

The President for "the Greatest Navy in the World"

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Bewildered surprise seems to be the first reaction of the editorial writers in all the camps to President Wilson's assertion that the American navy "ought, in my opinion, to be incomparably the greatest navy in the world"—a declaration that drew from his St. Louis audience of 18,000, we are told, a roar of applause that "made the Coliseum rock." "Taking this at its literal face-value," says a Massachusetts editor, "it out-Gardners Gardner and out-Roosevelts Roosevelt"; and even so loyal a champion of the administration as the New York World (dem.) suggests that the President "allowed the enthusiasm of the moment to carry him too far." "If he meant the statement to be merely the theoretical expression of a confessedly unattainable ideal, he may have been right," adds The World; but "if he meant it to be the statement of a practically feasible ambition, it seems to us obvious that he was wrong." The Charleston Post (Ind. dem.) remarks that this unexpected advocacy of a navy greater than any other "has almost stunned the advocates of 'adequate preparedness,' and there is a general confusion of mind over the whole question, perhaps greater than before Mr. Wilson went into the west to preach the doctrine of national defense." Many who feared that he would not go far enough in his recommendations, this South Carolina paper adds, "now are fearful that he has gone too far." Is he being carried away, it asks, by the proverbial zeal of the new convert? "Mr. Wilson's big navy caps Colonel Roosevelt's big army, and, as far as the public can see, neither is necessary," remarks the New York Commercial (com.), which believes in "reasonable preparedness." "There is a demand that we should stand second as a naval power, and a good second at that," admits the Philadelphia Inquirer (rep.); but it thinks that the goal set by the President "is little short of unattainable." "Is it possible," asks another republican paper, the New York Tribune, "that the President, who still retains Joseph Daniels as secretary of the navy, with all that this means, is actually and sincerely a convert to a policy of naval expansion which makes a 'little-navy' man of Theodore Roosevelt?" "It is a mighty good thing," remarks the Duluth News Tribune (rep.), "that President Wilson is back in the cooling atmosphere of Washington." Other anti-administration papers accuse him of "playing politics," while democratic journals advance many earnest arguments against the "greatest-navy" idea, among them the enormous cost, and the fact that it would be a stumbling-block in the way of disarmament at the close of the war. Here is the passage in the St. Louis address which, as the Washington Post (ind.) remarks, "has aroused no end of talk and bids fair to cause no little confusion":

"Do you realize the task of the navy? Have you ever let your imagination dwell upon the enormous stretch of coast from the canal to Alaska, from the canal to the northern coast of Maine? There is no other navy in the world that has to cover so great an area, an area of defense, as the American navy. And it ought, in my judgment, to be incomparably the greatest navy in the world."

Some editors remind us that the general board of the navy, of which Admiral Dewey is president, registered its conviction in its last year's report to the navy department that the United States navy "should ultimately be equal to the most powerful maintained by any other nation in the world," and that this rank should be attained "not later than 1925." But even this stops short of the President's idea of a navy "incomparably the greatest in the world, altho it goes far beyond the five-year naval program which he outlined to congress two months ago, and which the Springfield Republican estimates would not put our navy even in second place. Our present navy, as the President stated in one of his recent speeches, is ranked by experts fourth among the world's navies. It costs us now, in round numbers, \$145,000,000 a year, notes the Brooklyn Eagle (ind. dem.), which estimates that to make it "incomparably the greatest" would mean an annual expenditure of \$725,000,000. But it is obvious, this paper goes

on to say that such a navy "could not be manned, supplied, coaled, or provisioned without the backing of the world's largest merchant marine":

"One out of every four vessels flying the British flag is now in the service of the British government, and the other three are sailing under government direction. The only way to develop such a merchant marine is by some sort of government aid. If we allow \$275,000,000 a year for the creation and maintenance of the huge transport fleet which will be essential to 'incomparably the greatest navy in the world,' we reach that \$1,000,000,000 total which became famous when, a few years ago, we had our first 'billion-dollar congress.' In other words, 100 cents out of every dollar which the United States is spending today for all governmental purposes will have to be devoted to the navy alone."

This billion-dollar estimate is also figured by Representative Thomas S. Butler, republican, of Pennsylvania, of the house naval committee, who fears that the President's declaration "may bring about the defeat of the whole naval program." Representative William A. Browning, of New Jersey, another republican member of the Naval committee, lines himself up with the President "for the largest navy," while Representative Frank Buchanan, of Illinois, a democrat on the same committee, thinks that the President "is evidently in accord with the Wall street financial and commercial pirates, who desire a navy for aggression, not for defending our shores." Other democrats on the committee, when questioned by a correspondent of the New York Herald (ind.) refused to comment on the President's statement. The Washington correspondent of the Chicago Herald (ind.) reports that the "little-navy" democrats, headed by Representative Kitchin, "will fight more bitterly the administration's program, since, it appears, militarism and navalism are being fed on militarism and navalism." And he quotes a "high-ranking officer" as saying:

"It would be an impossibility for the United States to catch up with Great Britain, and perhaps with Germany, during the next few years. They have the shipyards, the skilled labor, and the institutions for turning out officers and men. We have a few shipyards, our skilled labor is limited, and our educational institutions have a small capacity."

It is "arrant nonsense" to talk of this country needing such a huge fleet, says the New York Journal of Commerce (com.), "unless it intends to enter upon a policy of bullying at sea that will needlessly make enemies of nations to whom the safety of the sea is quite as important as it is to us." And The World, which thinks that "an incomparable navy is an idle dream," remarks:

"Unfortunately Great Britain, with nothing but imported food-supplies standing between her population and prompt starvation, is convinced that her 45,000,000 mouths to feed, rather than our thousands of miles of seacoast, furnish the vital need for naval supremacy."

"Wedded to this not unreasonable conviction and with an overwhelming naval superiority over us to start with, Great Britain will never stand by and see our navy become comparable with her own, let alone incomparable. She will hold her present superiority, which is greatly enhanced through wartime construction, by building ship for ship with us as long as she is financially able to do so."

The same argument is advanced by Oswald Garrison Villard in his antimilitaristic New York Evening Post (ind.). Mr. Villard goes on to say:

"If we are to enter into a rivalry with England in the matter of building ships, Heaven only knows where it will end. Should congress give the President his way it would result in the most dangerous naval rivalry the world has ever seen, which, if the analogy of the German naval-building program of 1901 holds, can have but one ending—a conflict between the two forms of Anglo-Saxon civilization, than which, we have been told, there could be nothing worse for the world's democratic development."

Moreover, he asks, will not this declaration in favor of an incomparable navy "prove to be a

terrible stumbling-block in the way of disarmament at the close of the war?" Writing from Washington, he continues:

"It was bad enough when the President's original program was proposed: that, as a number of German and English newspapers have pointed out, put the gravest obstacle in the way of disarmament. It is being asked here today whether this latest development does not make it almost hopeless. For it must be noted that in this big-navy debacle of the President he has never once expressed the wish that this should be a temporary condition, or gone out of his way to say that, if the opportunity for universal disarmament should come, the United States would take the lead in laying down arms. That is one of the most discouraging features about it all."

If the President really believes that our navy should be the greatest in the world, some anti-administration organs remark, then he is hopelessly at odds with his secretary of the navy. "Of all the stabs at Danielism this is the cruelest," remarks the New York Tribune, which adds:

"If Mr. Wilson's conversion is real, then all that Mr. Daniel has ever stood for has become unreal. Shall he, too, suffer conversion, or shall he lay down his office, as Mr. Bryan did? That is the unhappy choice which now confronts the Secretary of the Navy. That is the nub and kernel of the Josephan tragedy."

But voices are heard in approval as well as in criticism of the "greatest-navy" idea. The United States is rich and fully able to build the largest navy in the world if it needs such a navy," remarks the Salt Lake Tribune (rep.). We must have enough naval power to defend the freedom of the seas, says the Milwaukee Sentinel (rep.):

"So far as our country is concerned, the 'freedom of the seas' is measured by the outward and visible ability of the American navy as a fighting force. That ought to be plain enough even to the meanest American comprehension at a time when the 'Mistress of the Seas' is doing about as she pleases, even to the larcenous degree of looting our postal service with neutral countries."

If the President intended his words "to be taken without qualification as the expression of a national policy for which he purposes to labor," says the Springfield Republican (ind.), then their consequences "outweigh whatever else he has said on his trip." But "in view of the fact that his utterance was in flat contradiction of the actual naval program which he laid before congress in his annual message and which he can not now repudiate," the Springfield paper classes his "greatest-navy" declaration as a "serious error" committed under the exhilaration of his "first plunge into the whirlpool of crowded psychology," and contact with "enormous crowds tremendously vocal in their approval."

Conscription means enforced military service. It means that men who do not want to be soldiers must be soldiers, and any system which is intended to compel any part of the male citizenry of America to serve one month or two months or any other part of a year is conscription, even though it be designated as military training.

MAMMON, THE WAR GOD

"To safeguard peace, we must prepare for war"—

I know that maxim, it was forged in hell. The wealth of ships and guns inflame the vulgar And makes the very war it guards against. The god of war, is now a man of business With vested interests.

So much sunk capital, such countless callings. The Army, Navy, Medicine, the Church To bless and bury. Music, Engineering, Red Tape Departments, Commissariats, Stores, Transports, Ammunition, Coaling Stations,

Fortifications, Cannon-Foundries, Shipyards, Arsenals, Ranges, Drill-Halls, Floating Docks, War loan Promoters, Military Tailors, Camp Followers, Canteens, War Correspondents, Horse Breeders, Armorers, Torpedo Builders, Pipe clay and medal Vendors, Big Drum Makers, Gold Lace Embroiderers, Opticians, Buglers, Tent Makers, Banner Weavers, Powder Mixers, Cork Limb Manufacturers, Balloonists, Mappists, Hellographers, Inventors, Flying Men and Diving Demons.

Beelzebub and all his hosts, who whether in water, earth or Air, among them pocket, when trade is brisk a million pounds a week.

—Isreal Zangwill.