WAR OR ARBITRATION ?

When at the democratic presidential convention Bryan converted a hopeless minority into the winning majority, and thereby made Mr. Wilson President, it was a foregone conclusion, that he would take a leading part in the administration. At that time, domestic issues dominated: the controversy being between progressive and conservative, between governmental centralization and decentralization. Soon after, the Mexican war became threatening and then the European war broke out and found our national administration without the diplomatic talent needed to watch the country's interest in the critical situation, and erratic have been our international activities ever since. In numerous treaties with other nations, we have established a new and higher procedure of dealing with international controversies, the principle of judicial investigation before action; but when the first real controversy with a foreign nation arose, we disregarded the principles which we laid down, and reverted to the old method, which had brought about the European war, and which is nothing but the law of the mining camp: "first fire, then acquire". We went on record, that embargo placed on the exportation of ammunition during a war would be a violation of neutrality, but

not long before this, the same administration during the Mexican war placed an embargo on the export of ammunition. Thus either our previous stand was right: then we now are violating the neutrality by actually assisting the one belligerent against the other; or our present position is right: then we have in the Mexican incident given proof to the worst accusation made by our Spanish sister republics in the South, that in dealing with them, we disregard right and law and appeal to brute force. We proclaim to be a democracy, and point to the European war as the terrible result of irresponsible secret diplomacy, and then some of our leading men tell us, that in this critical period we should leave the country's destinies entirely in the hands of a single man, and not embarrass him by criticism, even if we believe that his attitude is dangerous to the safety of the country, and threatens to embroil us in a war which none of us desires. This is autocracy, and not the attitude of a free republic. Under democratic government, as long as the die is not yet cast, as long as war is not yet declared, it is not only the right, but the duty of every citizen to fully express his opinion in critical situations as the present, and to exert all his efforts against action which he considers as against the public welfare; only when final action is taken and is irrevocable, then all citizens must rally around the government, and would in America, no matter from what country the citizens or their ancestors hail from.

If international relations shall ever emerge from the law of the mining camp, then the same principles, which are the foundation of national law in all leading civilized nations, must be applied. The two fundamental principles of law are: 1) neither the complainant nor the defendant can be the judge, but the judge or arbitrator must be non partisan. 2) Judgment must not be given until all the facts are ascertained beyond any doubt. A just and dignified method of dealing with international controversies, such as now threaten our relations with Germany, and our relations with England, thus would be, to submit the question to a board of investigation mutually agreed upon and comprised of nations not involved in the controversy, and to postpone any hostile action for one year. If within this year, the controversy is not settled, then recourse to arms may be had. This I understand is the principle established by the United States in the numerous arbitration treaties which we agreed upon, but disregarded in the present controversies with European nations. It does not entirely excludes war, as other suggestions of "judicial arbitration", and "settlement by an international court" attempt - in vain, as I believe history has proven. It does not demand peace at any price and threatens us with the fate of China, but war would remain the ultimate recourse where irreconcilable differences of interest exist. At the same time, there is no doubt that most of the wars would be avoided, especially

those due to popular frenzy brought about by some wrong or fancied wrong, as a year gives time for temporary excitement to cool down and calm judgment to take its place.

The difficulty with this arrangement is that at present, powerful influence may plunge nations into war for their own selfish interests, by creating popular excitement, but it would not be possible to maintain such excitement for a year, and the interests which now produce war by exciting nations against each other, would therefore be made important, and they naturally will oppose any such judicial consideration of controversies, under some pretext or other.

Such agreement of postponing hostile action for a year might be a serious handicap to nations which are prepared for war, and which therefore find it an advantage to strike before their enemy is ready: collectivistic nations such as Japan or Germany. For America however it would be a great advantage, since we are never ready, and never will be ready for immediate war, and a year's delay, even if finally war should result, would give us time for preparation. Therefore, whatever opinion we may entertain about Mr. Bryan's attitude in other issues, it can not be denied that his attitude regarding America's controversy with European nations is consistent and in agreement with the advanced principles of international relations, laid down by the United States in treaties with other nations, closed before the war.

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