

Present Peace Problems and the Preparedness Program

[Address by William Jennings Bryan, at the Twenty-second Annual Mohonk (N. Y.) Conference on International Arbitration, Thursday, May 18, 1916.]

The delightful memory of a visit to Mohonk six years ago has led me to look forward each year to the time of your meeting, with the hope that I might indulge myself again and enjoy the pleasure of association with you; but this is the first year since then when I have felt that I could work this into my plans. I am enjoying this session to the full.

Before taking up the subject which I desire to present, I am sure you will pardon me if I make reference to something that was said this morning before I arrived. I shall not deal with the personal criticism, for I discovered about twenty-five years ago that it was impossible for a democrat to deal with all the personal criticisms that he received.

The Chairman: Mr. Bryan, I'd like to include republicans in that.

Mr. Bryan: I welcome the distinguished ex-president to a companionship in this respect which we shall both enjoy.

Mr. Putnam is reported to have said: "The presence in the cabinet of a man like W. J. Bryan, who shamefully misrepresented our country in his interviews with Dumba and in other ways, etc." Let me say in advance that I am not surprised that people should be misled. Those who have nothing but the eastern metropolitan press to rely upon are fortunate if they get any truth whatever; they are the more easily excused if they do not get all the truth. Mr. Putnam, while his tone did not indicate that conscientious search for truth which is sometimes rewarded by success, was, probably, honestly misled by reports which I have tried to correct, but I have found that corrections of misrepresentation do not travel as rapidly as the misrepresentations themselves, and they are not always found upon the same page or under the same attractive headlines.

Ambassador Dumba called at the state department and it happened to be at a time when the President was in New York. Immediately after the interview I wrote out a report and sent it to the President, and received his approval of what I had said. When, a few days afterwards, I heard that my conversation with the ambassador had been misrepresented, I immediately called him to the state department, read over to him the report of the interview which I had made to the President, received from him a written statement certifying to the correctness of the report, and that was sent to Austria, his government, and to Berlin and to the President. It was after that that I resigned and if you will read the letter which the President wrote at the time of my resignation you will either have to doubt his good faith in what he said or you will have to cease criticizing me for the Dumba incident, for he knew all about it and, neither at that time nor since, complained of anything said.

The thing—if I may be pardoned for speaking of the subject of the conversation—the thing that was misrepresented or misinterpreted was this: I said to the ambassador that the fact that lives were lost in the sinking of the ship made the controversy with Germany different from the controversy with Great Britain, which only affected loss of trade; that the people could not consider a loss of life in the same light or treat it in the same way that they did an injury to trade. That was the distinction I made; it was a misinterpretation placed upon it that I had occasion to correct. The statement that I made and the distinction that I drew is one that I suppose has been drawn, and I think very properly, by every one who has discussed this subject.

I am very glad to present the facts in this case. I believe that a man in public life should be held responsible for everything that he does, but it is only fair that the facts should be known and that he should be judged upon facts and not upon misrepresentations of the facts.

Before taking up the particular subject which I desire to discuss, I shall dwell for a moment upon the plans of the League to Enforce Peace, and I will say to you that, in dissenting from those who support those plans, I give myself more embarrassment than I give those who rep-

resent them. I know the distinguished gentleman who is at the head of this league too well to doubt for a moment that he desires to have every possible criticism candidly stated, for I know he desires the triumph of that which is right much more earnestly than the triumph of any particular thing in which he may believe.

The names of those who stand sponsor for this League to Enforce Peace create a very strong presumption in its favor, but it seems to me, as I view it, that there are four objections to the plan and that these objections are of such great weight and importance that they deserve to be considered by those who have this plan in contemplation or who are inclined to support it.

The first is that it involves us in entangling alliances with Europe, and that we, therefore, can not adopt it without abandoning the advice of Washington which has been followed thus far and will, I believe, continue to be followed by the American people. I have not the slightest thought that any argument that can be presented in behalf of any plan that connects us with the quarrels of Europe will ever bring to the support of that plan anything like a majority of the American people.

Now, as I understand this plan, we are to agree with other nations of the world, to enforce peace and to enforce it by compelling all of the contracting powers to submit all of their controversies for investigation before going to war. I need not tell you that the plan of investigating ALL questions is one that I heartily approve. It is now more than ten years since I began to urge in this country and in other countries, a plan, which has finally been embodied in thirty treaties, which submits every question of dispute of every kind and character to investigation and gives a period of a year for that investigation during which time the contracting parties agree that there shall be no resort to force; I am committed to the plan of investigation. The point I make is this, that, when we join with other nations to enforce that plan, we join with them in attempting to settle by force the disputes of the old world. While the chances of a resort to force may be very remote, I am not willing to speculate on a proposition about which we can know absolutely nothing; I am not willing that this nation shall put its army and navy at the command of a council which we can not control and thus agree to let foreign nations decide when we shall go to war. Now, if I understand this plan, you can not agree with other nations to enforce peace by compelling the submission of all questions to investigation before war, without lodging with some power somewhere the right to decide when that force shall be employed. We can not hope to have a controlling influence in that body; I assume that it would be impossible to secure any kind of an agreement which would leave us to decide when these nations would enforce a proposition. My first objection, therefore, is that it necessarily entangles us in the quarrels of Europe and that we would go, blindfolded, into an agreement, the extent and effect of which no human mind can know.

The second is that if we join with Europe in the enforcement of peace over there, we can hardly refuse to allow Europe to join in the enforcing of peace in the western hemisphere. If I understand the sentiment of the American people, there is not the slightest thought in the American mind of surrendering the Monroe Doctrine or of inviting any foreign nation to assist us in maintaining peace in the western hemisphere.

The third objection is that our constitution vests in congress the right to declare war and that we can not vest the power to declare war in a council controlled by European nations without changing our constitution. The suggestion that we so amend our constitution as to vest in a body, whose control is across the sea, the right to declare war would not be popular in the United States. If we are to change the constitution from what it is now I am in favor of putting the declaring of war in the hands of the people, to be decided by a referendum vote of the American people. This is quite different from surrendering, into the hands of a foreign body, the right to determine when this nation shall take up arms.

The fourth objection that I see to this plan is

fundamental and can not be changed by a suggestion that I shall make in a moment. The fourth objection is that when we turn from moral suasion to force, we step down and not up. I prefer to have this nation a moral power in the world rather than a policeman. Therefore, while I have no doubt whatever of the high motives and of the laudable purpose of those who stand for the doctrines of the league, I can not bring myself to believe that it is a step in advance.

Three of the objections mentioned might be obviated if we divided the world into groups, the American group being entrusted with the maintenance of peace in the western hemisphere. I would be much more willing to join with the republics of Central and South America in any plan that would compel the submission of all disputes in this hemisphere to investigation before war than to favor a plan that would bind us to enforce decisions made by nations across the ocean, or even obligate us to join European nations in COMPELLING investigation before war.

And in addition to all the other objections—and there are so many that I shall not take time to give them all—when this league embraces European nations and puts them in a position where they can decide questions of war for us, there is this consideration that I think will not be treated lightly by the American people. If we are in a group of American republics, we are associated with people having our form of government, but the moment we cross the ocean, we tie ourselves to a theory of government from which our people dissented a century and a third ago. If I understand the heart of the American people, they still believe that there is an essential difference between a monarchy and a republic. So long as the European monarchies vest in their executives the right to declare war, it seems to me that the American people can well refuse to tie themselves to these countries and become thus "unequally yoked together."

As I said, if we are going to have any change in our constitution, I want it to be a change in the direction of democracy, and not a change in the direction of a monarchy. Our people will consider very seriously before they will join this country with countries with hereditary rulers and thus give to these rulers an influence over us which we deny to our own executives.

Now I have presented, as briefly as I could, the objections that I see to this plan to enforce peace and I shall be very glad if it can be so modified as to make it consistent and harmonious with the ideas of the American people and the institutions of the United States, for these gentlemen do not surpass me in the desire to do whatever can be done to make war impossible.

I ask you to bear with me for a moment while I speak of the nation's attitude on two or three phases of the subject now under consideration. First, as to whether we shall go into this war: there are very few people who say that we should. I believe they had a meeting in New York not long ago, and one in Boston, at which the speakers said that it was our duty to go into this war. The virus has not yet been carried across the Allegheny mountains; we have had no such meetings in the west. My fear is not that we shall deliberately decide to go into this war; my fear is that, following the diplomacy of the old world, we may do the things that will bring us into this war, even though we do not desire to enter it. You will remember that all the rulers who entered this war entered it PROTESTING THAT THEY WANTED PEACE, but they followed the precedents that lead to war. My contention is that the precedents of the past have broken down, that they have involved the world in a war without parallel; and that they ought not to be followed in this country if they will tend to bring us into the war. And so, where I have had a chance to speak to the people—and I have been improving every opportunity for some ten months—I have presented the alternatives which I think we can choose instead of going to war.

In the first place, if diplomacy fails, we have a peace plan. It was offered to all the world. It has been embodied in thirty treaties with one billion three hundred million of the human race. We have now three-quarters of the globe connected with us by these treaties, and three nations that have not signed the treaties have endorsed the principle. We have almost the entire civilized world bound to us either by treaties, actually made or by agreement upon the principle which the treaty embodies, providing that EVERY DISPUTE OF EVERY KIND shall, before hostilities begin, be submitted to an international tribunal for investigation and report. Four of the belligerent nations have signed