

WASHINGTON'S WARNING¹

BY MAXIMILIAN MILLER-JABUSCH

EUROPEANS sometimes imagine that, because the United States refused to join the League of Nations, she threw over Wilson's Fourteen Points. Nevertheless the latter, which Germany made the condition of her armistice offer, are still an important political force not to be overlooked in any international negotiation. Last March, while the Geneva diplomats, indulging in the worst abuses of pre-war secret diplomacy, were patching up futile private compromises in hotel chambers, they utterly forgot that in one of these points Wilson declared that the very kind of diplomacy they were practising should be abolished. Washington, however, has just recalled this truth to their attention with painful bluntness.

Mr. Houghton, the American Ambassador in London, recently returned to Washington to confer with President Coolidge. He submitted to the President a comprehensive report upon the condition of Europe, the substance of which he gave to the press. This method of taking the whole world into his confidence provoked some surprise. Of course, American diplomatic practices are often unconventional. Washington has a rough and ready manner that is sometimes called 'shirt-sleeves diplomacy.' But Mr. Houghton, whom we know and esteem in Berlin, is not of the shirt-sleeves type. He is a reserved gentleman, ordinarily super-correct in matters of diplomatic propriety. That makes his action on this occasion the

more surprising, for he certainly did not take it unless he believed it necessary and unless he was assured that Mr. Coolidge approved it.

His report dwells chiefly upon the subject of Wilson's second point, calling for general disarmament — which, by the way, received precious little attention at the last Geneva meeting. A preliminary conference to discuss that subject, to which both the United States and Germany have accepted invitations, was originally scheduled to meet in March, but has been adjourned until May. No one knows now whether it will ever be held. Ambassador Houghton stated positively that France, Italy, and Japan are opposed to separate negotiations over naval and land armaments. That means that they refuse to follow further along the path indicated by the Washington Conference of disappointing memory.

Probably the American Government's experience at that Conference makes it distrust the coming Geneva meeting. The Washington sessions opened with a tremendous surprise: America's delegation brushed aside all theoretical discussion and immediately proposed a practical measure that was approved unanimously although reluctantly. But the League of Nations has no such idea in mind. It proposes to discuss theories as developed in an elaborate questionnaire that promises to supply many a hard nut to crack. As if to complicate matters as much as possible, a new idea has been ad-

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vanced — that of potential military strength. This means that in judging a nation's armaments we shall not confine ourselves to its appropriations for military purposes, to the strength of its land forces and its fleets, but that we shall go into all sorts of other factors — its geographical position, its natural boundaries, the character of its civilization, the number of its inhabitants, the state of its industrial development, its ability to convert peace industries into war industries, and a thousand more things of the same sort.

Now it is perfectly obvious that if a disarmament conference starts out in this line it can go on talking until doomsday. Disarmament becomes impossible as soon as you complicate it with vague and incomputable factors upon which there can never be practical agreement. America's acceptance of the invitation to take part in such proceedings at all is an indication of her good-will, of her readiness to leave no stone unturned to accomplish her object.

Mr. Houghton's report has created an impression, however, that Europe's case is desperate. He therefore prescribes a remedy that looks disconcertingly like a 'kill or cure' prescription. The United States is to bring Europe to reason by financial pressure. Mr. Houghton thinks that in two or three years our continent's military burdens will have grown so heavy that our taxpayers will be unable to support them. In the same way that the Ruhr crisis compelled Europe to look facts in the face in regard to reparations, so an armaments crisis may prove necessary to bring her to her senses in respect to military expenditures. If America really resorts to this policy, it will certainly be a kill-or-cure operation.

Possibly the threat alone will be enough, for the countries against whom it is directed clearly perceive its meaning. Of course, their first impulse has been to become abusive and to ridicule the Houghton report. But America has made it plain that they are dependent upon her, and that they must respect her wishes whether they like it or not. France has not yet reached an agreement for paying her debts at Washington. The first great tumble of the franc was stopped by an American loan. Since then the franc has survived on the sufferance of America. Consequently France cannot refuse to heed Washington's injunctions, especially when they are as emphatic as this one. Moreover, Congress has not yet ratified the debt agreement with Italy.

Germany is not directly affected by America's warning, for our attitude at Geneva has made a good impression in that country. But we are likewise interested in seeing that America does not put that threat into effect. We know what these kill-or-cure prescriptions are; we took one ourselves at the time of the Ruhr invasion. We do not wish any other country to have a similar experience. But Europe must recover her health. If American credits are cut off, we may not be directly affected, but we shall be seriously affected indirectly. We want peace; our policies are definitely directed to that end. But other countries must want peace and must take the course that we have taken without kicking over the traces and gazing longingly back at glorious but unprofitable adventures. We cannot labor for a Lorcarno policy with one hand and for a big-armaments policy with the other; for this is a case where the right hand must know what the left hand does.

THE AMERICAN CLAIMS¹

AN ENGLISH ANALYSIS OF OUR BLOCKADE BILL

It would be idle to deny that Senator Borah's resolution on the subject of American claims against Great Britain suggests possibilities of a most unpleasant kind. The knowledge that claims of a very controversial character, amounting to over a hundred million pounds sterling, might at any moment be presented at Whitehall would in itself be sufficiently disturbing. That, however, is not the worst. The nature and origin of these particular claims, and the circumstances in which their presentation is now demanded, combine to make it quite certain that they cannot be pressed without exasperating public opinion in this country to an extreme degree. The fact that Senator Borah's action has synchronized with the partial publication of a very critical and even censorious report on the political state of Europe by Mr. Houghton, the American Ambassador to Great Britain, adds to the risk of the question giving rise to an embittered controversy.

In these circumstances it is of the first importance that all, on both sides of the Atlantic, who realize the supreme importance of friendly Anglo-American relations should form a clear idea of the questions at issue. What, in the first place, is the present position, and what are the chances that the American Government will take official action in support of the claims?

For several years past American exporters, shippers, and marine-insur-

ance firms have been filing with the State Department claims against Great Britain and France for damages arising out of the Allied blockade of Germany between August 1914 and April 1917 — that is, during the period of American neutrality. For a long time the United States authorities did nothing; but, as the claimants are very numerous and very wealthy, they have combined to put political pressure on the Administration. The Senate has passed a resolution that the Secretary of State be invited to explain what action he proposes to take with regard to the claims; the resolution has been referred to the Foreign Relations Committee, of which Senator Borah is chairman, and the Committee has reported favorably upon it.

The next step to be taken is not quite clear. Either the chairman of the Committee summons the Secretary of State to answer questions, or else the resolution is placed upon the Senate's agenda for further discussion, and the necessary action with regard to the Secretary of State is taken by the Committee, after a debate and division. It is reported, however, that Senator Borah, for the moment at any rate, does not intend to press the matter. Further, it must always be remembered that, even if the Foreign Relations Committee or the Senate presses for a decision, the Secretary of State is under no constitutional obligation to comply; he is perfectly entitled to refuse, on grounds of general policy, to proceed further in the affair.

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