

The Disarmament Conference

The conference on the limitation of armaments, originally called to meet in Washington, Nov. 11, met for its first session at 10:30 a. m., Nov. 12. President Harding came in at 10:33 and immediately Secretary Hughes called the conference to order.

Prayer was offered by the President's pastor, the Rev. W. S. Abernathy of Calvary Baptist church.

Immediately at the conclusion of the prayer President Harding rose and began the delivery of his address. The delegates at the main table followed the address, reading line by line from copies they had. The audience and some of the delegations came to their feet applauding when Mr. Harding declared America wanted "less of armament and none of war," and wanted to work to that end.

Arthur J. Balfour nominated Secretary Hughes for chairman of the conference, and John W. Garrett of Baltimore, former minister to the Netherlands was selected as secretary-general of the conference.

Secretary Hughes in a short speech accepted the chairmanship, and presented his proposals for the limitation of naval armaments and for a naval holiday.

As summarized by the Associated Press, the principal features of the American plan propose:

That for not less than ten years, competitive naval building cease as between Great Britain, the United States and Japan.

That all capital ships building or planned be scrapped and a few recently placed in the water be destroyed within three months of ratification of the agreement.

That the older ships, also be destroyed, reducing the British force to twenty-two battleships, the American to eighteen and the Japanese to ten, each ship to be retained being named.

That during the agreement no capital craft be laid down except under a detailed replacement scheme included in the proposal, which would provide for ultimate equality of the British and American fleets and for a Japanese force at 60 per cent of the strength of either of the other two.

That all other naval craft be similarly provided for in the same ratio, specific figures for aggregate tonnage in each class being laid down.

That naval aircraft be disregarded in the scaling down processes as a problem incapable of solution of commercial aircraft for war purposes.

That no naval building be undertaken in any of the three countries on foreign account during the agreement.

That no capital ships hereafter laid down exceed 35,000 tons.

That the life of a battleship shall be fixed at twenty years, and that ships to be replaced shall be destroyed before the replacement vessel is more than three months passed completion.

That no battleship replacements whatever be undertaken for ten years from date of the agreement.

That no combat craft be acquired except by construction and none be so disposed of that it might become part of another navy.

That regulations to govern conversion of merchant craft for war purposes be drawn up, because of the importance of the merchant marine "in inverse ratio to the size of naval armaments."

Those are the features of the sweeping challenge Secretary Hughes presented to the other naval powers. There was complete detail covering every phase of the question, but the essence of the proposal lay in this: That the United States offered to go far beyond what she asked Great Britain or Japan to do, viewed from the financial losses involved.

The whole American big shipbuilding program is on the stocks while Great Britain has no capital ships under construction and the Japanese "eight and eight" program is as yet largely on paper.

The conference adjourned at 12:22 o'clock until Tuesday, Nov. 15, at 11 a. m.

SECRET DIPLOMACY BAR TO SUCCESS

(Below will be found the first of the series of press dispatches by Mr. Bryan on the limitation of arms conference, called to meet at Washington, Nov. 11. These dispatches are carried by the United Press to a list of newspapers throughout the United States, and for the convenience of our readers who desire a complete report of the conference in suitable

form for reference, the entire series will be reproduced in subsequent issues of The Commoner.—Ed.)

Washington, Nov. 11.—The first question to come before the conference is whether the session shall be open or secret.

Diplomacy says secret; but opposition from diplomacy is an argument for open sessions, rather than against them. Diplomacy, as we have had it in the past, has been a fruitful cause of war. Things done in secret became the cause of war—things that would not have been done at all but for the secrecy permitted.

The peace conference at Versailles specifically condemned secret treaties and pledged the contracting governments against such secret treaties in the future. This doctrine has been endorsed by all the nations save the United States, and no objection was made to this particular provision in this country. The United States senate has very wisely requested the American delegation to use their influence to secure open sessions.

There was much more reason for secrecy at Versailles than here, because this conference is called primarily for reduction, or, as some say, limitation of armaments, and this is the one question upon which the eyes of the world are centered and in which the heart of the world is interested.

The nations represented here have parliamentary governments, and their people understand the responsibility of the representative. They know that he does not speak for himself, but for those whom he represents. Record votes are required so that he cannot evade the questionings of his constituents. Everyone who is acquainted with parliamentary bodies knows what a difference it makes whether the representative goes on record.

I have seen a motion carried by a large majority on a viva voce vote, and defeated on a large majority on a roll-call immediately afterwards.

This is the most momentous gathering held within the memory of man and, as Lloyd George has recently said, may become the most important gathering held in 1900 years. With the welfare of a whole world at stake, the welfare of the public outweighs the consideration of personal feelings, or even the wishes of governments.

In the recent war, the loss of life directly and indirectly was estimated at thirty millions, the destruction of property at three hundred billions, and the war added to the debts of the world a sum five times as great as the world owed when the first gun was fired.

The question now is whether the world will turn over a new leaf and seek to end war through the progressive reduction of armaments, or face world bankruptcy. At such a time, the friends of peace cannot afford to surrender any advantage, and publicity is not only an advantage but the most valuable one.

It is not necessary to conclude that those who love darkness rather than light in this matter do so for the reason given in the Bible, namely that "their deeds are evil;" it may be because they prefer to shield themselves and their governments by saying behind closed doors what they would not dare to say publicly, and with the best of motives. But the benefits of open sessions are so obvious as to outweigh any objections that may be raised.

In so tremendous a change, the representative is naturally more timid than the people; he is fearful that he may make a mistake. Why not give him the benefit of any protest his action may arouse. If he makes a mistake, it is better to find it out immediately, before it is too late to correct it.

Let there be light.

W. J. B.

DISARMAMENT AND INVESTIGATION

Washington, Nov. 14.—The air is still vibrating with the thrilling news of yesterday. A spirit of hope pervades the capital.

Those who doubted while they waited for the delegates to assemble, now feel quite sure that, so far as fleets are concerned, the question is practically settled.

They argue that this government has, in all probability, already sounded the governments of Great Britain and Japan and knows that they will in due time announce their acceptance of the plan of scrapping more than half of all the battleships afloat and will suspend building new ones for ten years.

They go farther; they argue that no govern-

ment can reject the American offer, without being overthrown by the people at home. Everywhere the world is weary of war and oppressed by the taxation imposed by war.

The debts of the world are more than six times as great as they were when the first gun was fired. All the surging dissatisfaction among the people would mass behind a protest if any government stood in the way of this long step toward disarmament.

At the first session, Premier Briand of France seemed to excite more personal interest than any of the other delegates, possibly because it was his first visit, and he was not only a stranger but a representative of one government that has always expressed itself conditionally in the matter of disarmament. France puts the question of security first; an agreement to disarm depends upon provisions that will give France a sense of security from danger.

Briand might easily be taken for an American lawyer or politician. He gives an appearance of solidity and poise. He speaks without embarrassment, and so modulates his musical voice as to make it winning in its melody. His gestures, though few, are appropriate, and his emphasis makes you feel that you understand what he is saying, even when you do not know the French language.

The conference will find that disarmament will be greatly aided by an international tribunal for the settlement of disputes. Heretofore, war has been the only means provided for the arbitrament of international questions.

For this reason every nation of importance has had a war department and nearly all a navy department also. They have had an organized force for use on land and sea, and they have usually resorted to compulsory service. No substitute for war is sufficient that does not cover all war producing causes. As long as nations regard war as a necessity they will prepare for it, and while they regard preparation necessary they will not agree to anything that looks toward universal disarmament.

Fortunately, the conference will have at hand and immediately available a plan thoroughly understood and universally approved, namely, the plan which provides for the investigation of all disputes before resort to war.

Arbitration treaties cannot cover the subjects out of which war is most likely to grow. All of our arbitration treaties contain three exceptions, viz.: independence, vital interests and the interests of third parties. "Vital interests" alone comprehends every real cause of war, so that arbitration was only compulsory in few and relatively unimportant matters. The treaties for investigation closed the gap and left no cause out of which war could come without a period of investigation.

In the thirty treaties negotiated by the United States with nearly all the leading nations, one year's time was provided for investigation and report, during which the contracting parties were pledged not to resort to force, but they reserved the right to decide at the end of that period upon their own course and to act independently.

These treaties make war almost impossible between the United States and the governments with which the treaties were negotiated—governments which represented about three-quarters of the population of the globe.

The plan of these treaties was incorporated in the covenant of the league of nations and has therefore been approved by all the nations represented in this conference. The United States Senate made no objection to this portion of the covenant, as the proposed reservations will show.

It would seem easy therefore to extend, as far as possible, the jurisdiction of courts of arbitration and then establish an international tribunal with power to investigate all disputes which are not submitted to arbitration. With such a tribunal provided for, the probability of war would be so lessened that the nations will be willing to go farther in the direction of disarmament than they would without provision being made for some such tribunal. It may be added that disarmament greatly increases the value of these tribunals for investigation; the less provision there is made for armies and navies, the less the likelihood of the violation of any treaty.

It will be remembered that the covenant of the league of nations coupled these two peace propositions together; investigation was provided for and progressive reductions or armaments pledged.

Such a tribunal should be empowered to consider any and every cause which can produce friction between nations, including any claims that any nation may feel justified in making for addition to its territory. The purchase of unoc-