

Summary of the Conference Proceedings

Progress in Complicated Problems

THE proceedings of the Peace Conference at Paris during March and April, 1919, were marked by increasing secrecy. The original Council of Ten gave way, first, to the Council of Five, including Japan; then Japan was dropped from the inner circle, and Premiers Clemenceau, Lloyd George, Orlando, and President Wilson, known as the Council of Four, carried on the discussions on the most important issues among themselves. Very few decisions were given out officially, and this led to fine-spun speculations on the part of the correspondents, while discontent prevailed generally in Paris over this new embargo.

Many articles attacking the Conference for its relapse into the ways of secret diplomacy, with charges that the proceedings were being unreasonably protracted, were published. Rumors of "dissensions," "crises," "ultimatums" were rife. President Wilson's action in ordering the steamship George Washington to France was interpreted as a threat to coerce his fellow-delegates. There were wild rumors that Clemenceau had resigned; that Italy would break away and make a separate peace with Austria. These and similar rumors were subsequently contradicted, and the gigantic task of reconciling the many conflicting interests and arriving at decisions satisfactory to all went on.

READY FOR GERMAN DELEGATES

President Wilson announced on April 14 that in view of the nearness of completion of the whole work of the Conference it had been decided to invite the German Peace Plenipotentiaries to come to France on April 25. The announcement was in these words:

In view of the fact that the questions which must be settled in the peace with Germany have been brought so near a complete solution that they can now quickly be put through the final process of drafting, those who have been most constantly in conference about them have decided to advise that the German plen-

potentiaries be invited to meet the representatives of the associated belligerent nations at Versailles on the 25th of April.

This does not mean that many other questions connected with the general peace settlement will be interrupted, or that their consideration, which has long been under way, will be retarded. On the contrary, it is expected that rapid progress will now be made with these questions, so that they may also presently be expected to be ready for final settlement.

It is hoped that the questions most directly affecting Italy, especially the Adriatic question, can now be brought to a speedy agreement. The Adriatic question will be given for the time precedence over other questions and pressed by continual study to its final stage.

The settlements that belong especially to the treaty with Germany will, in this way, be got out of the way at the same time that all other settlements are being brought to a complete formulation. It is realized that, though this process must be followed, all the questions of the present great settlement are parts of a single whole.

The Council of Ten, or Supreme Council, the body which dominated the affairs of the Peace Conference, was, by action taken on March 24, transformed into a Supreme War Council, to be called into session only to consider immediate questions. The government of the Peace Conference was at the same time vested in the representatives of four great powers, England, France, Italy, and America. The cause of this change was said to be the desire to make more rapid progress in the multiple matters involved.

Another change was announced on March 28. This consisted of the creation of a new Council of Foreign Ministers and Foreign Secretaries of the great powers, designed to work simultaneously with the Premiers and with President Wilson on different branches of the technical questions involved in the peace settlement.

THE SAAR BASIN

It was definitely stated on March 28 that the French had laid their claims before the Council of Four on that date, asking, first, that France's boundaries,

as fixed by the treaty of Paris of May 30, 1814,* be restored to her, together with the Saar Basin. In the Rhine province, on the left bank of the river, it was stipulated that the Germans should have political autonomy, but should not be permitted to establish fortifications, occupy the territory with armed troops, or control the railways. Thus the Rhine would serve France as a natural frontier.

The final decisions of the Peace Conference as to the disposition of the French claims were at first withheld officially, although it was stated semi-officially on April 14 that the differences over the future safety of France had been harmonized in a way to satisfy the French. Later, however, the situation was clarified. A decision affecting the disposition of the Saar Valley, it was stated, was reached on April 15.

The coal mines themselves were to be given to France outright. The remaining point at issue, the character of the political administration of this territory, was settled by the decision to give it into the holding of the League of Nations for fifteen years—the League to appoint an international commission to administer the region politically, while France should operate the coal mines. At the end of the fifteen years specified, the people of the Saar Basin were to determine by a popular vote whether they should return to German sovereignty or be united with France.

THE RHINE DEMILITARIZED

France's demand that the Rhine provinces be erected into an independent "buffer" State, so as to give France additional security against future German aggression, was to be satisfied by the solution of demilitarization. It was stated that there would be no buffer State—the Rhine provinces were to remain under German political administration—but the whole Rhine territory was

to be demilitarized—not merely the provinces lying between the Rhine and the French border, but the area for fifty kilometers (about thirty-one miles) on the east side of the river. Here there were to be no forts, no military depots, no soldiers, no sidings for troop trains—nothing, in short, that would enable Germany to mobilize an army quickly in this area for an attack on France.

The decision of the Peace Conference to settle the Danzig dispute by internationalizing that port is treated in the Polish article, Pages 299-301.

ITALIAN-JUGOSLAV BOUNDARIES

It was reported from Paris on March 21 that the Italian delegation had decided to withdraw from the conference unless Fiume were assigned to Italy, but this was never confirmed.

Italy's attitude had been stated by Premier Orlando in the Italian Chamber of Deputies March 1, when he declared that while Italy remained "faithful to the spirit of conciliation which inspired the treaty upon which Italy entered the war," this did not mean that she could "remain insensible to the appeal reaching her from the Italian town on the Gulf of Quarnero, (Fiume,)" which was "exposed to the loss of both its nationality and independence. We do not think," added the Premier, "that this is possible at the very moment when it is wished that the world may be redeemed from a memory of violence done to the rights of peoples."

There had been several "incidents" at Fiume and other points in the territory claimed by Italy and Jugoslavia since the signing of the armistice, and the feud at one time grew so bitter that Italy cut off food shipments to the interior. This matter was adjusted by the Supreme Council in Paris, and reports seemed to indicate that an amicable settlement of the conflicting claims was possible.

The Italian delegation, however, had answered all suggestions of a settlement which did not include the cession of Fiume to Italy with the assertion that any consent to such a solution would be useless, as neither the Italian Parliament nor the Italian people would ratify such

*The Treaty of Paris in 1814 provided that France should relinquish her claims on Belgium and the left bank of the Rhine and return to the boundaries as they existed in 1792, before the Revolution. This compelled France to confine herself to the Provinces of Alsace and Lorraine, west of the Rhine, those territories having been under French control since 1689.

an agreement for the abandonment of what they considered "the indispensable completion of the mother country." This question remained one of the most acute problems still calling for solution.

GERMAN PROTESTS

Various preliminary statements issued in Berlin indicated that Germany was resolved to use President Wilson's fourteen principles as the basis of protests against certain provisions of the treaty. Count von Bernstorff, former German Ambassador to the United States, in a Berlin interview printed by the Paris Temps on March 25, expressed the German frame of mind as follows:

The armistice of Nov. 11 was signed when all the powers interested had accepted the program of peace proposed by President Wilson. Germany is determined to keep to this agreement, which history will regard, in a way, as the conclusion of a preliminary peace. She herself is ready to submit to the conditions arising from it, and she expects all the interested powers to do the same. If these essential conditions of the Wilson program should be violated or neglected, and especially if conditions are imposed which go beyond the program, the German delegates would unfortunately find themselves in a position to say, *Non possumus*.

Count von Bernstorff advocated a plebiscite for Alsace-Lorraine and German Austria. He continued:

Germany's attitude on indemnities is fixed by her acceptance of the note of Nov. 5, 1918, whereby reparation is accorded for all damage done to the civil populations of France and Belgium by German aggression. This note admits of the payment of no other indemnities.

Other German expressions of public opinion and the whole tone of the German press implied an intention not to sign the peace treaty if it contained certain territorial changes. Not only the claims to Danzig and the Saar Valley, but also the claims to Malmedy were included among the demands which the German Government was called upon to refuse. Dr. Schiffer, Minister of Finance in the new Cabinet, as reported in the *Tageszeitung*, declared to a crowd before the Chancellor's palace that he took a solemn oath that the Government would not surrender to the enemy one inch of

German territory, either east or west. He was later succeeded in the Cabinet by Dr. Dernburg. In the Prussian Assembly, similarly, on March 25, Premier Hirsch asserted that the Government had no thought of abandoning the eastern districts of the State, and that he considered it its chief duty to ward off attacks, especially on West Prussia, Posen, and Upper Silesia.

RESOLUTION OF PROTEST

On March 26 the Prussian National Assembly voted unanimously against the relinquishment by Germany of any of the Rhine territory, especially the Saar Basin. A German Government wireless message stated on April 11 that the Weimar National Assembly had accepted a resolution, supported by all parties except the Independent Socialists, demanding a peace treaty corresponding with President Wilson's fourteen points, and declaring that "a peace of justice must not inflict upon us any changes in territory in violation of that program." The substance of this resolution was given by Count von Brockdorff-Rantzau, speaking before the Weimar Assembly on the day before. He said in part:

The financial demands to be made in the peace treaty are obviously causing as much difficulty to our opponents as those regarding territory. It is impossible to solve the question of financial claims without negotiating with our experts at the conference table. We will give a clear account to our opponents relative to their demands and our ability to pay.

Our opponents cannot dismember and paralyze Germany and at the same time extract from the resources of the country the enormous sums they expect from them. For that purpose we require the release, industrially and agriculturally, of the important west, which, contrary to the armistice terms, is cut off from the rest of Germany.

We need to have the blockade speedily raised and we require the importation of foodstuffs on conditions which will make their purchase possible.

All the States which participated in this war find themselves in the same distress, and hardly a nation is not disappointed by a peace that is a terrible danger because of the encouragement given by it to disruptive forces.

A similar disposition to protest was seen in the response of the German Gov-

ernment to the notes of the President of the Interallied Armistice Commission, which met the German representatives at Cologne to arrange for the regulation of German exports and a system of blacklists. This statement said that the adoption of the system intended by the Allies was in contradiction to the basic principles of the peace which had been solemnly announced as including the greatest possible economic freedom for trade of all peoples; that it was irreconcilable with the interests of German industrial life, and consequently with those also of the allied countries.

EBERT'S EASTER MESSAGE

President Ebert of Germany addressed the following Easter message to the National Assembly on April 15:

The National Assembly, as the competent representative of the German people, expressed unanimously on April 10 the expectation that the Government would agree only to a peace based on understanding and reconciliation, and would reject any treaty which would sacrifice the present and future of the German people and the world.

I welcome this pronouncement as a declaration of the inflexible will of the German people that the coming peace shall be a peace of lasting understanding and conciliation among the nations, and that it must thus give Germany the possibility of permanently observing the principle of understanding and conciliation.

The National Assembly and the Government are working with devotion and energy to fulfill the great task of giving peace, bread, work, and a new Constitution to a great nation.

The task is difficult to fulfill as long as those who have it in their power to give the world peace allow themselves to be dominated by feelings of hatred and revenge, and by means of the hunger blockade and by threatening our annihilation are driving the German people to despair.

Five months ago we accepted our enemies' terms. We agreed with them on the basis for a conclusion of peace; we have fulfilled the hard armistice conditions, disbanded our army, and surrendered enemy prisoners, but peace is still withheld from us. Though defenseless and economically exhausted, we are still cut off by the blockade and our prisoners are still detained, which is equivalent to a continuation of the war.

It is a burden such as no nation has as yet been compelled to endure. We have

done everything to obtain peace from our enemies and to liberate our nation from this intolerable torture. The responsibility for all the consequences which must follow the continuance of the present situation for us and the world must fall on their shoulders.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR WAR

The question of the responsibility for the war, and the possibility that the ex-Kaiser would be placed on trial for his life, had been widely discussed. On March 30 it was announced from Paris that the Commission on Responsibility for the War had decided:

First, solemnly to condemn the violation of neutrality and all the crimes committed by the Central Empires.

Second, to urge the appointment of an international tribunal to judge all those responsible, including the former German Emperor.

A report from the Commission on Responsibility was laid before the Conference, and was under discussion on April 9. To this report Mr. Lansing, President of the commission, and the Japanese representative had made reservations disagreeing with certain conclusions of the majority.

From the outset of the discussions in the Commission on Responsibility there was an effort on the part of the French, British, and other nations to prove that the Kaiser deserved death. Many precedents were cited to show that this punishment would be consistent with the treatment of other tyrannical and irresponsible monarchs. But references to the execution of Mary Queen of Scots, Charles I., Louis XVI., and Marie Antoinette did not hold good under the application of latter-day conceptions of justice.

It was finally agreed that on legal grounds Wilhelm could not be held responsible for bringing on the war, and on that point all the members of the commission were united in their suggestions to the Council. But the French, British, Italian, and smaller nationalities represented in the commission's personnel believed that political exigencies demanded that he be dealt with severely.

Secretary Lansing submitted a separate memorandum in which Wilhelm's culpa-

bility was considered from a legal point of view. While the overwhelming majority of the commission contended that the Kaiser was responsible largely for the acts in violation of the rules of war committed by his land and naval forces, Mr. Lansing took the ground that what was done in his name was sustained by his own people, and that he could not be held legally culpable for that reason. At the same time there was no effort on Mr. Lansing's part, it was stated, to prove that Wilhelm and his principal advisers were entitled to be let off without punishment.

REPARATIONS

Both Lloyd George and Clemenceau had promised their constituents that Germany would be made to pay the full amount of what the war had cost the Allies. This integral cost was estimated by the British at \$120,000,000,000 and by the French as high as \$200,000,000,000. The financial experts, however, concluded that the payment of any such sum by Germany was impossible, and finally estimated a possible reparation payment at from \$20,000,000,000 to \$30,000,000,000, providing the payments were spread over a period of from ten to fifteen years.

On April 14 it was announced that the important and embarrassing question of reparations was practically out of the way. Germany was to be made to pay "every cent the traffic would bear." The damages she inflicted were to be assessed under six categories. Within two years after the treaty was concluded Germany was to pay about \$5,000,000,000 cash. By May 1, 1921, an allied commission was to report how much she owed the Allies under the six categories. Allied commissions were to meet annually and assess Germany on her national annual earnings. The amount of actual total reparational damages was not stated, but estimates as to how much Germany will ultimately have to pay varied from \$25,000,000,000 upward.

The tentative scheme of distribution advanced by Great Britain and France apportioned about 85 per cent. of the total sum realized to these powers, leaving about 15 per cent. to satisfy the

demands of Belgium, Italy, Serbia, Rumania, Russia, and others. The first \$5,000,000,000 to be paid by Germany within two years was assigned to the payment of the expenses of the Rhine armies of occupation.

The six categories decided upon included reparation for actual damage to life and property, pensions for cripples and the families of slain soldiers, compensation for enforced labor exacted from inhabitants of occupied territories, including work done by deported Belgians, remuneration for illegally exacted labor by prisoners of war, and payments for German requisitions in occupied territories. No offset was allowed Germany for the upkeep of allied prisoners of war in Germany, because of the sending of food by the Allies, without which the prisoners could not have subsisted, and of the labor exacted by their German captors.

RUSSIAN RELIEF PROPOSED

On April 10 President Wilson, after deliberations with Hjalmar Branting, the Swedish Socialist Minister; Dr. Fridtjof Nansen, head of the Norwegian Food Mission to the United States, and several other prominent Scandinavian and Swiss subjects, in combined meeting with Herbert Hoover, Director General of Interallied Relief, and other members of the Interallied Relief Council, presented a proposition by the Council of Four to send food to Soviet Russia on condition that the Bolsheviki ceased hostilities. This plan met with serious opposition, especially by the French, on the ground that it would constitute recognition of the Bolshevist Government.

Dr. Nansen was anxious that the re-victualing plan be adopted speedily, so that food ships could approach Petrograd as soon as the ice broke up. He estimated the death rate at 200,000 monthly, directly or indirectly due to starvation. He said that the world could not stand idly by and watch women and children starve. Virtually all children of less than 2 years are now dead in Petrograd, according to Dr. Nansen, and conditions are terrible beyond description in the orphans' homes and hospitals.

Premier Clemenceau withheld his ap-

proval of the proposition temporarily, but added his signature on April 17 to those of Premiers Orlando and Lloyd George and President Wilson, thus practically assuring immediate economic relief of Soviet Russia, as Lenine was known to be willing to accept food on the conditions outlined by Dr. Nansen and discussed with the Bolsheviki by various neutral representatives at Moscow.

The correspondence between Dr. Nansen and the Council of Four, which had led to this important decision, was made public on April 17. Dr. Nansen's letter of April 3 read as follows:

The present food situation in Russia, where hundreds of thousands of people are dying monthly from sheer starvation and disease, is one of the problems now uppermost in all men's minds. As it appears that no solution of this food question has so far been reached in any delegation, I would like to make a suggestion from a neutral point of view for the benefit of this gigantic misery, on purely humanitarian grounds.

It would appear to me possible to organize a purely humanitarian committee for the provisioning of Russia, the foodstuffs and medical supplies to be paid for, perhaps to some considerable extent, by Russia itself, the justice of distribution to be guaranteed by a committee. The general makeup of the commission would be comprised of Norwegians, Swedes, and possibly Dutch, Danish, and Swiss nationalities.

It does not appear that the existing authorities in Russia would refuse the intervention of such a committee of a wholly nonpolitical order, devoted solely to the humanitarian service of saving life. If thus organized upon the lines of the Belgian Relief Committee, it would raise no question of political recognition or negotiations between the Allies and the existing authorities in Russia.

I recognize keenly the large political issues involved, and I would be glad to know under what conditions such an enterprise would be approved, and whether such a committee could look for real support in finance and shipping and food and medical supplies from our Governments.

The reply sent by President Wilson and the three Premiers on April 17 said that the Governments and peoples which they represented "would be glad to cooperate, without thought of political, military, or financial advantage, in any proposal which would relieve this situation in Russia," with the obvious proviso, of course, that "such a measure would

involve the cessation of hostilities within definite lines in the territory of Russia." Dr. Nansen's mission was generally regarded as possibly the beginning of the end of the Bolshevik war.

MEDITERRANEAN BLOCKADE LIFTED

On March 28 the Council of Foreign Ministers and Foreign Secretaries decided that the blockade of German Austria would be lifted as soon as measures could be perfected for preventing imports into that territory being re-exported to Germany. On April 1 it was announced that it had been decided to raise the blockade of German Austria, Poland, Esthonia, Turkey, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, and the territories occupied by Rumania and Serbia. Regarding German Austria, prohibition was maintained against trade in a few articles, chiefly of a military nature. The International Trade Commission, sitting at Vienna, was to exercise supervision to prevent re-exportation to Germany. This partial relaxation of the blockade with rigid control decided on by the Supreme War Council was to take effect on April 2. Official notice of this action was given in the United States by the War Trade Board on April 1, in a statement issued over the name of the Chairman, authorizing trade and communication with German Austria under the limitations provided.

CABLES NOT PRIZES

The American view that submarine cables were not prizes of war was upheld by the War Council on March 24. This decision, long pending, affected thirteen German cables, including those to America and several in the Pacific, connecting former German colonies.

The Commission on the Regulation of Ports, Waterways, and Railroads by April 8 had completed a report which provided for freedom of transportation for the newly created States in Europe through the central enemy countries, for equality of treatment in ports and harbors, and the international regulation of traffic over the Rhine and Danube Rivers, to which the most important sections of the report were devoted.