

THE PRINCIPLES OF THE NEUTRALITY POLICY OF THE UNITED STATES
1914-1917, THEIR BACKGROUND AND APPLICATION

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1914-1917, THEIR BACKGROUND AND APPLICATION

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PREFACE

This study is the result of an honest effort to discover if possible the reason for the apparent breakdown in the neutrality policy of the United States in 1917; the similarity, if any, between the causes of the entanglements in the Napoleonic Wars and the World War; and the basic principles on which the policy of non-intervention was founded.

The point of departure in this quest was the similarity between the two periods. In 1812 the use of steam power was in its infancy, nevertheless, it had revolutionized industry. In 1917 the use of electric power, the combustion engine, and improved use of steam power had again revolutionized industry. In both instances the machinery for the control of international relations, in time of war, had failed to keep pace with the improved methods of travel, transportation, and actual warfare.

In 1812 Napoleon was fighting with his back to the wall; the only hope he had of crushing England was to cut off neutral trade. The British government retaliated in kind; consequently the commerce of the United States was being destroyed. Napoleon saw a chance to involve the United States in the struggle and save himself. In 1917 Germany was fighting desperately against the ever tightening blockade. The Allies were in very much the same position as that occupied by Napoleon in 1812. The commerce of the United States was again caught between the steel jaws of the opposing forces. The English blockade and Napoleon's Continental System interfered with the neutral rights of the New England shippers and the allied industries. The 1914-1917 blockade had a more far-reaching influence on account of the industrialization

of large sections of the United States.

By the close of the year 1916, the British blockade was so very effective that the only possible chance of Germany to escape an apparently futile, long-drawn-out war seemed to be to resort to unrestricted submarine warfare, which by a long stretch of the imagination interfered with the right of all Americans to travel on the high seas at pleasure, and did in reality interfere with the privileges of a few. If carried to its logical conclusion, however, submarine warfare would have swept all commerce from the seas. American trade with the Entente would have been destroyed. In that event the "economic tailsping" mentioned by Professor Bemis probably would have been disastrous. The English Government followed the example set by the wily Napoleon to the extent that it "stalled for time" until it had positive proof that Germany intended to resume unrestricted submarine warfare.

The idealism of President Wilson was entirely inadequate to cope with the graft, greed, and double-dealing of the men with whom he had to deal both at home and abroad. They used his position as President of the United States and his idealism as a means of promoting their own selfish aims, which is additional proof that the pocketbook transcends both patriotism and morals.

The periodic breakdown of international law would be extremely discouraging were it not for the fact that each apparent collapse in modern times has been accompanied by an upward swing which has made some permanent gains in each case. For this reason, there is some foundation for the belief that the instinct for national self-preservation and the desire for economic gain will eventually outlaw war. In that event, a new world order will rise phoenix-like out of the

ashes of the gallant American boys who died fighting in 1917 and 1918
in a war to end wars.

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CHAPTER I.

DEFINITION, ORIGIN, AND SCOPE OF NEUTRALITY

The word neutrality is difficult to define satisfactorily for the simple reason that each individual interprets its meaning in terms of his own social background and experience. For instance, to the farmer or industrial laborer of the United States, neutrality means to attend strictly to one's own business; to the pacifist it implies non-participation in active warfare; to the legal mind it signifies absolute impartiality in all dealings with the belligerents (in a legal sense impartiality may be interpreted to mean total indifference.) In a technical sense:

Neutrality is a term in international law, used to describe that status of countries announcing that they will not participate in a war which has been declared between two or more powerful belligerents, and that they will claim their rights and fulfill the duties prescribed by international law.¹

In order to be strictly neutral, a non-participant would have to stand aloof and take no part whatsoever in the conflict. This would mean the entire cessation of communication, transportation, and trade between the would-be neutral and the warring nations. Such a course of action would very seriously interfere with the trade rights of the citizens of the neutral nations. On the other hand, a complete severance of trade relations with two nations engaged in a struggle for existence does not necessarily mean that neutral nations are strictly impartial. For instance, one of the belligerents might be able to produce enough food and other basic materials within its own

¹Julia E. Johnson, Com., The Neutrality Policy of the United States, p. 73.

borders to carry on war and maintain its population in a fair degree of comfort, while the other, a highly industrialized nation, might be reduced to the verge of starvation within a very short time. For these reasons, fair and impartial neutrality implies carrying on trade in time of war, barring contraband, as though no war existed. And here again complications arise. A commodity which appears to be perfectly harmless today may be classed as absolute contraband tomorrow.

So, no matter which way we turn, we are faced with the utter inadequacy of any single definition or interpretation for any one of the trouble-making terms which rise to plague statesmen and diplomats in time of war. Add to this inadequacy of definition the multiplicity of conflicting interests arising from trade relations, racial antagonisms and the inherent greed of the human race and the formulation of a workable policy of neutrality becomes an almost superhuman task.

In the dawn of civilization, the definition of neutrality was clear cut, definite and easily understood for the simple reason that all who were not friends were foes; there was no middle ground. In those days property rights were just as clearly defined. If a state could not defend its outlying territory it had no right to possess it, so far as the rest of the world was concerned. These simple ideas prevailed as long as the implements of battle were simple, warfare was confined to land and consisted of engagements between opposing forces which fought in the open and at close range. But the very instant that warfare was transferred to the sea in primitive boats, skiffs, or rafts, as the case might be, new problems arose in regard to the passage of war-parties through neutral waters and permission to make repairs in neutral territory. With the dev-

elopment of sail ships innumerable problems arose in regard to the fitting out of ships, furnishing supplies, and sojourning in neutral waters.

By the twelfth century the rise of cities, towns and guilds furnished many opportunities for non-belligerents to make increased profits by trading with warring states. The rapid extension of commercial activities destroyed the ancient concept that all who were not friends were foes. The commercial importance of the Hanseatic League caused it to develop a sufficient amount of unity of strength to enable it to demand, in the thirteenth century, some sort of rules and regulations for the protection of its ships and cargoes during the conflicts between neighboring states. Such conceptions were made grudgingly, no doubt, but they gave the embryo League enough protection to permit it to continue its activities until it had gained a sufficient amount of power to be considered a permanent organization.

It (the Hanseatic League) carried on war, entered into treaties with foreign nations; it had a league army at its disposal and a league fleet; . . . The sphere of activity of the league was essentially confined to the province of commerce; protection of commerce; . . . the closing of commercial treaties, . . . The Hanse ships in the war with England in union with Burgundy had been waging war with France since 1415, saw themselves attacked on all sides in spite of the neutral flag.²

The rapid development of international trade increased the jealousies which had existed from the very beginning of communication between states. As the jealousies increased, pretexts for waging war increased in geometrical progression; so, for mutual protection,

²J. W. Larned, The New Larned History, V, 5019.

England and France entered into commercial treaties with Flanders, in 1457, which were quite modern in terminology.

The subjects of both countries, whether dealers in wool, hides or provisions, or other articles were to have free access by land or water, with liberty to buy or sell all kinds of merchandise, except warlike stores, established when commerce had free intercourse between the two countries.³

This treaty has the modern ring to the extent that its verbosity obscures the principle involved, and because the term "warlike" stores is not defined. This leaves a loophole through which violators of the treaty could wriggle out of the responsibility of trafficking in contraband.

The Italian cities united for mutual protection a century earlier than their northern neighbors, because the influence of the Roman past, and contact with the Orient had created a demand for articles of luxury and refinement in Italy at an earlier date than in the more remote parts of Europe. The Peace of Constance, which gave them political independence from the Empire in 1163, started the struggle between individual states which ended in the supremacy of Genoa and Venice. The necessity of maintaining peaceful relations with the rest of the world became increasingly urgent as the merchant fleets of these two cities increased year after year, in size and value. This was especially true during the long struggle between Burgundy and France under Louis XI, in the latter part of the fifteenth century.

In 1492 Venice maintained a watchful neutrality against Charles the Bold It was his task to amuse his enemies with fair words, delusive proposals and treacherous promises until the time for action was past.⁴

³D. H. Trail, Social England, II, 404, 405.

⁴The Cambridge Modern History, I, 111.

After the discovery of the New World in 1492, international trade and rivalry spread like wild fire to the four corners of the globe. The spirit of the common people of Europe was fired by the competition for wealth to the extent that the desire to get rich overcame the ancient fear of the sea. For these reasons, the necessity for treaties and agreements between nations was much greater than in the days when the boldest seamen of Prince Henry the Navigator dared not sail out of sight of land. At this stage in the game of international diplomacy, there was no high moral purpose involved in the relationships between nations. According to the Cambridge Modern History: "As early as 1503, neutrality was purchased by the promise of a free hand in other territory."⁵ And, in no case did neutrality extend further than was absolutely necessary to give the belligerent the advantage in dealing with his opponents. Moreover, every neutral was a prey to the pirates of almost every nationality, who infested every nook, inlet, and bay that afforded shelter and protection. There had been some efforts made to remedy the difficulties with which neutrals had to contend. Henry V of England made an honest effort to punish pirates by establishing at all ports peace officers, whose duty it was to decide whether prizes brought into port were lawful or not. This attempt failed for lack of cooperation, because it was safer in the fifteenth century for neutrals to send their goods in foreign ships than to trust them to English ships, which were almost sure to be attacked by pirates. A form of piracy, legalized during the long struggle over supremacy of the sea, remained in practice long after the supremacy of England was established.

⁵I, 125.

But, in case a privateer, as the legalized pirate was called in diplomatic circles, exceeded his instructions, he automatically became an outlaw, and by the right of the Law of Nations the commander of any vessel could capture and hang him from the yardarm without the formality of a trial. This procedure was a decided advance over King Henry's plan to catch pirates because it gave neutrals a legal right to protect themselves.

Neutrality and international law, as the terms are understood today, did not exist at the end of the fifteenth century. In the most highly civilized countries intrigue, treachery, and piracy were justifiable. It is true that Henry IV of England had prepared what seemed to be a workable project for a court of nations which would have had power to govern trade and warfare, but his dreams for international cooperation failed to materialize and the pope continued to arbitrate the quarrels of Europe according to his own rules. And they were seldom, if ever, determined by higher motives than those which led him to divide the New World between Portugal and Spain by the Bull of Demarcation in 1493. (The Pope himself was a Spaniard under obligations to the Spanish King, and the custom of bestowing papal favor upon Portugal extended far back into the past.) However, Pope Alexander might have been more considerate of the rights of the other European countries, if he could have been permitted to draw aside the veil and catch a panoramic glimpse of the world's activities for the next six hundred years.

The papal bull of 1493 carried with it the trade privileges which led to the discovery of an all-water route to India. This galvanized both England and France into action. And by the time

the first voyage around the world had been completed by Magellan's ship, the little Victoria limping painfully into the home-port with her ghost-like crew of eighteen men, the stage was set for the long, bloody conflict which grew out of the mad scramble for the control of trade of both the East and the West Indies by the European nations. During the long struggle some attention was paid to the development of international law and the rules of neutrality, not for altruistic motives, but because the instinct for self-preservation is as strong among nations of the earth as it is among the individuals which make up their population.

By the end of the fifteenth century all of the old landmarks were gone. The invention of gunpowder had sounded the death knell of chivalry before the end of the fourteenth century. Knights in armor, fighting from the backs of horses laden with spectacular war-gear and gay trappings, were unable to compete with foot soldiers armed with guns. And the strongest castle could not withstand a siege backed by cannon which hurled projectiles from long range with sufficient force to crumble the thickest walls. The invention of the compass had turned the oceans into highways of trade and travel. Out of the use of these inventions were growing abuses which threatened to strip the last shred of civilization from the face of the earth.

This danger in turn served to attract the attention of the rulers of Europe to the necessity of revising the rules of warfare. In the meantime they began to toy with the idea of making adequate provisions for the protection of neutrals because none of them expected to be perpetual belligerents.

With this end in view, Queen Elizabeth exchanged views with

several nations on the continent in regard to such fundamental propositions as the usages of war, the definition of contraband, the right of neutrals, and the freedom of the seas, the last having been one of the main bones of contention in the long struggle between Elizabeth and Phillip II.

The destruction of the Spanish Armada in 1588 broke the sea-power of Spain. This gave England the might necessary to dictate terms in regard to what she considered right in the settlement of international disputes. Elizabeth therefore started the practice, still in use, of publishing a contraband list at the outbreak of hostilities. The other nations followed her lead, but there was no uniformity of opinion. Each nation published a list of what it would consider contraband, and started out to capture every vessel which carried any of the forbidden wares. It is true that little had been done to safeguard the rights of neutrals, but the very fact that the rulers of the more powerful nations were willing to concede the right of neutrals to carry on trade with belligerents was a long stride forward.

During the greater part of the seventeenth century, colonial rivalries occupied the attention of the great maritime powers. Wars followed each other in such rapid succession that virtually every foot of soil on the continent of Europe was soaked with the blood of men who died in the attempt to defend the views of diplomats who frequently changed their minds before the result of the battle reached the homeland.

The conquest of the New World raised many legal questions as to the basis upon which title to territory rested. . . . For the most part, however, legal title was regarded as of small consequences, and the victors on the battlefields of Europe dictated, as at the Peace

of Paris 1753, the fate of the colonists across the sea.⁶

At this stage of the game the colonies were not officially recognized as having rights separate and distinct from those of the mother country. They were nothing more than a pawn in the great game of European diplomacy, which had started, so far as the American colonies were concerned, when Queen Elizabeth asserted that Spain had no right to deny English ships the privilege of trading with the West Indies. After she had won supremacy on the sea, in order to maintain the monopoly of the colonial trade of her colonies, Great Britain issued

The Proclamation . . . of the famous Rule of 1756, which denied the right of neutral states to engage in trade between belligerent colonies and the home port when such trade was closed to them in time of peace.⁷

This Rule increased smuggling to such an extent that it ceased to be a side line with colonial traders. The mother country then directed the energies of her powerful navy toward the task of forcing the colonists to stop supplying the French with ammunition and food with which to carry on the war against their English neighbors. The action of the colonists shows how far the pocketbook transcends both patriotism and morals.

As gloomy as the prospects appear to have been at this stage of the development of neutral rights, greater accomplishments had been made than appears on the surface. In 1778 France had agreed to adhere to the principle that blockades to be binding must be made effective by the use of an adequate number of battleships. The principal nations had subscribed to the tenets of the Armed Neutral-

⁶Charles C. Fenwick, International Law, p. 21.

⁷Ibid., p. 21.

ity of Catherine of Russia in 1780. And the United States had been voted into the family of nations by the recognition of its independence in the treaty of Versailles of 1783.

This background sets the stage for the long struggle over neutral rights which occupies such a prominent place in the history of the United States from the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789 to the close of the war with Great Britain in 1814. It is interesting to note in this connection that in every dispute over neutral rights, from the time Queen Elizabeth published the first contraband list in 1589 down to the end of the eighteenth century, the scope of neutrality was limited when neutral trade rights interfered with the methods being used by belligerents to crush their respective opponents. Though, despite frequent setbacks and limitations imposed by powerful belligerents in time of war, tangible gains had been made over the ancient rule that all who were not friends were foes.

CHAPTER II

TWENTY YEARS OF NEUTRALITY FOR THE UNITED STATES
1792-1812

The neutrality policy of the United States, from the moment of its conception, was based on the ideal of fair and impartial treatment of all nations engaged in war. This meant, of course, that commercial relations between America and Europe would continue in time of war the same as in peace, with the exception that commodities considered contraband, according to the rules of international law, would not be sold to warring nations. This policy was the result of the bitter experience gained by the colonists during the long series of so-called Inter-Colonial Wars.

Contrary to general belief, "Washington's Farewell Address" was not the first formal statement of the policy of non-intervention in European wars. John Adams, at the time the alliance with France was under discussion in the autumn of 1776, reminded his colleagues that it would be to the advantage of the new nation to proceed "with great caution", and with all possible foresight to avoid an alliance which would entangle it in the affairs of Europe. He also advised the wisdom of maintaining absolute neutrality in all future European wars. Adams again raised his voice in favor of neutrality at the time the Nootka Sound controversy brought the struggling little republic to the ragged edge of one of the frequent European quarrels, which had never failed to involve the colonies during the days of their dependency on the mother country. Washington's advisers were hopelessly divided, and he was uncertain in regard to the least dangerous course to pursue. At the crucial moment, Adams sagely suggested that it would be well to follow the law governing such cases, and to remain strictly

neutral in the meantime.

This episode served to remind Washington and his cabinet that the weakness of the new nation, and the fact that it was hemmed in on three sides by the territory of as many different European countries, made friendship with all of them necessary to survival.

The outbreak of the French Revolution within a week of his inauguration gave Washington food for more thought along the line of the best policy to pursue in order to prevent the infant republic from being caught in the undertow of the bloody whirlpool which he believed was certain to involve all of Europe sooner or later.

Realizing the gravity of the situation in regard to world politics, and keenly aware that the destiny of the American experiment in government was at stake, Washington called his first cabinet meeting as soon as the news of the outbreak of the general European war reached him. Again, there was no uniformity of opinion. Jefferson believed that the United States was bound by its treaty to go to the aid of France immediately. Hamilton said the United States was absolved from all obligations to France because the government with which the treaty was made no longer existed. Washington thought they were both wrong, but in view of the fact that France was fighting an offensive war, the United States was no longer bound by the treaty, which specifically stated that the alliance was defensive only.

The proclamation issued by Washington on April 22, 1793, did not contain the word neutrality. It was confined to a clear-cut, definite statement of the neutral duties of American citizens.

. . . the duty and the interest of the United States requires that they should with sincerity and good faith adopt and pursue a conduct friendly and impartial toward the belligerent powers. . . . whoever. . . shall

render himself liable to punishment or forfeiture under the law of Nations by committing, aiding, or abetting hostilities against any of the said powers by carrying to them any of those articles which are deemed contraband by the modern usage of nations will not receive the protection of the United States . . . prosecutions to be instigated against all persons who shall within the cognizance of the courts of the United States violate the law of the Nations with respect to the powers at war¹

In the midst of the storm of protests raised against this proclamation by ardent French sympathizers, Citizen Genet coolly walked into the limelight of American affairs. He was armed with several hundred commissions which he magnanimously issued to American citizens who were financially able to outfit privateers to prey upon British commerce. With more audacity than foresight, he proceeded to set up prize courts on American soil. A British ship was seized within the three mile limit. Washington thereupon issued orders that French prize courts on American soil be abandoned; that all prizes be restored to their rightful owners; and that privateers cease their activities at once. In the meantime, Hamilton refused to make payment on the debt to France on the grounds that the government from which the loan was secured no longer existed, and that payment to the existing government would violate the neutrality of the United States. Genet appealed to the people over the head of the government, and thereby caused his own recall in disgrace. Washington steadfastly refused to be swayed by the protests against his method of handling the Genet affair, and the people generally supported his defense of American dignity, after they had considered the matter in its proper perspective. The memories of Indian raids from Canada were etched

¹J. D. Richardson, Messages and Papers of the Presidents 1789-1809, I, 156, 157.

vividly on the minds of the adult population. This was a sufficient cause for the rapid veering of public opinion, which within a very short time had reached the point of approving Washington's recommendation for fair and impartial neutrality.

In 1794 congress passed a neutrality law with a definite time limit, but enacting a law and enforcing it are two entirely different matters. This is especially true in the event that enforcement curtails the liberty of influential groups to make money. Rigid enforcement in this particular case was virtually impossible on account of the diversity of opinion in regard to the matter. Many Americans were in sympathy with France (since the common people had beheaded their king and the members of the nobility), and were in favor of entering the war immediately as an ally; others were opposed to the neutrality law on general principles; and still others were in favor of any course which would embarrass or injure Great Britain.

Aside from the danger of becoming entangled through the activities of American citizens, trade rights were a constant source of anxiety to the Government. In its efforts to be fair and impartial the trade of neutral citizens was fair prey for the contending forces.

In the first place no one appeared to know what his duties were under the Law of the Nations. The terms neutral rights and neutral duties had never been clearly defined, therefore the custom established by Queen Elizabeth still prevailed. As matters stood anything which would aid an opponent in any way was considered contraband by the warring nations and as such subject to capture. According to John Bassett Moore:

There is no accepted enumeration of the articles coming within the prohibition, and to add to the dangers

of collision, the principles by which they are to be tested is so loosely defined that it is practically of little use, but to furnish a pretext where one is wanting, to enable parties at war to enlarge the contraband list at their pleasure.²

England in her efforts to conquer France, began restrictions through orders in council which the United States regarded as interference with neutral trade rights. By way of retaliation against England, France announced her intention to seize ships which carried foodstuffs. In regard to this matter Secretary of State Pickering expressed the opinion of the American government in a letter to Pinckney, minister to France, in which he said:

All the effects belonging to subjects of the nations at war, should be free on board neutral vessels, contraband excepted.³

This is one of the innumerable instances in world affairs in which a clear-cut, unmistakable definition might have saved confusion and bloodshed, for it was a very short step from the claim that food was an aid to military resistance of an opponent to the point where all trade was prohibited on one pretext or another. It is true that England promised to pay for all goods seized, and according to the letters of Stephen Higginson, goods captured by the British were not a total loss. On the other hand, shippers who fell into the hands of the French were less fortunate, for:

Their property taken by the French is lost to them forever. The French have neither the disposition nor the ability to make compensation as the British have done and will do.⁴

As the war dragged on year after year, the English navy became

²A Digest of International Law, VII, 660, 661.

³American State Papers, Foreign Relations, I, 260.

⁴American Historical Association Report 1895, I, 796.

short of sailors. The press gang, therefore, began to operate more freely than usual. The United States government admitted the right to visit and search under conditions described by the Law of Nations, but drew the line sharply at seizing men. This practice was doubly humiliating after the British officers began to take native born Americans and naturalized citizens along with English deserters. Protests against the practice of impressment were useless, for the British courts had never been known to interfere with the right of the press gang to recruit sailors in time of need. However, many of the men impressed were released after the courts had had time to look into the merits of individual cases.

All of the other belligerents tried to follow the lead of Great Britain. But, as no other country had naval strength sufficient to seriously damage American shipping, anti-British feeling ran higher than ever before. The violations of neutral rights became so flagrant in the spring of 1795 that the patience of the American people almost reached the point of exhaustion. Scores of ships and valuable cargoes were being swept into the British prize courts, and the owners could do no more than raise useless protests, cool their heels on the decks of their own vessels or in their American offices while the courts proceeded in a leisurely manner to dispose of cases as their turn came.

In the meantime Jay returned from England with a treaty which neither mentioned impressment nor defined contraband. But to add insult to injury, from the American point of view, the British government had dictated the contraband list, and, in spite of Jay's best efforts, laid down the law for neutral ships in the Article which runs:

It is agreed that in case a vessel is suspected of carrying contraband, it shall be brought to the most convenient port and only that part of the cargo which belongs to the enemy shall be made prize, the vessel shall then be at liberty to proceed.⁵

This treaty was so obnoxious that it took all of Washington's personal popularity and political influence to secure its ratification. A howl of protest was raised as soon as the full significance of the advantage England had secured dawned upon the masses of the American people. Washington was accused of taking sides with England; France was offended; and Monroe embarrassed because he had previously assured France that his government would not enter into any agreement with England which would violate its treaty of commerce and friendship with France. But, regardless of Monroe's promise to the contrary:

. . . . Jay's general acquiescence in the British system of maritime law amounted to a violation of neutrality.⁶

France expressed bitter disappointment at the peaceful settlement of Anglo-American difficulties, and anger at the terms of Jay's treaty, in particular, by seizing American vessels with or without protest.

In the midst of the turmoil at home and abroad Washington's term of office expired. His "Farewell Address" contains no hint of the disillusionment and sadness caused by the abuse of those whom he had tried to serve. It does contain, however, a restatement of the neutrality policy he had practiced during his eight years in office, and a warning against the dangers attending Old World alliances.

The great rule of conduct for us in regard to foreign nations is in extending our commercial relations to have as little political connection as possible.

⁵Wm. M. Malloy, Treaties and Conventions, etc., I, 590.

⁶John Holladay Latine, American Foreign Policy, p. 95.

Europe has one set of primary interests which to us have none or very remote relation

Our detached and remote situation invites and enables us to pursue a different course

Why forego the advantages of so peculiar a situation? Why quit our own to stand upon foreign ground? Why by interweaving our destiny with that of Europe entangle our peace and prosperity in the toils of European ambitions, rivalry, interest, or caprice?⁷

The entire country was in a state bordering perilously on anarchy at the time John Adams was inducted into office. Constant danger of Indian raids on the frontier, uncertainty in regard to the right to use the Mississippi river, and righteous anger at the treatment accorded the American government by European powers, added to the aggravation of constant interference with neutral trade rights constituted a cumulative problem of gigantic proportions. The worst feature of the whole affair, however, was the fact that any solution which would satisfy one group would tend to intensify the dissatisfaction of the other groups according to their special interests.

In his inaugural address, Adams endorsed the policy of his predecessor. He went one step further, however, by recommending that armaments and adequate convoys be provided for merchantmen engaged in European trade that was being carried on according to the rules of international law. The inherent greed of the human race must have been at the bottom of much of the trouble of that extremely "perilous time", for, according to Adams:

The greater part of the cruisers whose depredations have been injurious have been built and some of them partially equipped in the United States . . . some of our citizens abroad have fitted out privateers, and others have voluntarily taken command and committed

⁷Richardson, op., cit., I, 222, 223.

spoliations on the commerce of the United States.⁸

Adams emphasized the necessity for fair and impartial neutrality on the grounds that European powers would continue to regard the United States as "forming a weight in the balance of Europe", regardless of anything Americans might say to the contrary, and that it would be unfair to encourage that trend of thought, because

It would not only be against our interest but it would be doing wrong to one half of Europe at least, if we should voluntarily throw ourself into either scale.⁹

France, indignant at American acceptance of Jay's Treaty, insulted the minister from the United States and preyed upon neutral commerce with renewed energy during the early part of Adams' administration. The President continued to remind the people of their duties as neutrals, but, at the same time he urged congress to make provisions to defend the neutral rights of American citizens. Matters came to a climax in the summer of 1798 in an undeclared war of short duration. Before hostilities had gone too far, France let it be known in a round about way that negotiations for a peaceful settlement would not be entirely unwelcome, whereupon, Adams assumed the responsibility of resuming diplomatic relations without so much as notifying his cabinet of his intentions. This move destroyed the small measure of popularity Adams had gained by his skillful handling of the X Y Z affair, and the leadership of his party in national affairs, Adams had the satisfaction of knowing, however, that he had averted a war, and at the same time secured a respite from the aggressions of the French.

⁸Ibid., p. 237.

⁹Ibid., p. 238.

From the viewpoint of pure idealism, the fates could not have selected a man better equipped by nature and training than Thomas Jefferson to carry out the difficult policy of maintaining commercial relations with Europe, and steering clear of "entangling alliances" at the same time. He was an ardent and sincere lover of peace who had faith enough in the innate goodness of the human race to believe that peace could be maintained without the assistance of armies and navies. He agreed with Washington and Adams in regard to the necessity of keeping the United States from becoming involved in the European controversy at that particular time, but his policy for maintaining peaceful relations was diametrically opposed to that of his predecessors. Frederick R. Coudert, quoting Admiral Mahan, in an address to the Academy of Political Science in January, 1935, interpreted the policy of Jefferson thus:

The panacea recommended was to abandon the sea; to yield practical submission to the Orders in Council, which forbade American ships to visit the Continent; and to the Decrees of Napoleon, which forbade them entrance to any dominion of Great Britain. By a curious mental process, this was actually believed to be resistance.¹⁰

The sentiment behind the policy of Jefferson was beautiful, and there is not the slightest doubt that he was sincere in his belief that Europe was so thoroughly dependent upon American products that restoration of peace would inevitably follow cessation of trade. Unfortunately, idealism was entirely inadequate as a weapon with which to fight the wily Napoleon, who invited neutrals into continental harbors by special proclamation and then captured them. Even so, New England shipbuilders were reaping a golden harvest from European trade. They,

¹⁰Johnson, op., cit., p. 227.

therefore, resented deeply Jefferson's efforts to starve the nations of Europe into stopping their suicidal war. Resentment eventually reached the point where violators of the Embargo Act could not be convicted on the plainest evidence.

In the meantime, Napoleon was replenishing the bins, warehouses, and granaries of France with the commodities taken from the vessels captured in his efforts to aid Jefferson in his attempt to enforce the municipal law of the United States. Technically, of course, Napoleon was correct in his assertion that every American ship on the high seas after 1807 was there in defiance of the law of the land. It is needless to say, however, that the "good neighbor" policy of the French was totally unappreciated by the United States government.

Like Washington, Jefferson was glad to turn over the government to his successor. His second term had been particularly disappointing. His policy of peaceable coercion had failed to coerce either France or England; his embargo policy had lost him the support he had gained previously in New England; and his friends and kinsmen in Virginia had turned against him.

In spite of general dissatisfaction, however, Jefferson had enough political influence to select as his successor James Madison, who made a whole-hearted attempt to preserve peace by a slight modification of Jefferson's policy. Madison was a great man in peace, but he was much too "easy-going" to restrain the impetuosity of the younger members of congress. Had he been able to hold out a few days longer against the shrill cries of the "War Hawks" a complete victory for the policy of non-intervention might have been won. West, quoting Professor Hart says:

The United States waited until the European system . . . was on the point of falling to pieces of its own weight, and then made war on the power which, on the whole, had done us the least harm.¹¹

Be that as it may, the English Orders in Council were actually revoked the very day on which the American declaration of war was made. But by the time the news of the retraction reached Washington, the war was well under way and there appeared to be nothing to do except blunder through to defeat or victory.

The long chain of trying events stretching over the twenty years, 1792-1812, and culminating in war did not prove the policy of non-intervention to be a failure. On the contrary, barring the French reprisals of 1798, peaceable relations had been maintained under the most aggravating circumstances, and in spite of the greatest provocation on the part of both France and England. In the meantime a new generation had grown up. Some of the younger members of congress were imbued with the idea that it was morally right for the United States to take Canada, Florida and enough additional territory to "round out" the borders to the Southwest. The engagement of Europe in a fratricidal war afforded a perfect opportunity to take Canada by force. The New England states were enraged to the point of threatened secession by the restrictions of the Embargo and Non-Intercourse Acts. The easiest way to secure domestic harmony was to unite all of the disgruntled factions in a "righteous" foreign war. Even so, a legitimate excuse for war had to be found. The wily Napoleon came to the aid of the war party by manipulating matters so as to make it appear that England alone was restricting American neutral right to trade

¹¹Willis Mason West, The Story of American Democracy, p. 381.

with Europe. But, in spite of the deception of Napoleon, and with all the blunders with which the policy of non-intervention had been accompanied for twenty years, the war with England probably would have been averted had there been cable connections between Washington and London in June of 1812.

The treaty of Ghent made no mention of neutral rights, blockade, or impressment, but it provided for three commissions which later settled the disputed Canadian boundary. For these reasons, there is justification for the argument that all matters in dispute might have been settled peaceably in 1812, if Madison had not allowed himself to become embroiled prematurely with England.

CHAPTER III

A CENTURY OF PROGRESS

The century intervening between the end of the War of 1812 and the outbreak of the World War changed all of the implements of warfare without changing the fundamental principles of human nature.

Europe was so far away in 1800 that Jefferson believed it would be possible to make the Atlantic serve as a broad lane to keep the interminable wars of Europe separated from all contact with American life. Fulton's little steamboat exploded that idea by completely revolutionizing transportation, trade, and maritime warfare.

By the end of the nineteenth century all of the old landmarks had once more been replaced by new inventions. The battle between the Virginia and the Monitor had sounded the death knell of the clumsy old wooden battleships; the steel-clad vessels, in turn, were rendered obsolete by the first dreadnaught set afloat by Great Britain in 1906. The armament race set in motion by the launching of this huge death-dealing monster was brought to a sudden halt in the summer of 1914. The halt, however, came at a most inopportune time from the viewpoint of the safety of civilization.

The nations of Europe were armed to the teeth with every device and implement of destruction that the ingenuity of the men who had been engaged in scientific research for a half a century or more had been able to produce. In the meantime two new "spheres" of war had been made available by the invention of the airplane and the submarine. Add to this the more modern means of communication which had brought all of the capitals of Europe within "talking distance" of Washington and the stage is set for the greatest tragedy of the age, "the war to end wars."

The oceans were no longer highways of trade and travel. They had become avenues crowded with innumerable fleets of merchant ships, and floating palaces, which carried goods and passengers to every nook and far-away corner of the globe. International law, however, had not developed at the same radical speed as the scientific methods of warfare, communication, and transportation. Therefore, as in the days of Queen Elizabeth, a war, which threatened to strip the last vestige of civilization from the human race, was fought while the diplomats of the world were frantically attempting to formulate rules for the control of the new weapons and instruments of destruction.

The foundation of the rules under discussion in the autumn of 1914 were laid far back in antiquity. The Indian Code of Manu condemned the use of poisoned weapons and other brutalities of war five hundred years before the birth of Christ; the Hebrew kings from David on showed some regard for the sanctity of treaties; Argos and Sparta agreed to submit their grievances to arbitration, while they were at the height of their power; the Roman contribution consisted of formality in the negotiation of treaties, which still carried the Hebrew implication that they would be faithfully observed. After the coronation of Charlemagne, by the pope, the influence of Christianity entered into international relations.

Through a long series of struggles with obstreperous kings and emperors, the pope won the right to arbitrate the quarrels of the nations. The rise of Protestantism stripped him of this power. He then drew his robes about him and retreated inside the sacred walls of the Vatican, from which vantage point, in 1914, the Head of the Church watched the apparently futile efforts of the secular rulers

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diplomats, and statesmen to formulate a code of rules which would operate in such a way as to prevent the human race from accomplishing its own annihilation.

By the end of July, 1914, the term "international law" was under discussion in every village postoffice and crossroads store in the United States. To the average mind there was some sort of magic power in the words which the president used so often in his press conferences - a power which would protect the government from all danger of entanglement in the European war, and at the same time preserve the right of its citizens to travel on the high seas at their pleasure.

Comparatively few Americans knew at the time that there had never been any force behind international law, except the integrity of the nations which subscribed to its tenets. And fewer still were aware of the fact that this frail reed upon which the American Government was leaning so heavily had been watered throughout the ages by the tears of the grief-stricken victims of its violations and fed by the blood of the men who died fighting to maintain its principles. Little was said in the summer of 1914 about the fact that the Law of Nations had been violently uprooted after the Peace of Westphalia, and again during the Napoleonic Wars. Fortunately, there had been enough sanity left in the world in both instances to replant the mangled roots of this frail bulwark of national safety in time to prevent the world from collapsing into a state of total anarchy.

Although the great mass of the people were ignorant of the impending danger, the political leaders of the United States were thoroughly acquainted with the facts in the case and acutely aware of the perils involved in any expression of partiality toward either group of belligerents. But, instead of taking the people into their

confidence, these men set about lulling the masses into a state of Pollyana-like security with "spell-binding" speeches which at best contained no more than half truths. The few brave souls who dared raise their voices in protest were hissed down again and again. Bryan and LaFollette tried to warn the government as well as the people against the practices which they feared would lead to engagement in the European quarrels, but their warnings were drowned by the rapidly rising tide of public sentiment. And so, America blithely followed the "pied Piper" into the shambles of Europe in order to save the world for Democracy and to secure permanent world peace.

CHAPTER IV

THE 1914 INTERPRETATION OF FAIR AND IMPARTIAL NEUTRALITY

It would be virtually impossible to formulate a clear-cut definition of the principles of American neutrality for the years 1914 to 1917 for the simple reason that the president, his secretary of State, and his unofficial representative in Europe each had a policy separate and distinct in its principles. As the war progressed in Europe, and economic pressure was brought to bear more forcibly on the administration, changes were made from time to time in the official statement of the policy, but the underlying principles remained the same throughout the entire period of so-called neutrality.

In the first place, consciously or otherwise, the president had been definitely committed to a policy of intervention as early as January, 1913, when according to Millis,

Colonel House told a friend that he intended to get Wilson to let him bring about a better understanding between the United States in regard to the Monroe Doctrine, and also to endeavor to bring about a better understanding between England and Germany.¹

House knew definitely at the time what he wanted. He had long been a student of national and international affairs and had done a great deal of reading along the lines of social and political reform.

Behind his studies was the idea of working out a distribution of national boundaries that would make civilization safe from war.²

The extent to which President Wilson had committed himself to aid House in carrying into effect his Utopian scheme is a matter of conjecture. It is a fact, however, that House was sent to Europe in January,

¹Walter Millis, The Road to War, p. 22.

²The Dallas Morning News, March 29, 1938, Sec., I, p. 3.

1914 on a secret mission to learn what he could about the "perennial war-scare", and to try to convince the governments of Great Britain and France of the danger of the situation.

Whatever doubts the European nations had held previously in regard to the effectiveness of the United States "as a weight in the balance of Europe" were dispelled by the unofficial representative of the president, as he glided noiselessly in and out of the capitals sowing seeds of peace and good will during the early spring of 1914. Walter Hines Page, American Ambassador at the Court of St. James, gave both material and moral support in the efforts of Colonel House to bring about a better understanding among the statesmen of Europe. These men did not appear to take the efforts of Page and House seriously at the time, but, judging by subsequent events, it seems that, intentionally or otherwise, a goodly sprinkling of dragon's teeth were mixed with the seeds of peace the Colonel planted with meticulous care as he proceeded leisurely from one European city to another on his "secret mission".

The extent to which this unofficial "meddling" was responsible for the premature eruption of the European volcano will probably never be known. But, the Colonel did not show any symptoms of disappointment at the miscalculation of the German Kaiser who, according to the report of House, was not expecting war for at least twenty years.

On the outbreak of hostilities in Europe, President Wilson issued the customary proclamation of neutrality. However, for some reason or another it was too vague and uncertain to create a feeling of perfect confidence that it would be enforced.

The Statutes and the treaties of the United States and the Law of Nations alike require that no person within the territory and jurisdiction of the United States shall take part, directly or indirectly. . . . but shall remain

at peace with all of the belligerents, and shall maintain a strict and impartial neutrality.
 . . . all citizens of the United States and others who may misconduct themselves in the premises, will do so at their peril, and they can in nowise obtain any protection from the consequences of their misconduct.³

"Strict and impartial neutrality" implied that, barring contraband, trade would be carried on with both groups of belligerents as in time of peace. This would have been fair enough provided there had been a specific definition of the term "contraband". The "peril of misconduct" was left to the interpretation of the individual reader of the message which, in the final outcome, made little difference because the work of Page and House nullified, prior to the outbreak of hostilities, whatever effectiveness the policy stated in the proclamation might have had if given a fair trial.

The "Texas Warwick" had long been toying with the idea of a League of Nations. The outbreak of the war crystalized his plan, and gave him a splendid opportunity to do missionary work in its favor. Ambassador Page was invaluable aide, because he was doing missionary work of his own in which he needed the cooperation of House. From the moment hostilities broke out, Page threw himself whole-heartedly into the task of making the American people understand that the Entente Allies were fighting a holy war, and that England was leading the crusade against militarism and autocracy. That idea tied up beautifully with the plan for a League of Nations to preserve the fruits of the "holy crusade"; hence the perfect teamwork of the official and unofficial ambassadors. There was no dearth of able lieutenants to assist in the missionary work of the two-some of them came from unexpected

³Foreign Relations, 1914 Supplement, pp. 550, 551.

quarters. For instance, as early as September 1, 1914, Charles W. Eliot began to assist Page in his efforts to clarify the issues at stake, for the benefit of the "average American mind", by saying:

. . . the people of the United States . . . are not and cannot be neutral or indifferent as to the outcome of this titanic struggle. It already seems to them that England, France, and Russia are fighting for freedom and civilization.⁴

Any qualms the people of the United States might have had in accepting Russia as a proponent of democracy was nipped in the bud by an ingenuous letter written by the Russian minister of foreign affairs for publication in the London Times shortly after the beginning of hostilities. Among other interesting and intriguing bits of information the letter contained this statement:

For years Germany has been steadily and vigorously pushing her trade into all quarters of the Russian Empire The ground has been broken . . . and those enormous markets for machinery, chemicals, and all sorts of manufactured products are now suddenly cut off. . . . It is the country which foresees the situation commercially in Russia that will reap the enormous benefits. . . . Experts should be sent in here now. So that when peace comes those channels which for decades flowed deeply with German products may continue to flow with products from America and England.

For America . . . does Russia open an opportunity for an industrial outlet such as can hardly be overestimated. . . . He who would profit should take the first steps with the least possible delay.⁵

In view of the fact that London was the clearing house for all news from the continent, fair and impartial neutrality for the people of the United States was doomed from the very beginning of the conflict. Page made no effort to obtain fair and unprejudiced reports of war activities. On the contrary, he incessantly dinned into the receptive ear of the administration at Washington the unfounded rumors of German

⁴Current History, I, (1914) pp. 476, 477.

⁵Ibid., p. 362.

atrocities, which were passed on to the public by means of the press. If Page had any convictions of his own in regard to conditions in Europe, he kept them to himself, for he invariably gave the opinion of his friend and co-crusader, Viscount Grey, when pressed by the state department for information.

Unfortunately, the president and his secretary of state were at cross purposes from the moment hostilities broke out in Europe. Bryan wanted to take a straight middle-of-the-road course in all dealings with the belligerents, and settle mooted questions by arbitration. Mr. Wilson, on the other hand, was definitely in favor of settling every issue according to the rules of international law. This would have been a much more difficult course to follow than that suggested by Bryan, because no rules had been laid down definitely for the regulation of the new methods of fighting. In the absence of adequate rules, no one appears to have done what John Adams suggested in regard to the Nootka Sound dispute--"find out the law concerning such cases, and remain neutral in the meantime."

For various reasons, the policy of the president was never tried. Great Britain pursued the same general course from the beginning of the conflict, as that adopted by Queen Elizabeth and followed during the Napoleonic Wars--that is, a contraband list was published at the outbreak of hostilities, and every neutral ship suspected of carrying any of the forbidden wares was captured and towed into a British prize court where its cargo was eventually examined. This procedure was particularly irksome to neutral shippers on account of the frequency with which additions to the contraband list were made.

Be it said to its credit that the American state department did

ask the belligerents to abide by the rules of warfare which had been adopted by the Hague Conference of 1909. The Central Powers agreed to do so if the Allies would do likewise. After more or less evading the issue for a time, Great Britain refused to adopt the declaration unless she should be allowed the privilege of making certain changes and additions to the contraband list.

The United States was hopelessly defeated in the debate which followed the refusal of the British government to abide by the rules incorporated in the Declaration of London.

Great Britain emerged triumphant with the knowledge that the United States would do no more than make very feeble protests against future extensions of the contraband list; that it would clear vessels carrying munitions of war; that it would admit armed British ships to American ports; that it would remain an open market for munition supplies for the Allies; that it would not establish a government owned merchant marine; and that it would not insist upon the American right to carry on trade with the Scandinavian countries. According to the interpretation of Borchard and Lage:

These decisive victories for Allied Diplomacy some of which were vital in the process of sliding America into the war, were not merely evidence of superior diplomatic skill. Their more important result was to indicate to Great Britain at once that it had strong friends in the administration who sympathized with the British point of view and would not insist on American rights, if such insistence conflicted with the British policy.⁶

During the debate over British interference with the right of American citizens to carry on neutral trade with Europe, Page sowed more seeds of peace telling Cressy that the United States would not press the cause of people who deliberately and directly traded with Germany, but that more tact would be necessary in dealing with questions

⁶Edwin Borchard and Em. P. Lage, Neutrality for the United States, pp. 60, 61.

concerning trade with other neutrals because,

there was great feeling against stopping legitimate trade with Holland which had always been large, and, it was difficult to disentangle the two questions.⁷

The fact that Page was allowed to hand over to the British the right of Americans to trade with the Central Powers, and that he was not rebuked for his crude method of handling the affair gave Spring-Rice, the British Ambassador to the United States, ample justification for saying:

all of the State Department are on our side except Bryan who is incapable of forming a settled judgement on anything outside of party politics. The President will be with us by birth and upbringing.⁸

Although Lansing was less outspoken in his defense of British interference with American neutral trade rights, he was of little, if any, more benefit to his countrymen than Page, who was committed to the Allied cause to such an extent that he wrote a letter to the president, early in October, 1914, urging the necessity of the immediate intervention of the United States on the side of the Entente. A few days later the "neutral" Ambassador threatened to resign if Lansing did not stop insisting on the adoption of the Declaration of London. Lansing's disposal of the declaration is one of the unique highlights of this period of un-neutral neutrality:

. . . . this Government feels that it fully understands the British position and is not disposed to place obstacles in the way of the accomplishment of the purpose which the British representatives have so frankly stated.

The confidence thus reported in this Government makes it appreciate more than ever the staunch friendship of Great Britain for the United States.⁹

⁷Foreign Relations, 1914 Supplement, p. 235.

⁸Borchard and Lage, op., cit., p. 67: Gwyn, Letters and Friendships of Sir Cecil Spring-Rice, II, p. 220.

⁹Foreign Relations, 1914 Supplement, p. 250.

The plan to aid the British Government in accomplishing its purpose followed this frank statement of sympathy. President Wilson gave his whole-hearted approval to the un-neutral scheme. In a letter to Page he said:

Lansing has pointed out to you . . . how completely all the British Government seeks can be accomplished without the least friction with this government and touching opinion on this side the water on an exceedingly tender spot.¹⁰

Such a statement coming from the pen of the President of a neutral nation is especially mystifying in the light of the knowledge that this same President, a little later, went to war to put a stop to "private international understandings of any kind", and to establish a type of diplomacy designed to "proceed always frankly and in the public view." Furthermore, it is extremely difficult to reconcile the acquiescence of Mr. Wilson in the extraordinary diplomacy of House, Page, and Lansing with the lofty sentiment expressed in his appeal to the people to practice neutrality.

The effect of the war upon the United States will depend upon what American citizens say and do. Every man who really loves America will speak and act in the true spirit of neutrality, which is the spirit of impartiality and fairness and friendliness to all concerned

The United States must be neutral in fact as well as in name during these days that try men's souls.¹¹

Baker softens the part of the president in giving Great Britain free rein in the very beginning of the conflict at the expense of American neutral rights, by explaining that Wilson was dominated by

the desire to keep America out of the war, a desire to be the instrument for making peace in the conflict and

¹⁰Ibid., p. 250.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 251, 252.

'beyond that' . . . a vision of a 'new world order' wherein war would be abolished, and a desire to avoid conflict with the British.¹²

The desire to avoid war with the British is explained by one writer on the ground that Wilson, the first Princeton man, since Madison, to be elevated to the Presidency, was determined to avoid repeating the blunder Madison had made in allowing himself to be inveigled prematurely into a war which might have been avoided altogether.

Whatever the motives of the president may have been in the beginning of his attempts to avoid friction with the British Government, there is no doubt that he was hampered in any attempt he may have felt inclined to make toward carrying into effect the fair and impartial neutrality policy advocated in his August address. Page, House, and Lansing, in a lesser degree, were so overwhelmingly committed to the crusade theory of the war that impartiality was utterly impossible so far as they were concerned.

Before the end of the year, economic forces began to interfere with fair and impartial neutrality to a marked degree. The use of war maps called for pin factories to triple their peace time output. An order for an unusually larger number of horseshoes¹³ revived two rapidly declining industries. The newspapers and magazines emphasized the fact that the United States "now has the chance to become the richest country in the world". This opportunity to reap a golden harvest from the distress of the European people could be realized only by supplying the Entente Allies with commodities of every kind nec-

¹²Life and Letters of Woodrow Wilson, V, 211.

¹³Collier's Weekly, November 14, 1914, pp. 20, 27.

essary to carry on the war, because the surrender of the State Department in the matter of the Declaration of London had effectually cut off American shippers from trade, either directly or indirectly with the Central Powers.

For these reasons, President Wilson's policy of reliance on international law as a basis for "neutrality in fact as well as in name" was abandoned entirely, by the end of October, 1914. And the only consolation the State department ever had for its surrender of the rights of American citizens to trade with both belligerents according to rules of the law of Nations was Page's report that "the withdrawal of the Declaration of London had a most admirable effect all around."

The effect may have been most admirable according to the British standards of Mr. Page, but the criticism on this side of the Atlantic was widespread and varied. At that time, the greater part of the solid, substantial middle class farmers, and small town industrial workers throughout the country were in favor of maintaining fair and impartial neutrality.

Secretary Bryan's middle-of-the-road policy of strict neutrality based on arbitration, as a means of settling disputes concerning the violation of neutral rights, was never given serious consideration by either the President or Mr. Lansing. According to The Memoirs,

. . . the curious conditions surrounding Mr. E. M. House's unofficial connection with the President and his voyages abroad on affairs of State . . . were not communicated to Secretary Bryan

. . . as early as February, 1916, the affairs of the Department of State were being unofficially conducted over the head of the Secretary, without consultation with him, the President was unofficially dealing with foreign governments.¹⁴

¹⁴Mr. and Mrs. Wm. J. Bryan, Memoirs of Wm. J. Bryan, pp. 404, 405.

The British orders in council of October 29, 1914, infringed still further upon the rights of neutral trade by requiring shippers to give proof that cargoes consigned to the northern neutrals would not reach Germany. If the proof was not forthcoming, the penalty was confiscation of both ship and cargo. The extent to which the British Government was influenced in this drastic move by the advice and consent of House and Page, to pursue the course that would lead to "permanent peace", is a matter of conjecture. But the fact remains that the extreme partisanship of these two men, the president's deference to Great Britain, and the influence of pro-Ally propaganda destroyed whatever effectiveness Wilson's appeal for "neutrality in fact as well as in name" might have had. This being the case, the United States had travelled much farther along the "Road to War" by the beginning of the New Year than the average American citizen was willing to admit.

CHAPTER V

BASIS OF THE CHARGES OF UN-NEUTRALITY: THE INFLUENCE OF
HOUSE AND PAGE

Early in 1915, pressure was brought to bear upon the state department to adopt a policy which would be fair to both groups of belligerents--such a neutrality as would render it impossible for either belligerent to obtain implements of war in the United States or prevail upon Great Britain to lift the blockade against neutral trade with the Central Powers. Senator Stone, Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations, summarized the complaints of un-neutrality as being:

. . . Submission to censorship of mails and to the . . . destruction of American letters found on neutral vessels; search of American vessels for German and Austrian subjects . . . submission to English violations of the rules regarding . . . contraband . . . ; supporting the policy of Great Britain to cut off all supplies from Germany and Austria; non-interference with the sale of dum-dum bullets to Great Britain; allowing British vessels to lie off American ports . . . ; change of policy in regard to loans to belligerents; failure to prevent trans-shipment of British troops . . . across the United States; and a general unfriendly attitude toward Germany and Austria.¹

The reply of the state department to this summary of complaints was brief and to the point.

If Germany and Austria-Hungary cannot import contraband from this country, it is not because of the fact (the duty of the United States to close its markets to the Allies). The markets of this country are open to the world, to every nation, belligerents or neutral.²

No one ever doubted the truth of the last statement--the markets were open, but the submission of the American state department to the British order in council, the previous October, made trade with the

¹Foreign Relations, 1915 Supplement, pp. vi, vii.

²Ibid.

Central Powers virtually impossible. To take the sting out of the order, however, offered to buy the American products, which it, the British Government, had cut off from market, including cotton.

Professor Bemis takes the view that the failure of the United States to use the embargo, at least on munitions of war, was due to the fact that the resulting decline of trade would have sent the United States into "a real economic tailspin" which would probably have thrown the Democratic party out of its seat.³

Looking back from the vantage point of years, it seems incredible that the United States with absolute control of the situation, so far as food supplies, money, and munitions could secure control, should have allowed the British Government to get the upper hand. At that time, a definite policy of fair and impartial neutrality might have put an end to the suicidal folly of Europe, by prevailing upon the belligerents to arbitrate their grievances.

Soon after hostilities broke out, Bryan suggested to the president the advisability of making an attempt to bring the conflict to an end on the ground that,

. . . . responsibility for a continuance of such a war is as undesirable as . . . for beginning it, and that responsibility attaches to this nation as well as to the participants

From answers received there is reason to believe that such an offer would not be refused, and if it succeeded you would have the satisfaction of knowing that you had rendered an international service almost if not quite without parallel.⁴

Nothing came of this suggestion, but Wilson and House agreed,

³ A Diplomatic History of the United States, p. 587.

⁴ Bryan, op. cit., pp. 391, 392.

when it was too late to do anything about it, that the war might have been ended by mediation in September, 1914.

Faxon takes the view that the tangle of neutral privileges and belligerents rights was inevitable, because the whole war was based on precedents created by a sort of war that was out of date.⁵

A storm of protest was raised by the Entente when the German Government announced that it considered the waters around the British Isles a war zone, and that all enemy merchant ships encountered in them would be destroyed. Bryan expressed his opinion of the whole matter in a letter, to the president, in which he said:

If we oppose the use of the submarine against the merchantmen we will lay down the law for ourselves as well as for Germany. If we admit the right of the submarine to attack but condemn their particular act or class as inhuman we will be embarrassed by the fact that we have not protested against Great Britain's defense of the right to prevent foods from reaching non-combatant enemies.

We suggested the admission of food and the abandonment of torpedo attacks upon merchant vessels. Germany seemed willing to negotiate, but Great Britain refused to consider the proposition.

The fact that we have not contested Great Britain's assertion of the right to use our flag has still aggravated Germany.⁶

At the same time, Mr. Bryan wrote a letter to Lloyd George begging him most earnestly to spare no efforts to persuade the British Government to consent to negotiations, with a view to bringing about a settlement without further loss of life because, according to the views of the American Secretary of State:

All international disputes are capable of adjustment by peaceable means. Do not, I pray you, by refusing an exchange of views, assume responsibility for a continuation

⁵Pre-War Years 1913-1917, p. 163.

⁶Bryan, op. cit., p. 387.

of the unspeakable horrors of this unparalleled conflict.⁷

Whatever chance Mr. Bryan might have had of persuading the president to use his influence to bring about an exchange of views towards an early settlement by means of arbitration was destroyed by the unlucky combination of events which resulted in the sinking of the Lusitania.⁸ Aside from everything else that may be said about the heated discussions of this catastrophe, which caused the resignation of Mr. Bryan, the loss of American life was of incalculable value to the Allied "cause". So much stress was placed on the moral issues involved on one side of the controversy that all arguments on the other side were dismissed by the administration as irrelevant.

The Memoirs of Mr. Bryan contain a note of memorandum from the president in which he clearly indicated that he was in favor of submitting the whole affair to arbitration. Later the same day, another note informed the secretary that Mr. Wilson had changed his mind, on account of something he had heard, indirectly, from the German Embassy. While the nature of the indirect message will probably never be known, the result is unmistakably certain in its far-reaching implications in the note in which the president said:

. . . I beg that you will pardon me for changing my mind thus. I am sure it is the wiser course, the one more likely to produce the results we are all praying for. Please withdraw . . . (the supplementary statement) altogether.⁹

In replying to Bryan's request that Americans be warned against

⁷Ibid., p. 397.

⁸"The Lusitania Case", Current History, (1915) III, 411, ff.

⁹Ibid., p. 401.

taking passage on belligerent ships, the president raised objections which were incomprehensible to the Secretary until he found the key to the whole situation in Tuxsilly's book, Woodrow Wilson as I Knew Him, in which, according to the private secretary:

The President said, . . . England is fighting our fight and you may well understand that I shall not, in the present state of affairs, place obstacles in her way. Many of our critics suggest war with England in order to force reparations in these matters. War with England would result in German triumph. No matter what may happen to me personally in the next election, I will not take any action to embarrass England when she is fighting for her life and the life of the whole world. Let those who clamor for action against England understand this.¹⁰

Mr. Lansing backed the president in his refusal to warn Americans to stay off of belligerent ships, on the ground that "there was no authority in law for the President to issue a warning to American citizens".¹¹ This attitude of Mr. Lansing and the president, coupled with Bryan's fear that the Lusitania notes would result in war with Germany, brought about the resignation of Mr. Bryan. In regard to the unreasonableness of the stand taken by the president and his legal adviser, Borchart and Lage are of the opinion that,

If, . . . Bryan's sensible and thoroughly legal suggestion had been followed, instead of rejected, the one great justification alleged for entering the war, the loss of American life would have been wanting. The rejection of Bryan's plea for common sense was therefore crucial to the ultimate denouement.¹²

It is interesting to note at this point the reason which House gave for his refusal to consider accepting the position vacated by the resignation of Bryan:

¹⁰Ibid., p. 404.

¹¹Borchart and Lage, op. cit., p. 139; Lansing Memoirs, p. 115.

¹²Op. cit., p. 139.

. . . the President could not consider tying me down to departmental details when I was doing the work I had in hand, for I could be more useful to him and to the country as I had been doing.¹³

The nature of the work the Colonel had been doing, was doing at the time the vacancy occurred, and which he continued to do is made clearer by a letter which he received from Viscount Grey:

I am glad to hear from Drummond, my private secretary at the foreign office, that a cypher had been arranged which you can use with me direct.

If, as you think, the United States drifts into war with Germany, the influence of the United States in the general aspects of the peace will be predominant and perhaps decisive. . . . But the dilemma I foresee is that the desire of the people of the United States to keep out of war with Germany may lead to burying the Lusitania indefinitely, in which case Germany will disregard and the other belligerents will hope for little from American influence and the tendency will be to discount it.¹⁴

Regardless of the wide diversity of opinion concerning the personal motives of House in his clever manipulation of the foreign policy of the United States at this most critical period of American history, the reader of the Intimate Papers is forced to admit that the colonel was an apt student of international politics; and the adroit manner in which he worked upon the personal ambitions of the president shows that he knew something about human nature, notwithstanding the fact that he appears to have been outwitted at every turn by Grey, Lloyd George, and Balfour. Be that as it may, House, with the aid of Page, did eventually succeed in maneuvering the president into a complete reversal of the policy stated in the proclamation of neutrality at the beginning of hostilities in Europe. Instead of a fair and impartial consideration of the Lusitania case, Mr. Wilson was com-

¹³Seymour, Intimate Papers of Colonel House, II, p. 5.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 54.

mitted to holding Germany to a "strict accountability" for attacks on British vessels, while at the same time, he allowed Great Britain to restrict the right of American citizens to carry on neutral trade according to the established rules of international law. According to Borchard and Lage:

The partiality which Bryan had criticized became an irrevocable policy under which neutrality was gradually submerged. The administration in effect fought the British case against the submarine, and entangled itself in the bargain. It lost, by its position, all opportunity to obtain relaxation of British illegalities. American intervention in the war was thereby foreordained.¹⁵

The grief of Mr. Page, and perhaps of some others, over the loss of life which accompanied the sinking of the Lusitania was somewhat overshadowed by joy at the German blunder which had brought about the resignation of Bryan, and the commitment of the present to the "strict accountability" policy in regard to Germany. The only thing that worried Page, at this stage of the game, was the extreme slowness with which the current of popular opinion was carrying Wilson into the bloody maelstrom of the European war, as an ally of Great Britain in name as well as in fact. The neutral ambassador became so thoroughly exasperated, with the snails pace at which the president was moving, and he was constrained to express the hope that another Lusitania might be sunk in order to arouse the American people to a realization of their duty to join the Allies in the holy crusade to save civilization from the destruction by the autocratic, militaristic powers of Central Europe.

In reply to Page's tirade against American insistence that he warn the British Government to check its interference with American

¹⁵Op., cit., p. 164.

neutral trade, House wrote:

Sir Edward and you cannot know the true situation here. . . . Ninety per cent of our people do not want the President to involve us in the war. They desire him to be firm in his treatment of Germany. . . . He went to the very limit in his last note

If the President had followed any course other than he has, his influence would have been broken and he would not be able to steer the nation as he is. . . . He sees the situation just as you see it and I do, but he must necessarily heed the rocks.¹⁶

In the meantime, other neutrals began to press the British Foreign Office to make arrangements for a conference of mediations. Viscount Grey religiously reported the trend of neutral thought to his friend House whose reply, coming from the official representative of a neutral country, is astounding on account of the naive frankness with which it hands over to the representative of one of the belligerents the one weapon the United States could have used most effectively in securing British respect for neutral trade rights. Another astounding thing about the whole affair is the fact that the president read the following surrender of American rights and gave the message his silent approval before it was dispatched to Grey:

In my opinion, it would be world-wide calamity if the war should continue to a point where the Allies could not, with the aid of the United States, bring about a peace along the lines you and I have so often discussed. . . . He may then desire me to go to Europe that a more intimate understanding as to the procedure may be had.

It is my mind that after conferring with your Government, I should proceed to Berlin and tell them it was the President's purpose to intervene. . . .

I would not let Berlin know of my understanding with the Allies, but would rather lead them to think our proposal would be rejected by the Allies. This might induce Berlin to accept the proposal, but, if they did not do so, it would nevertheless be the purpose to intervene. If the Central powers were still obdurate, it probably be necessary¹⁷

¹⁶Seymour, *op. cit.*, pp. 60, 61.

¹⁷The 'probably' in the above sentence was inserted by the President and appears to have begun the rift between the two friends and co-workers, which ended in the complete break between the two at Versailles.

for us to join the Allies and force the issue.

. . . . I would have made this proposal to the President last autumn, but you will remember that it was not agreeable to the Allies.¹⁸

Perhaps Grey was so well acquainted with the history of the Napoleonic Wars, and the tactics of the "Little Corporal" that he recognized the origin of the idea behind the Machiavellian plan of House. At any rate the British Government failed to "rise to the bait" held out--much to the disappointment of the colonel, who expressed his sentiments quite freely in an entry in his faithful diary, dated November 25, 1915.

. . . the offer which I made in my letter which was practically to ensure the victory to the Allies--should have met a warmer reception. . . . The richer we grow through the acceptance of their insistence that we sell them munitions of war, the more unpopular we become. . . (later)

I tried to impress upon Lansing the necessity of the United States making it clear to the Allies that we considered their cause our cause, and that we had no intention of permitting a military autocracy to dominate the world, if our strength could prevent it.

. . . He (the president) feels that we should let the Allies know how our minds are running. He thought my going was the only way to properly accomplish what we had in mind.¹⁹

In the hurly-burly of "gathering up loose ends" in preparation for his immediate departure for Europe, House was shaken out of his habitual complacency by learning that the British naval attache with whom he had established rather intimate relations had told that he (House) had direct cable communication through code with Grey in London. The colonel confessed to his diary the necessity for taking "certain people" into his confidence, but deplored the "human characteristic" to repeat information "that should be held in confidence."

¹⁸Ibid., op. cit., pp. 90, 91

¹⁹Ibid., p. 102.

No one will ever know what the colonel had in mind at the time, but the entry in his diary indicates that he was pondering over something of more important and far-reaching influence than the attache's breach of confidence.

Most of the trouble in the world, I feel certain is caused by conveying information or misinformation to one person from another and from one government to another. That which was information to start with, becomes misinformation before it reaches its goal, and an infinite amount of trouble and misinformation and misunderstanding results.²⁰

House went to Europe without any specific instructions in regard to the task of making the Allies understand that "we considered their cause our cause". It was imperative that some sort of definite understanding be reached before the dissatisfaction in the senate culminated in open revolt, at the policy of the state department in allowing the Entente to continue restrictions on neutral trade. Fear of the threatened senate revolt, however, was not the only reason for House being given perfect freedom to carry on negotiations in his own way. By this time, the insidious propaganda campaign carried on from the very beginning of the conflict, by House, Page, Grey, and others had accomplished the desired effect--the president was so thoroughly imbued with the idea that it was his sacred duty to lead all of the people of the world into a state of permanent peace that he had entirely lost sight of his duty to the American people--to maintain neutrality "in fact as well as in name".

An analysis of the policies of the President, in the form of a characterization, by one who called himself a "neutral", sheds a great deal of light on the impelling motives behind the apparently

²⁰Ibid., p. 9.

contradictory words and actions of the chief executive at a time when straight thinking and impartial actions might have guided the nation safely over the shoals of foreign engagements:

Woodrow Wilson profits by being inscrutable. . . . No man was ever more easily understood. . . . his political keynote is the union of the legislative and executive function. . . . His election to the Presidency he regarded as an opportunity for carrying out certain personal theories in regard to government. . . .

Woodrow Wilson would probably not consciously sacrifice anyone else to reach his own ambition. . . . But he always has been intensely interested in his own career.²¹

This interpretation of the character of the president, added to the knowledge that he was thoroughly in sympathy with the Utopian scheme of Colonel House "to work out a distribution of national boundaries that would prevent future wars", tends to clarify the mystery of the un-neutral neutrality of the first year of the war. Ambassador Page helped the matter along considerably, by never losing an opportunity to sow seeds of ambition in the fertile brain of the president-- as a means of breaking the tiring monotony of sowing seeds of peace in Europe.

Be it said to the credit of Mr. Page that he had the virtue of perseverance, and he exercised it by reminding the president over and over again and again that America coming in on the side of the Allies "in time" would assure him (Wilson) a position in the leadership of world affairs, especially at the peace conference which would follow Allied victory.

Two weeks before House sailed to Europe on a mission that "probably" would create the necessity for the United States "to join the Allies and force the issue", President Wilson delivered a touching

²¹The Nation, CLIII, pp. 256-258.

address to congress. On the surface, this address appears to be inconsistent with the intent of the House mission. A close examination of the context, however, shows the message to be permeated with the idea of political and economic world-leadership for the United States. Among other things, the president said:

We have stood apart studiously neutral. It was our manifest duty to do so... that some part of the great family of nations should keep the processes of peace alive, if only to prevent collective economic ruin and the breakdown of the world industries. . . .

Something must be done at once to open trade routes and develop trade. . . . as yet undeveloped; to open arteries of trade where the currents²³ have not yet learned to run. . . .

. . . . We should see to it (the Government of the United States) lacks no vigor of law, to make it sufficient to play its part with energy, safety, and assured success.²²

Baker takes the view that the president was sincere in his expressions; that he considered the part of the United States was merely to bring about mediation; and that he was unconscious of the real meaning behind the scheme of House. The implication is that the chief executive and his unofficial ambassador were working at cross purposes. "Wilson wanted an opening--almost any opening--that would enable him to begin mediation; he undoubtedly regarded the proposal of Grey relative to a League of Nations as a hopeful²⁵ method of approach."²⁴

²²Foreign Relations, 1915, pp. ix-xxiv.

²³This is the same sentiment as that expressed by the Russian Minister in the letter quoted on page 31 of this work.

²⁴Baker, op. cit., p. 137.

²⁵Grey had written to House, "I feel that the influence of the President would be used to secure objects essential to future peace that we will all desire. "In another letter, a few days later, Grey explained the "objects essential" to future peace as ". . . . the pearl of great price, if it can be found, would be some League of Nations that can be relied on to insist that disputes between any two nations must be settled by the arbitration, mediation or conference of others."

The president shifted the responsibility to House in a letter dated December 17, 1915, "You know what is in my mind and how to interpret it, and will, I am sure, be able to make it plain to those with whom you have the privilege of conferring." Baker goes on to explain that the president made it plain to House that the senate demanded immediate and firm pressure upon the British in the matter of interference with American trade. But, instead of committing himself to put the pressure on the Allies, House sailed to Europe to offer "the help of the United States in those larger conditions of peace, which, looking to the future, interest neutrals as much as belligerents."

There is no doubt that House gave tacit assurance to the President that his wishes would be carried out to the letter; neither is there the slightest room to doubt that the colonel intended to carry on negotiations in his own way. In his discussion of this matter, Baker says:

One wonders sometimes, reading the documents, whether there ever was a real meeting of the minds of the two men; or whether there could have been a more slippery basis for effective diplomatic action. . . .
 . . . , would it not have been safer for the President to trust his State Department? Here he would have had at least a background of method based upon experience. . . . , at least equipped with a modicum of skepticism. The question occurs: what course of action would Wilson have initiated if Colonel House had not been at his elbow?²⁶

Those questions can never be answered with any degree of satisfaction, of course. But, whatever power House had held over the mind of the president previous to his sailing to Europe, with instructions to "bring pressure to bear on the Allies", appears to have been broken. At any rate, from that time on the chief executive and his unofficial

²⁶Woodrow Wilson Life and Letters, VI, 139, 140.

ambassador appear to have held slightly different views concerning the application of the principles of the policy to be pursued by the United States in regard to the matter of neutrality.

CHAPTER VI

THE LOWEST REB OF AMERICAN DIPLOMACY

Colonel House arrived in London early in January, 1915. But instead of carrying out the orders of the president to bring pressure to bear on the British in regard to the matter of interference with neutral trade, he learned within a few hours of his arrival that the minds of Grey and Balfour ran parallel with his and the president's in regard to the larger conditions of peace. Furthermore, he had learned that Grey was in favor of "freedom of the seas", provided the United States would join a covenant to sustain it. That House deliberately deceived Mr. Wilson is clearly indicated in the message in which this bit of information was relayed to the chief executive in such an insidious manner as to impel him to reply that "he would rather be glad to co-operate in a policy of permanent peace." Baker blames the president as well as House for the failure to discuss the matter in plain words:

both men were here dealing perilously in vague generalities, the details and implications of which were loaded with dynamite.¹

The use House made of the president's vague message does not tally with the rules of either personal friendship or becoming conduct of a diplomat, unofficial or otherwise, of a neutral country--he informed his British friends that the president was ready to cooperate with the British Government. Grey and Balfour asked House just what the United States wanted them to do, whereupon he surrendered the very last atom of self respect his government had left by replying that

¹Op., cit., p. 142.

"the United States would like Great Britain to do those things which would enable the United States to help Great Britain win the war."² From that moment, the British Government was complete mistress of the situation. Balfour and Grey had learned what they had been trying for months to discover--just how far the United States would go in helping the Allies win the war. With the knowledge that there was no limit, they could afford to be cordial if non-committal, as House later recalled.

The cable message House received from President Wilson on January 12, should have warned even the wily colonel that his chief had other things in mind than an overwhelming desire to help Great Britain win the war. But, by this time, the "unofficial representative" was so completely under the spell of the charming hospitality of his British friends that he was oblivious to every consideration except that of winning their approval. In order to do this, the colonel appears to have talked more freely than was his custom. In fact, he became so enthusiastic over the prospect of the fulfillment of his desires that he actually reconstructed the map of Europe for Grey and Balfour; --along much more liberal lines than even they had anticipated. But even the addition of Constantinople to the spoils failed to gain any definite information for the colonel. On the other hand, the British diplomats had learned so much about the plans of House that they felt perfectly safe in allowing him to depart for Berlin.

At this most critical period in American diplomacy, the official forces were divided three ways. Wilson was working for peace;

²Seymour, The Intimate Papers of Colonel House, II, p. 124.

House was doing his best to embroil the United States on the side of the Allies; and the state department under the leadership of Lansing was trying to work out a just rule to govern the use of the submarine without abandoning neutral rights. According to Norchard and Lage:

Mr. Lansing's proposal was the high point of the American effort of neutrality. It was sound and unassailable, but short-lived. Had the position been maintained, it might have been more difficult to find ground on which to lure the country into war.³

A storm of protest was raised in England by Lansing's proposal that the submarine be bound to the rules of "visit and search" in return for the disarmament of Allied merchant vessels. Mr. Page used every argument his fertile brain could concoct in order to bring about a withdrawal of the proposal which he considered a complete victory for the Germans. He even hinted that, if the state department insisted on Allied merchant vessels being disarmed, England might build additional munitions factories in England and Canada, thereby bringing about a financial panic in the United States.

In the meantime, House had been courteously received in Berlin, but had received little information in return for his efforts to convince Bethman, W. Hülweg that the Allies were going to win the war. The poor colonel received little more information in Paris than he had in Berlin, despite the fact that he assured the French that the United States intended to stand by the Allies no matter how low their fortunes might ebb; moreover, the president would intervene if they felt they were losing, "and guarantee a peace based on justice."

³ Op., cit., p. 106.

The chagrin of Colonel House knew no bounds when he learned of the Lansing proposal. He was bitterly disappointed at the part the president had played in the affair, because this had largely interfered with his efforts to bring about American intervention in Europe. But, after thinking the matter over, he philosophically expressed the hope that matters could yet be ironed out in a way to "make the plan possible"⁴.

At this time, a few congressmen, who were not entirely blinded by the dazzling light of the "blood-soaked boom" of war prosperity, began to embarrass the president by insisting upon being told why the United States should fight the battles of the Allies on the seas. Moreover, these same men were beginning to toy with the idea of following the advice of the German Government--to warn American citizens to stay off belligerent vessels. They argued that such a course would leave the warring nations to fight out the war on their own terms, and would lessen the prospect of the United States becoming embroiled on either side.

The Gore-McLenore resolutions brought to light the information that the majority of the members of both houses were in favor of giving the president a free hand to carry on his diplomacy in his own way, although a few, who were somewhat bolder than the rest, insisted that the people had a right to know what was going on. Senator Norris' defense of the resolutions was considered little short of treason at the time. He spared neither the president nor his colleagues, but stated emphatically that:

⁴Seymour, op., cit., pp. 212, 219.

Senators one after another get up and say they are in favor of warning American citizens off . . . armed merchant vessels, but they vote with the president. . . . who wants to protect everyone who desires to go on such a ship; and he is opposed to giving any such warning to the people. Evidently the senators vote as they fear and not as they feel. . . . The President is leading toward war and Congress is holding back, trying to keep the country at peace. I fear the course of the President. . . . I want Congress to warn people to keep off of armed vessels and thus avoid friction.

. . . . We can prevent, by law, any ship leaving port from carrying passengers if she has her hold filled up with explosives and munitions of war.⁵ . . . such a law ought to be passed and. . . at once.⁵

The president crushed the revolt in both Houses with an iron hand, but according to Baker's point of view:

. . . the victory itself had its fateful aspects. We were now still further committed to the policy of holding Germany to the observance of rules for the treatment of merchantmen which exposed submarines to risks in a manner admitted by Wilson to be 'hardly fair'. The Allies could now (March 23rd) reject Lansing's modus vivendi without fear. . . . On the other hand the demonstration of Wilson's strength, giving. . . sense of unified diplomatic control, tempered with extreme action . . . on the part of the Germans. But the whole situation, . . . was in a state of perilous uncertainty, with the nation. . . bickering . . . while drifting toward war.⁶

According to Gilson Gardner, Senator Norris was correct in his inference; moreover, the president was deliberately leading toward war. As proof, Gardner calls attention to

. . . the incident known as the "Sunrise Conference. . . This conference was held in consequence of an effort by president Wilson to put the United States in the war. . . . in the spring of 1916, just as the Presidential nominations were looming. . . .

All those called into the conference opposed the President's purpose and Speaker Clark and Claud Kitchen told Wilson frankly that they would fight in Congress any effort to secure a declaration of war. The Presi-

⁵Congressional Record, vol. 53, part 4, p. 3486.

⁶Op., cit., pp. 174, 175.

dent, . . . decided to bide his time. So the campaign was made on the platform of "he kept us out of war."⁷

The United States was led into the war with bewildering rapidity after the presidential campaign got under way in the spring of 1916. In June, Page reported from London that the British were inflexible in their intention to maintain the blockade; indeed they went so far as to blacklist⁸ some eighty business firms in the United States because of their commercial relations with the Central Powers.

By the middle of October, the president and House had reached entirely different conclusions in regard to the manner in which the impending submarine crisis should be met. The president thought the most effective way to handle the situation would be to demand that the belligerents lay down their arms for the welfare of mankind. He was confident that the "moral influence" of the United States, if properly used would be sufficient to bring about peace negotiations, thereby preventing the United States from being drawn into the war.⁹ House, on the other hand, was opposed to taking any definite steps toward mediation without the approval of the Allies, on the ground that such an offer would be offensive to them, and would give the

⁷Justy Scripps, pp. 194, 195.

⁸At this time Canada refused to submit to the black lists, and was trading freely with the firms in the United States were forbidden to patronize.

⁹The President had reached the conclusion that the war aims of the Entente were just as selfish as those of the Central Powers--England had the world and Germany wanted it.

Germans an opportunity to gain a more favorable diplomatic position.

As matters stood, the states department was helpless. The British Government absolutely refused to stop flying American flags in order to get Germany to observe the rules of international law in regard to "visit and search" before attacking ships suspected of carrying contraband; and the refusal to disarm merchantment, as a means of securing German adherence to international law, was just as emphatic. The reason for the independent attitude of Great Britain should have been clear at the time House and Page had made it plain enough that neither economic pressure nor moral force would be used against the Allies; and they had also made it plain that the United States had no intention of acting with impartiality.

Despite repeated rebuffs, the president was still confident that "logic could be made to prevail". In fact, his was the confidence born of necessity. There appeared to be only two possibilities left--he must either stop the war by peaceable means or be drawn into its vortex. By the autumn of 1916, world affairs had reached the point where neither the Machiavellian diplomacy of House, the pro-English, out-spoken partisanship of Page, nor the spineless backing down of Lansing, either singly or collectively, would be expected to keep the United States out of the war much longer. As House had intimated to his diary the previous year, too much misinformation had been conveyed from one person to another and from one government to another.

This being the case, the stage was set for the last great peace drive of the president. The peace he had in mind, however, to satisfy the purpose of his country, had little resemblance to that desired by the Central Powers, and pledged among themselves by the Allies.

Instead of peace that would make him the catspaw of one group of belligerents or the other, Mr. Wilson had his head set to reach a settlement of world affairs through the initiative of neutral nations, with himself the director of the movement.

The president, therefore, set himself to the task of drafting a circular note, soon after the election. In this note, he asked the belligerents to state definitely the aims for which they were fighting, in the hope that he might be able to bring about a negotiated peace. Page opposed the idea altogether; House resorted to suave cajoling to get the president to change the text of the note, or at least to wait for a more opportune time to deliver it.¹⁰

House was attempting to delay the President's delivery of the note until he could find out, by indirect means, what the German attitude toward the proposal in the note would be, in order that he might report to Balfour. But, before House had accomplished this purpose, a diplomatic bombshell exploded in the Allied camp. The Central Powers, weary of the British "stalling for time" published a note in which they expressed willingness to enter into a peace conference. This offer upset the scheme of the president and widened

¹⁰Grey had resigned and House doubted that the revamped Cabinet would even consider negotiations at that particular time. House being in communication with Balfour by means of the private code knew that the British Government had to quiet the growing peace party at home and find out what Germany had in mind in regard to negotiated peace before making a public statement in regard to the overtures of the President.

the almost imperceptible rift between him and House.¹¹ Instead of giving up his plan, Wilson worked harder after the German offer was published than he had before, and, the final draft of the peace note was made without the advice, consent, or knowledge of the man who had appeared to hold a sort of uncanny power over the mind of the president from the very moment of the first meeting of the two, during the campaign of 1912.

The Wilson note brought down on the head of the president a terrific storm of criticism and abuse. Lansing made the charge "of the President's meddling" sound more ominous by letting it be known at his press conference the next day that the United States was on the verge of war. The retraction, made at the insistence of the president, lost force by coming so closely on the heels of the German proffer of willingness to negotiate.

As House had predicted, Wilson's attempts to secure peace by negotiation failed either to remove the danger of the submarine menace or to improve American relations with the belligerents. According to Seymour:

The Allies refused to negotiate on the ground that a durable peace presupposed a satisfactory settlement of the conflict and at the moment it was hopeless to expect from the Central Powers the reparation, restitution, and guarantees necessary to such a peace. They challenged

¹¹House had dragged the diplomacy of America through every crooked, subterranean by-path of European deceit and intrigue without gaining even one concession for his country. In fact, he with the aid of Page and Grey, had placed every obstacle humanly possible in the way of plain, straightforward negotiations along the line suggested by Bryan in the early part of the war. It is interesting, therefore, to note that in the late autumn of 1916 the President was more nearly in harmony with the Bryan type of diplomacy than with that practiced by House with such disastrous effects for the United States.

Wilson's analogy of the war aims of the two groups. . . . They met . . . request for a statement of peace terms with an uncompromising declaration . . . which seemed to end the possibility of negotiations.¹²

Page sadly deplored the fact that the suggestion of the President came at such an inopportune time as to make the Allies feel that he was too sympathetic with the cause of the Central Powers. In his efforts to make the President feel sufficiently conscious of the enormity of his blunder, Page went on to say that he had heard from a luncheon guest that the King had wept with surprise and sorrow at the suggestion in the circular of the President, which the British interpreted as meaning that Mr. Wilson placed the Central Powers and the Allies on the same level.

According to Grey, the prolongation of the war after December, 1916, was the result of unnecessary bungling of diplomatic affairs of more than one of the powers involved because:

In the light of after events it is clear that Germany missed a great opportunity of peace. If she had accepted the Wilson policy, and was ready to agree to the Conference, the Allies could not have refused. They were dependent on American supplies; they could not have risked the ill-will of the Government of the United States, still less rapprochement between the United States and Germany.¹³

This admission places a great deal of responsibility on House, Page, and Lansing for their unneutral handling of American diplomacy at the time they should have been doing everything within their power to aid the president in putting over his plan for a negotiated peace. Granting that these men had a perfect right to their pro-British sympathies, no possible excuse can be made for their failure

¹²Op., cit., p. 406.

¹³Twenty-Five Years, II, 135.

to use their influence to bring about negotiations in September, 1914, again after the sinking of the Lusitana, and above all times, in the autumn of 1916.

The extent to which the President was aware of the impediments being thrown in his way, by the men from whom he had every right to expect cooperation, will probably never be known. But, for some unexplained reason Mr. Wilson took matters into his own hands in December 1916, and from that time on, until the very eve of the break with the Central Powers, he worked with persistent determination to preserve the neutrality of the United States. Neither the failure of the circular note to bring about negotiations nor the impending danger that Germany would be forced to resume submarine activities as a means of self-preservation caused him to waver in the least. Seymour says:

Wilson's pacifism had been intensified by the events of the year. Previous to 1916, his sympathies, although carefully concealed, were strongly with the Allies. . . . But the refusal . . . to accept his proffered intervention aroused his suspicions of their motives and led him to fear that . . . if we brought them military assistance, it would be used merely to further European nationalistic aspirations. He distrusted intensely the real purpose of all the belligerent Governments, whatever their avowed war aims. He was equally affected by the course of the electoral campaign, which convinced him that he owed his reelection largely to the votes of those who counted upon him to keep them out of war. He regarded the mandate of peace compelling.¹⁴

Unfortunately, the President had waited too long to begin his active campaign to maintain neutrality. His unyielding attitude toward Germany, which had resulted in his ultimatum in regard to

¹⁴Op., cit., p. 413.

resumption of submarine warfare had taken the power of preserving peace out of his hands. At this time, everything depended upon the next move of Great Britain. If the blockade should be tightened the least bit, Germany would resume restricted submarine warfare, and there was nothing the United States could do to prevent either belligerent from taking the fatal step. For these reasons American diplomacy had been reduced to the level of absolute futility by the men who should have used the desperate need of the Allies for supplies as a means of securing respect for the neutral rights of citizens of the United States, who desired to travel on the high seas or to carry on trade with Europe.

CHAPTER VII

THE END OF NEUTRALITY IN NAME

By the beginning of the New Year, President Wilson was in reality "waging peace" in the face of overwhelming odds. In the first place, the British Government had most emphatically refused to consider either the President's proposal for a negotiated peace or the Kaiser's proposal that delegates from all of the warring nations should meet on neutral ground for the purpose of making a settlement agreeable to all concerned. In the second place, the enemies of peace within the President's own fold were legion, and their demands were no less insistent than those of the Allies, who could not understand why the United States was not interested in fighting its own battles. The subtle propaganda campaign of the Allies was beginning to bear fruit bounteously. Most of the Americans "who mattered" in a social and economic way had long since been committed to the Allied cause, and they were influencing those of the lower social levels by letting it be known that the continued prosperity of the farmers and laborers of the United States depended upon the ultimate victory of the Allies. According to Beard:

It was clear enough by the spring of 1917 that without American aid the Entente Allies could hardly hope for anything more than a stalemate if indeed they could escape defeat at the hands of the German war machine. . . . At best, American investors who had staked money on the Anglo-French side, munition makers who had accepted the paper of London and Paris in return for supplies and manufacturers who had huge Entente credits on their books were placed in a serious dilemma unless the United States Government came to their rescue.¹

¹The Rise of American Civilization, II, pp. 630, 631.

Beard goes on to say in effect that these "selfish interests" must have carried on a well managed, adequately financed campaign that reached into all of the crooked by-paths and strange out-of-the-way places as well as the main highways of American life. As this domestic campaign against neutrality began to bear fruit, the British and Canadian propagandists redoubled their efforts. According to the Canadian novelist, Sir Gilbert Parker, the work was most effectively carried on "by means of three hundred and sixty newspapers in the smaller cities in addition to an English newspaper which gave daily and weekly reviews of the war activities."²

For a time, the president held, against all opposition, to the campaign for neutrality, which he thought would enable him to stop the useless slaughter on the battlefields of Europe as well as the more terrible destruction of human life by means of the slow starvation of the civilian population of the countries cut off from neutral trade by means of the British blockade and the resulting German submarine warfare. Mr. Wilson brooded over the matter until he finally became obsessed with the idea that the masses of the people of the European countries were as strongly opposed to war as the toiling millions in America had been in the summer of 1914; therefore, it was his sacred duty as the head of the only powerful neutral to bring the bloody carnage to a close with all possible haste. No sooner had he reached that conclusion than he appeared, unannounced, before Congress and delivered in a very dramatic manner his famous "Peace

²Harper's Magazine, Vol. 136 (March, 1918), p. 622.

"Without Victory" speech, which, according to Mark Sullivan, appeared to be:

meant more for the belligerents in Europe than for the Senate. He had a manner of irritation against the Allies for their rejection of his gesture to end the war, a manner implying "I'll make you".

Speaking "for the silent masses of mankind everywhere", he adopted the manner of an outsider addressing rather imperiously the two sets of belligerents who were making the world a miserable place to live in. To the belligerents he had the air of saying that this fighting must stop.³

So far as the Allies were concerned, the President's appeal for "peace without victory" fell on stony ground. They were well aware of their war aims and the secret treaties, which had kept safely hidden from the keen eyes and ears of Colonel House, and they had no intention of allowing the idealism of Wilson or anyone else to keep them from reaping the benefits of their victories, diplomatic and otherwise.

The American response to the plea for peace was varied. The majority of the farmers and laborers were of the opinion that as Mr. Wilson was elected president of the United States he would do well to attend strictly to that job and let the European rulers look after the interests of their own subjects. Many people wondered just what the president meant by

. . . proposing . . . that all nations should adopt the doctrine of President Monroe. . . all act in the common interest. . . free to live their own lives under common protection.⁴

The Hitchcock Resolution, an endorsement of the act of the presi-

³Our Times, V., 248, 249.

⁴Foreign Relations, 1917 Supplement, I, p. 29.

dent in asking the warring nations to take the terms on which they would consider peace, raised a storm of protest which finally settled down to a heated discussion of the meaning of some in the vague phrases of Mr. Wilson's speech. An interpretation printed in the Louisville Courier-Journal was read into the record:

Is it not the President's purpose that we shall have a Wilson doctrine as we have a Monroe doctrine; a Wilson doctrine of a far greater scope than the Monroe doctrine; whereas the latter committed the United States to the regulation of certain affairs in the Americas, the Wilson doctrine would commit us to a participation with a strong hand in the regulation of the affairs of the world.⁵

The German Government exploded another diplomatic bomb, at the crucial moment, in the form of an announcement that the insistence of the Allies on continuing the war released it from its promise to restrict submarine warfare; for that reason on and after January 1, 1917, all navigation, including that of neutrals would be forbidden in the various war zone around the British Isles. Passengers were to be given safe passage under certain conditions. This declaration put the whole series of American ultimates to the test. The president had no choice left except to back down from the firm stand he had taken previously or fight to the finish. He chose the latter. His immediate response to the German challenge was the severance of diplomatic relations. He gave congress and the American people the impression that, notwithstanding the seriousness of this apparently

⁵Congressional Record, 64th Congress, 2nd. Session, vol. 54, pt. I., pp. 795, 796.

The idea expressed in this quotation ties up with that in the characterization on page 51 of this work; also with the suggestion for "A New World State", Current History, III, (1915) 62 ff. in which Norman Angell explains how the United States may take the lead in the formation of a world federation.

fatal step, he meant in some way to avoid hostilities.

The fears of the people were augmented however, when on February 26, the president asked congress to give him authority to arm American merchant vessels, as Adams had one in order to stop French depredations in 1789. Wilson's reasons for asking for this concession were that two American vessels had already been struck and that American shipping was hopelessly tied up by the decree of unrestricted warfare. Even with this request, the president continued to insist that he was not planning any step that would lead to war.

The fillibustering of the "little group of willful men" in the senate prevented congress from granting the president the right to take a step that could have but one end--embroilment with the Central Powers. He thereupon proceeded to arm merchant vessels without the advice or consent of congress.

In his inaugural address, the President announced to the world that "we stand firm in armed neutrality", by this time, however, Mr. Wilson had retreated from his former firm stand for peace, to the extent that he admitted "circumstances", not desire, "might draw the United States into a more immediate association with the struggle in Europe." It soon dawned upon the Chief Executive, however, that arming merchant men's vessels without the proper authority might be fraught with much graver danger than he had at first anticipated, and that nothing short of a miracle could prevent the involvement in the struggle after that step had been taken, because such vessels not only had no legal right to fire on a belligerent, but if they proceeded to do so, even under provocation and in self-defense, the act would constitute piracy and leave the neutral without legal redress.

In order to avoid more serious complications, the Government assumed full responsibility for the armed merchant ships by placing naval men in charge of the firing of the guns. Under these circumstances the firing would be legal, but would constitute an act of war. The president, therefore, appeared before Congress and demanded recognition of the fact that the acts of the German Government constituted war against the United States. And thus ended the fight for "neutrality in fact as well as in name".

The President dramatically insisted, however, that the motive of the United States was only the vindication of the rights of humanity. He confessed that neutrality had failed, but from the choice of the United States--the blame rested entirely on the German Government. Its insistence that it be allowed to resort to unrestricted use of the submarine⁶ in order to break the British blockade was responsible for the entry of the United States into the gigantic struggle.

According to Hacker and Kendrick, any consideration of the reason for the United States abandoning the role of neutrality in the spring of 1917, must take into consideration the hopes and aspirations of Woodrow Wilson himself:

It is quite probable that he desired to play a role of the first importance in the writing of the peace; there must have been on his part, too, a growing realization as his

⁶ At the time the United States severed diplomatic relations with the German Government, only three American lives had been lost in American ships sunk by German submarines. Ralph E. Smith, Chief Officer, testified on oath that two sailors jumped overboard and were drowned; the Captain died of shock several hours after he was rescued by the patrol. - Current History, III, p.435.

efforts at mediation failed that America (and himself) would have no place at the peace table. . . unless the United States took as a belligerent. (Quoting Jane Adams, Peace and Bread in Time of War)

He (the president) still spoke to us, however, as to fellow pacificists to whom he was forced to confess that war had become inevitable. He used one phrase which I had heard Colonel House use so recently that it stuck firmly in my memory. The phrase was to the effect, that, as head of a nation participating in the war, the President . . . would have a seat at the peace table, but if he remained the present representative of a neutral country he could only "call through a crack in the door"⁷

The extent to which these considerations were responsible for the president eventually giving up his fight for neutrality will probably never be known. But give up he did after a long, nerve-wracking struggle against odds which perhaps could not have been overcome at that late date. The influence of House and his fellow-crusaders; the insistence of the "vested interests" that their European investments be protected; the subtle influence of the Allied propagandists; the blundering stupidity of the German government, which culminated in the Zimmerman note;⁸ the clamor of the masses for continued prosperity; and the personal ambitions of the Chief Executive himself continued to constitute a cumulative power which was apparently too great for human nature to withstand indefinitely; so, president Wilson surrendered, and neutrality for the United States was officially ended April 6, 1917.

⁷The United States Since 1865, p. 507.

⁸Zimmerman gives his version of the story in an article in Current History, XI, 236, 237.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSIONS

On the surface it appears that the principles of the neutrality policy of the United States changed from time to time as the war progressed in Europe. A close examination of the facts in the case, however, tend to disprove the assumption that there ever was a change in the policy--the method of application changed as occasion demanded, but the essential principles remained the same throughout the entire period of so-called neutrality.

The entry of the United States into the European war in 1917 does not prove neutrality to be a failure, neither does it prove the non-intervention policy of Washington and Jefferson to be a failure, for the reason that President Wilson was committed to intervention in European affairs¹ before the war broke out in Europe. It is true that he made a determined effort to extricate himself from the web in which he had become enmeshed, more or less unconsciously through the activities of House and Page. The president brought Page home for a time so that he might learn how the American people felt about British interference with American trade, but for some unexplained reason allowed him to return to England in spite of his pro-British sympathies and their danger to American neutrality. Mr. Wilson repeatedly insisted, however, that Page should bring pressure to bear on the British in regard to the blockade. The British Government was aware that the president was beginning to doubt the motives of

¹Bemis, The American Secretaries of State and their Diplomacy, X, p. 9.

the Allies, for that reason the peace circular, which was sent out against the advice of both House and Page, would probably have had the desired result if it had not been for the fact that the British Government knew the German plans for resuming submarine activities. That knowledge added to the belief that Mr. Wilson would keep his word in regard to the Sussex ultimatum² was sufficient cause for the British to refuse to consider the president's plan to stop the war in the late autumn of 1916.

Contrary to general belief, all indications point to the fact that President Wilson was tremendously opposed to war. For that reason he based his neutrality policy on the Utopian scheme of the "Texas Warwick"--to remake the map of the world, to set up some sort of super-machine to prevent future wars, and at the same time give the United States permanent leadership in the new "World Order". The ideals involved were worthy of King Arthur and Launcelot themselves. Unfortunately, neither the financial wizards of the United States nor the European diplomats were ready to have world politics manipulated according to such Quixotic principles. They, therefore, set about accomplishing their aims by the age-old system of intrigues, secret treaties, alliances, and underhand dealings of every conceivable type. The work was made remarkably easy, so far as the Entente Allies were concerned, because of the perfect confidence of Page and House appear to have placed in British professions of friendship for the United States.

²Foreign Relations, 1916 Supplement, p. 234.

By no stretch of the imagination could the activities of Page and House be classed as diplomatic. They not only bared their souls to their British friends and co-crusaders, but they violated the confidence of the American people by unconditionally and unreservedly committing the resources of the entire nation to the Allied cause-- at the time the United States was supposed to be neutral "in fact as well as in name. They also violated the confidence of the president again and again, after he started his active campaign for peace.

There is no evidence to prove that President Wilson was insincere in his recommendation for fair play at the beginning of the conflict in Europe. But, he became so inextricably enmeshed by the skillful maneuvering of the British Foreign Office, which worked through Page and House, that he was forced to deceive the American voters in order to win the election in 1916. After the election, Mr. Wilson made a determined effort to maintain neutrality, much to the disgust of both Page and House.

The choice of peace or war was beyond the power of the Chief Executive of the United States in the spring of 1917. His ultimatum issued to the German Government, in what is known as the Sussex note, had taken the matter of neutrality out of Mr. Wilson's hands; the next move belonged to the German Government. Had it not been for the fatal blunder of the president in placing the illegal acts of the Entente Allies and the Central Powers in two separate categories and steadfastly refusing to recognize the connection between the two, it is possible that his peace without victory campaign might have been successful. At any rate he might have been able to maintain the official neutrality of the United States.

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