred millions more may be added, to cover contingencies. We should then have a cool three billions, or three times the amount required just

before we entered the war. What need — or, indeed, excuse — is there for spending more than three billion dollars during the present fiscal year? But when four and a half billions are demanded, one may fairly ask whether the resources of statesmanship have been seriously employed, much less, exhausted.

Useless expenditure will attempt to fasten itself upon the treasury, and the life of the emergencies which make it necessary will be protracted by every art. But if it is attacked with resolution, it will yield.

An instance of this is shown in the reduction of our army. It was proposed to cut the army to 150,000 men, and a variety of objections was urged against the proposal. The one seeming to have the most merit was that contracts of enlistment had already been made, and the government would need to repudiate many of its contracts with its soldiers in order to make the reduction. But Congress, to its credit, insisted upon cutting down the army; and, almost before the bill had passed, the reduction was effected. The men were very willing to be released from their contracts.

To cut off a billion and a half of expenditure more than is now proposed would go far toward emancipating the productive energies of the country, and toward that revival of industry which is so necessary to the restoration of prosperity, and especially to the reëmployment of labor.

There is an intimate relation between the expenditure of government and what is called disarmament, in which Mr. Borah has so nobly led. A great saving of public money would undoubtedly result from putting in force an international agreement making a radical reduction in armaments; and no harm could come to any nation if the reduction were made proportional and world-wide. Very great items in mili-

tary expenditure, grouped under the title of the 'cost of past wars,' would of course be untouched. The interest upon war-debts, and the pension rolls would still remain.

Disarmament also would have a distinct bearing upon the future peace of the world. Sometimes the possession of powerful armaments might tempt nations to use them. It would be a very great thing to do away wholly, by general agreement, with many of those terrible engines which have been devised simply for the destruction of man. If in mythical times, as I have at another time said, a single one of our modern dreadnaughts or submarines had been seen upon the ocean, whoever should have destroyed such an enemy of mankind would have received the general applause of the world, as did the hero who slew the fabled Hydra. How immeasurably greater then would be the fame of him who should to-day make free our oceans, swarming with these monsters, and send them all to the bottom.

But there is extremely little likelihood of such a result. The portents of modern war have ceased to spread terror among a race which sets no limit upon its daring. If the old Hydra should come back in our time, and should appear to be more horrible than the other engines of destruction, it is likely that our munition-makers would at once take it up and attempt to reproduce great numbers of the monster, and our appropriation bills would doubtless supply suitable sums for their purchase. To carry out a sweeping disarmament would imply a radical change of view with regard to war, which would be very wholesome.

But we must guard against any illusions regarding the effect of a reduction of armament, extreme or otherwise, upon the likelihood of war. Such a policy would not go to the root

of the peace-problem. Neither reduction of armaments nor complete disarmament would furnish a sufficient solution.

Our country declared war in 1812, when it had practically no army at all. Cleveland sent his warlike Venezuelan message to Congress in 1894, when we were defenseless against England. France declared war against Germany in 1870, with hardly half the military strength that her adversary possessed. Time and again nations with relatively weak armaments have embarked upon war. For very many years the laws of England recognized only the militia, whose training was limited to fourteen days a year; and Macaulay, in his lively fashion, wrote of the concern of patriots at staking the independence of their country upon the result of a contest between ploughmen officered by justices of the peace and veteran warriors led by marshals of France. And yet England and her kings more than once took the chances and went to war. Nations will still have their differences, and under the present system they are likely to go to war to settle them, or to attain their ambitions, even if they all have weak armies and navies, or none at all.

War has become a matter largely of chemistry, and a nation might rely upon its superior laboratories in order quickly to blow up or poison its adversary. It might rely upon its superior proficiency in the art of flying, and its flocks of commercial air-planes would be at once available for warlike use. It requires no argument to prove that the military microbe, which has infected the blood of man for uncounted centuries, still persists. Unless nations shall provide some way to settle their controversies peaceably, they can be relied upon now and then to settle them by force. Thus, while a material reduction of armaments will

bring about a welcome saving, it will leave the general question of peace far from a final settlement.

It is indispensable that there should be an arrangement among nations to resort to some peaceful method of settling differences before taking up arms, and scarcely less necessary if they have no armaments at all than if they possess them.

The plan with which Mr. Wilson associated his name may have been far from perfect in all its details, but it was the noblest attempt at practical idealism that has ever been made by any statesman. It was evident that there must be some general and central agreement to outlaw war, and that the nations must band themselves together for that purpose, or that wars would happen in the future just as they had happened in the past. It was just as evident, also, that another general war, with the methods of warfare that have come in, as barbarous as they are destructive, might mean the obliteration of civilization, if not the extinction of the race.

It is objected that such an arrangement would infringe upon the sovereignty of nations. Precisely the same objection might be made against an agreement for the reduction of armaments. What more sovereign power is there in a nation, and what one is more necessary to its preservation than the power to arm? If by agreement it consents to put a limitation upon this power, it could as well be argued that it was limiting its sovereignty. But the right of a nation to shoot up the world and to endanger civilization should be limited, just as the right of an individual to shoot up the community in which he lives is limited.

Any treaty obligation is, in the sense in which the argument has been advanced, a limitation upon sovereignty, that is, a limitation upon the power of

a nation to do anything it may choose. In order to meet the requirement of such a claim, we should have international anarchy, when each nation would be subject to no law of nations, but only to its own will and to such self-imposed notions of righteousness as it might see fit to recognize and put in force. So long as the area of law is circumscribed within the boundaries of states, and separate aggregations of men do not come within its sway, we shall have a lawless universe. The right of collective bodies of men to murder, pillage, and commit piracy against their neighbors is no greater than that of the individual, and the assertion of such a right involves a brutal and barbarous conception of a nation, which should at once be brought to an end.

But we are told that the thing has all been settled by the last election; and Mr. Harvey, having referred to the little glory, at his own appraisal, with which we emerged from the war, declares that we are to have no part in the League. That, he tells us, was decreed by America by 7,000,000 majority. It must be conceded that, if we are to accept any part of the League, we are proceeding in that direction with impressive deliberation. Perhaps we are to come to it by way of the Pacific. But as to the significance of the sweeping majority, a distinguished and influential group of Republicans, headed by Mr. Taft, Mr. Hughes, and Mr. Root, told us before the election that the only way to enter the League was to have a Republican victory. Then, too, we must not overlook the fact that great race-groups were functioning and voting with reference to their fatherlands. No one can tell just what was decreed by the voters — whether the amended League of Messrs. Hughes and Root, or the no league of Messrs. Johnson and Harvey.

After one of the tremendous tides sometimes following a heavy storm at sea, the waters reach heights before almost unknown, and it seems doubtful whether the old landmarks will ever again appear. But on the next day, perhaps, when the sun shines and the waters have gone back to the old level, the only result one can see of the far-thundering upheaval is that there are scattered upon the sand some strange little creatures such as were never seen before, which have been thrown up from the nether realms and will disappear with the next tide. Even the familiar bones of some old wreck are still there, and, as if more widely to proclaim their uselessness, are even pushed up higher upon the sands.

In the same way, great results in politics are not apt to come to pass from what are called 'tidal waves.' Grandiloquent majorities sometimes indicate that the political atmosphere is seeking its equilibrium by a tempest, and that the settled current of popular opinion may ultimately blow in the opposite direction. The sweeping victory of Pierce, in 1852, for example, settled nothing, and a reaction set in which nullified his victory. Only the most commonplace results followed upon the triumphant election of the first Harrison. But Lincoln, chosen by a mere plurality, with the majority of all votes cast for other candidates, and Wilson, another plurality president, creeping in between Taft and Roosevelt, were linked with things that shaped destiny and shook the world. To borrow an instance from across the sea — the Kaiser has not yet been hanged, notwithstanding the astonishing victory of Mr. Lloyd George, with that among his assortment of issues, three years ago. Generally, anything has been settled by tidal waves except the thing about which the politicians have most fiercely declaimed.

If nothing is to be done by our country upon the peace-problem except a cutting down of armaments, the work of garnering the supreme result of the war will remain undone. When the fighting was ended, the almost universal opinion of the country would have found expression in the phrase so pathetically reiterated by President Harding on the return to the country of thousands of our fallen heroes: 'It must not be again.'

If, upon the day of the Armistice, President Wilson had declared that, in the treaty which he was to negotiate, he would not consent to our entering into any combination of nations to outlaw war, it is impossible to believe that, in that moment of victory, his declaration would not have been received with general execration. Of one thing we may be sure — as a result of such a reversal, peace would have had champions new and strange, and there would have been a radically different cast appearing afterward in the rôles of the morning stars singing together for joy. But the issue was adjourned, and the pressing duty of the hour was put off. It seemed to become stale. Eternal debate took the place of action. Our memories became blunted, as year after year the grass sprang up anew on the French battlefields.

But the course to be taken is as clear before us to-day as it was two years or more ago. There is already formed a union of nations, of which, with scarcely an exception, all the nations of the Western Hemisphere are members except our own. Germany, it is understood, is willing to join when the right to do so shall be given her. Russia is at this time too dismembered and chaotic to speak with the voice of national authority upon any subject. In effect, America is the only part of the organized world that stands aloof. Let us make clear the conditions upon which we will

join hands with the civilized nations. The choice is clearly before us. We can show ourselves willing that the world should go on, as it has gone, exposed to the danger that some maniac may throw the brand that will wrap the universe in flames, and then we may marshal and consume our wealth, and drag our boys from their mothers, and with pæans of

patriotism send them to destruction; or we may play the part of reasonable creatures and unite with the rest of the world to make the thing measurably impossible by extending the reign of law over nations. Not to choose the latter course would be basely to array ourselves with the forces at war with civilization.

WORLD-EQUILIBRIUM

BY S. C. VESTAL.

I

THE world has long been seeking to solve the great problem of the maintenance of peace. War is as old as man; and he who wishes to limit its ravages may learn its most useful lessons from some rather old books — Thucydides, Demosthenes, Grotius, and our own *Federalist*. To the neglect of these lessons we may lay the carnage of the last seven years and the futile efforts to form a league of nations. If we would put aside our prepossessions, and study a few books that may be found in any good library, we might easily learn what may and may not be done to eliminate war. In the matter of preventing war, nothing is so absurd that it has not been advanced by some writer. What is most needed is a statement of the problem. We may safely assume, for the purpose of this study, that human nature is unchanging, — though it varies greatly in different races, — and that morality is stationary.

A sharp distinction must be carefully kept in mind between domestic and

international peace, and between civil and international wars. Much of the confusion and incoherence of thought about peace and war is due to our failure to make this distinction.

International war and civil or domestic war are separate and distinct phenomena. An international war is a contest between nations or states; a civil or domestic war is a contest between parts of the same nation or state. The character of the military operations is very much alike in both cases; but the political problems involved are as far apart as the poles. Nevertheless, we continually meet people in search of a formula that would have prevented the American Revolution and the Boer War, which were civil wars within the British Empire, and the great international war of 1914. No one with sufficient logic to distinguish these cases expects to find a specific for civil wars. There is none, except good government; but it is not infallible. We shall first consider civil wars.