

The League and the Washington Conference

By RAYMOND B. FOSDICK

THE United States is about to make another bid for world leadership. Will it be more successful than the first one? Will the spirit that defeated the work of Mr. Wilson also defeat the plans of Mr. Harding? After the disillusionment and reaction that followed the armistice, can public opinion once more be raised to a level of clarity and strength that will make partisan issues and personal interests subservient to the welfare of the whole human race?

These are the questions that fill the minds of all those whom the war waked out of the old dream of national self-sufficiency. The call issued by the President to a limited number of great powers for a conference at Washington in November is primarily concerned with the problem of disarmament. This question is so imperative that no thinking man dares quibble about the means used in arriving at its solution. If the action of the President leads to any relief from the overwhelming burdens that the peoples of all countries have borne because of their fears of each other, no man, whether Republican or Democrat, conservative or progressive, can fail of approval and congratulation. But just because the problems involved are so pressing, those who are most eager for a solution are anxiously watching the steps taken by the President, not in a spirit of fault-finding, but only in the hope that obstacles may be avoided and everything done that can be done to ensure ultimate success.

Studying the conference in this spirit, the first thing that strikes an observer is its limited character. Fault has been found, repeatedly and bitterly, with the fact that the League of Nations in its original proceedings did not include the representatives of the entire civilized world. The war, with its insuperable cleavages, accounted for the exclusions in this case, and even then these exclusions were never meant to be anything but temporary. At its birth the League had a possible membership of forty-five nations and an actual membership of thirty-eight. Today it has a membership of forty-eight. Seven-eighths of the civilized world are represented in its deliberations.

Mr. Harding's conference is to be composed of the delegates of only six powers. These six powers represent undoubtedly a stronger armed force on land and sea than any other combination of nations in the world. If it be simply a question of enforcing their will, they may succeed in achieving their aim. But the leadership of force has been tried and found wanting. If the war so recently concluded meant anything in its outcome, it was that world leadership shall never again be based on armies and navies. To carry the world with them in this new venture, these six powers must win the good-will and voluntary cooperation of the rest of the nations. They must have behind them the united public opinion of forty or more lesser States. The question is whether the right path to that goal begins at a conference from which the overwhelming majority of the world's nations are completely excluded.

Already the chorus of protest is beginning to rise. Spain is dissatisfied, Holland and Belgium feel particularly aggrieved, and the lesser States in Europe, as well as the countries in South America, regard the Washington conference with no little suspicion. In their eyes it resembles too closely the Holy Alliance; it seems to suggest a threat to enforce on the rest of the world a decision arrived at in secret by five great powers. "We are equally interested in the problems of armament and disarmament," say these smaller powers. "Are we to have no voice in the discussion? Is this matter of world-wide human impor-

ance to be settled for us by a handful of great States?"

This argument becomes the more compelling as the realization grows that international questions other than disarmament are to be discussed by the Washington conference. The problems of the Pacific and the Far East situation are to be taken up. Is it any wonder that Holland, with her extensive holdings there, should resent her exclusion from the Washington deliberations? Her stake in the decision is tremendous, and she rightly feels the indignity of the discrimination. This is to be a conference of the powerful, not of the weak; of the great, not of the small.

Moreover, it is likely that the conference will develop for discussion further questions of international significance. There is persistent rumor—let us hope it is not true—that the State Department has sounded the British Government with regard to putting the international opium situation on the agenda of the conference. Will six powers, sitting behind closed doors, determine this and other questions for the rest of humanity? Is there not danger that

the discriminatory basis of the conference may wreck beyond repair the possibility of world disarmament?

The second point that strikes an observer is the evident desire of the Washington Administration, in embarking on this new international venture, to avoid any connection with the similar venture already started by forty-eight Governments under the name of the League of Nations. Disarmament is to be the principal issue of the Washington conference. Disarmament, or rather the gradual reduction of armaments, is one of the avowed objects of the League. Moreover, this mission of the League is not merely a hope laid in the future. Its work in this direction has already begun, and begun in a scientific spirit which those familiar with the field regard as highly auspicious.

In this connection it is well to bear in mind that the five powers invited to the Washington conference are members of the League of Nations. There are undoubtedly those here who think that such membership will not matter, but recent events in Europe give strong color

to the belief that the representatives of the five powers will arrive with unabated consciousness of their duties and rights as members of the League of Nations. The American delegates may adorn themselves with blinders of any size and thickness and may thus be able to imagine that the League does not exist as far as the conference is concerned. But the world will know whenever a delegate from one of the other powers speaks that what he says is based to no little extent on data collected and resolutions formed under the auspices of the League. It will be interesting to see whether the American delegates and those directing their movements from behind the scenes can in the long run remain impervious to the logic of this ridiculous situation.

The steps taken by the League toward the gradual reduction of armaments all over the world are too well known to need repetition. Only the last one of these steps is pertinent to our discussion. It consisted of the formation on June 22, 1921, of what is called the Temporary Disarmament Commission, composed of twenty-two members.

In accordance with the system practiced by the League in several other fields, the membership of this body is made up without regard to nationality, although care was taken to have as many nations represented as possible and to avoid the over-representation of any one country. Under the Assembly resolution creating it, the membership of the Temporary Disarmament Commission is decided by personal qualifications, and each member acts not as a representative of his Government but as a private individual representing a certain field of experience and study.

This body met for the first time at Paris a few days after President Harding had given the first hint to the world about his proposals for a disarmament conference. At first it was thought that such a step by the American President would take the ground from under the feet of the League Commission. A brief but intense study of the situation by those most immediately concerned showed, however, that the differences between the two bodies were such that they could supplement each other without in any way crossing wires. The Temporary Disarmament Commission under the Presidency of M. René Viviani thereupon proceeded to organize, not as though no Washington conference had been called, but as if its work were meant for the use of that conference. The keynote struck by M. Viviani at the opening meeting was one of sincere rejoicing that the American people had at last taken a definite step to join the rest of the world in active fight against the old evil of competitive armaments. Emphasis was placed on the fact that the commission appointed by the League is technical and will deal with general principles, while the Washington conference will be political and is to deal with specific applications of those principles.

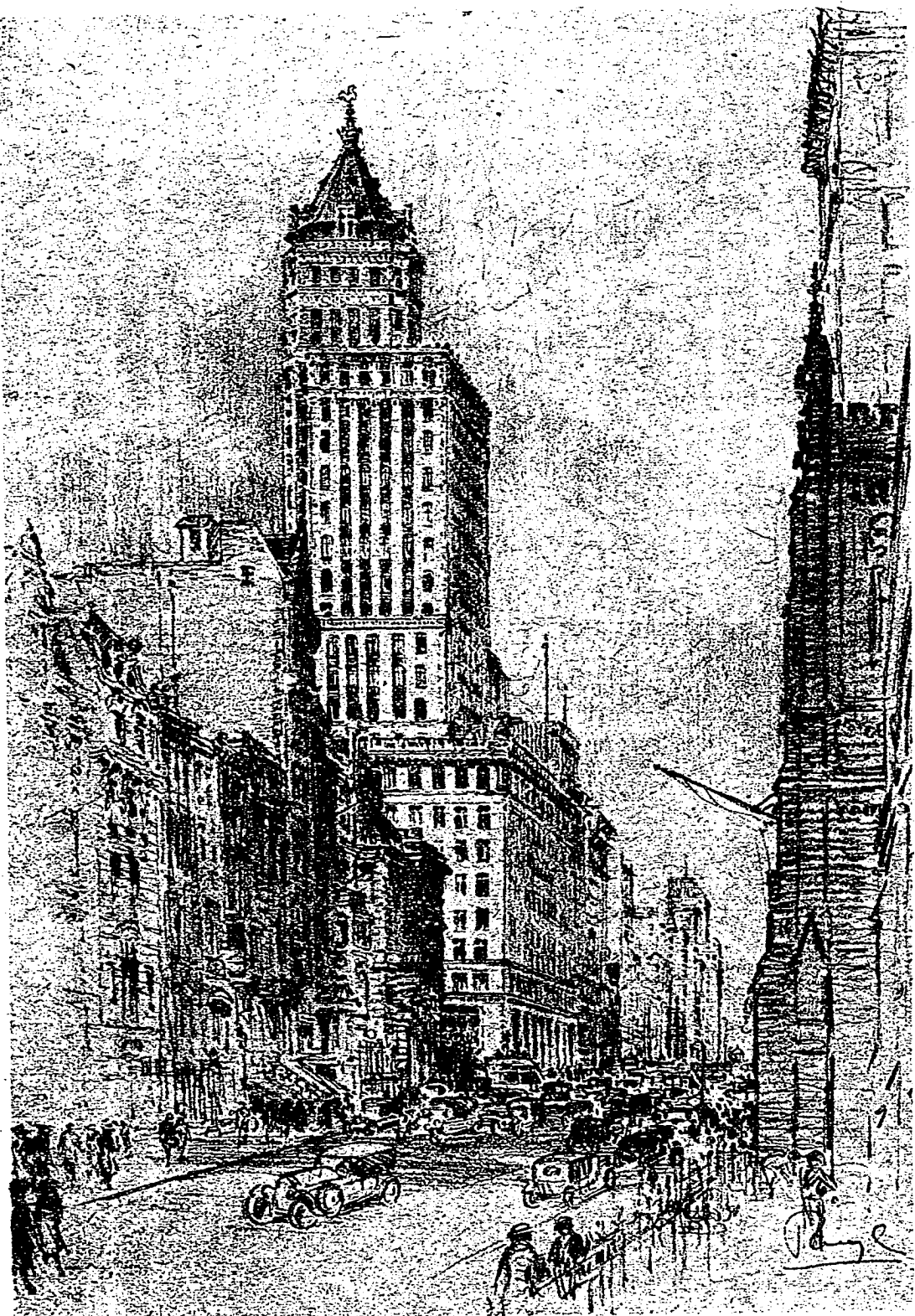
The question now is whether the men in charge of the Washington conference will show the same generous attitude toward the League Commission that the commission has shown toward the conference. The question is the more pertinent and interesting as it implies merely a receptive attitude on the part of the conference, while all the giving is left to the League Commission. Will it be a spirit of honest recognition of fact on the part of Mr. Harding and Secretary Hughes, or will they treat the League and its disarmament commission with the same studied discourtesy and hostility which have marked their attitude to date?

A few additional facts about the composition, organization, members and methods of the Temporary Disarmament Commission may help to explain the vital importance of this question. The commission has divided itself into three sub-commissions, with the following membership and objects:

Commission No. 1 is to deal with the private manufacture of arms and war material; the ratification of the Convention for the Control of the Traffic in Arms, and the establishment of a central international bureau for the control of such traffic. Its members are H. A. L. Fisher of Great Britain, Dr. Rivas Vicuña of Chile, Admiral Gough-Calthorpe of Great Britain, General Marietti of Italy, Jouhaux of France, Hodacz of Czechoslovakia and Jancovici of Rumania.

Commission No. 2 will deal with the right of investigating the armaments of ex-enemy States under the treaties of peace and with the mutual exchange of information on armaments between the members of the League. It is composed of Viviani of France, Branting of Sweden, Tatsuke of Japan, Thorberg of Sweden, Marshal Fayolle of France, General Inagaki of Japan, Jancovici

FIFTY-SEVENTH STREET FROM MADISON AVENUE



From a Drawing by Louis Ruy.

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of Rumania and Langkjaer of Denmark.

Commission No. 3 will deal with the basis for the examination of the actual state of armaments in all the Governments of the world. It is composed of Senator Schanzer of Italy, Sir James Brunyate of India, Janssen of Belgium, Professor Benini of Italy, Oudegeest of Holland, Thomas Findley of Canada, Marshal Fayolle of France, General de Magaz of Spain and Admiral Penido of Brazil.

It is to be noted that on each one of these subcommissions, which are to go to the very bottom of the whole question of how the world can rid itself of its most irksome burden, men representing widely separated walks of life are working side by side. Every subcommission includes statesmen, financiers, economists, military and naval experts, and representatives of capital and labor. These men have at their disposal figures and facts collected by the Secretariat of the League since its inception in May, 1919. Furthermore, they have at their command the answers returned by about twenty-five Governments to inquiries sent out by the Secretariat early in 1921. There is every reason to hope that additional information of every kind will be forthcoming at a steadily increasing rate. The members of the commission have already been at work formulating plans for overcoming some of the great difficulties in the way of a concerted movement for disarmament. The technical problems involved are enormous. It is not oratory, but painful study, that is going to bring us to our goal. What we want is not the pious eloquence of Presidents and Prime Ministers, but a formula.

As an example of the kind of preparatory work that is necessary may be mentioned the plan worked out for the League's Commission by Senator Schanzer of Italy for standardizing the methods used in calculating the armaments of different countries. It had been thought that the extent of their armaments might be gauged by the appropriations made for military and naval purposes rather than by the number of men under arms or the number of ships in commission. This belief was rapidly undermined when, in accordance with the Assembly resolution, the proposition was made to the various members of the League that they restrict their military and naval appropriations for 1922 and 1923 to the sums already appropriated for the fiscal year of 1921. It was shown, for instance, that Japan could maintain an army almost as large as that of the United States on a budget appropriation little more than one-fourth of what we are spending for the same purpose. Under the plan proposed by Senator Schanzer all factors entering into the question will be co-ordinated in such a way that it will be possible to determine just what each particular nation is doing or not doing to render itself safe against, or dangerous to, other nations.

Does any one believe that the conference meeting next November can develop, in the few weeks at its disposal, the material needed to make its deliberations scientifically as well as politically effective? If not, does any one think that President Harding and his associates can afford to disregard an available collection of such data freely offered for its use by the League of Nations? And if the conference places the desire for efficiency above all other considerations and accepts what is offered to it, will it not be plain to every observer that the present American attitude toward the League is as hypocritical as it is obstructive?

A large fraction of the American people have been bamboozled into thinking that the League is a frightful bogey. But what do we find when we look at the facts? We

find that the League is run, not by the selfish imperialists of Europe, but by men like General Smuts, Lord Robert Cecil, Hjalmar Branting, René Viviani and Wellington Koo. In the light of what it has attempted and achieved during the nearly two years of its existence, we discover no superstate with its capital at Geneva, no armies going from Japan to separate the Polish and Lithuanian forces near Vilna, no harsh notes demanding the payment of indemnity from the powers of Central Europe. Instead, we discover an organization with practically no physical force at its disposal and without the right to command the support or collaboration of a single member, unless that member explicitly consents. We discover a body which has repeatedly been balked in efforts that seemed desirable to the greater part of the civilized world, and which in other instances has been compelled even to refrain from making any effort at all because of the realization that it would be futile. Yet we discover also a body with a prestige that is growing proportionately to a growth of conviction throughout the world that it represents the one feasible means of rendering all nations capable of concerted action for purposes common to all. And one of the reasons why we find this growth of faith in the face of several unmistakable failures is that these failures generally are ascribed not to any short-

comings in the League itself or on the part of those guiding its destinies, but entirely to the obstructionist methods applied toward the League by the country where the idea of its establishment first took form, namely, our own.

For our official attitude has been one of barely disguised hostility, although the practical aims of the League in most cases are particularly dear to the American heart. Wherever it was possible, the American Government has directly or indirectly blocked the actions of the League, and in one instance at least it has forced the League to abandon its plan and resort to makeshift arrangements, generally recognized to be unsatisfactory in the face of the vastness of the problem involved. The League's proposal for the establishment of a public health organization covering the world had to be abandoned because the United States as a signatory of the convention establishing the Public Health Office at Paris explicitly refused to let that body enter into any co-operation with the League. Similarly, the American Government has refused to let the control of the international opium traffic become centralized under the League. Refusals of this kind have not been sent directly to the League, but have gone from Washington to the body or Government previously in charge of the matter involved. The League itself has been systematically flouted by

our State Department, which has even gone to the extreme of sending a local Consular officer to the League Secretariat with a verbal explanation that the United States, not being a member of the League, could not answer its communications.

On the other hand, this attitude of the American Government must be balanced by the increasing prominence of the suggestion that the establishment of a new association of nations be brought up for discussion by the Washington conference. It must also be studied in the light of such peculiar phenomena as the presence in Geneva for the past two months of Professor David Jayne Hill, studying the workings of the League within its very headquarters and attending the sessions of the second Assembly.

There is one obvious explanation of these apparent contradictions. This is that the real purpose of the Washington conference is not so much the discussion of disarmament and the Pacific adjustment as the accumulation of a prestige that will enable the Administration to force the establishment of a new association of nations, differing from the existing one only in having a Republican instead of a Democratic birth certificate. It seems scarcely possible that we should stoop so low. It seems incredible that America should juggle with the hopes of mankind to satisfy the exigencies of a political fight. Nevertheless, even out of this welter of intrigue and selfishness may come something worth while. The world is so sorely stricken that few if any nations can afford to quibble about particulars, and the assurance of American co-operation is so alluring that it may lead to extreme concessions on the part of the other nations. The question is, however, whether co-operation started under such circumstances would have a chance of successful development. Furthermore, it is a question whether even then we would not quickly find that the alleged substitution was one that affected only the name of the organization, and that the new association was merely the old League with a new label pasted over its front. If these misgivings are warranted, it is plain that the reported policy of Washington can lead to nothing but a loss of time, while, on the other hand, all the chances for a resumed American world leadership lie in a frank discussion by the Washington conference of the best means to enable the United States to join the present League, with such modifications and reservations as may be deemed necessary by American public opinion.