

The Next War

by Bertram D. Wolfe

2. How Disarmament Conferences Disarm

He who troubles to think back a bit will remember all the peace conferences preceeding the war of 1914-18. Beginning with the Algeciras Conference of 1906 and continuing to the very moment of opening of hostilities, the smoke screen of peace talk rose thicker and thicker. There were Hague Conferences, there were arbitration treaties (in place of the Kellogg Pact—the Bryan arbitration treaties), there was a world court of arbitration, there were peace societies like the Carnegie Foundation, peace prizes for “distinguished service in the cause of international peace” offered by Nobel, the munitions manufacturer (!) Among those who received one or another decoration or prizes for “distinguished service in the cause of peace” were Theodore Roosevelt, Czar Nicholas and Kaiser Wilhelm!

Again and again, Earl Grey and Premier Asquith declared in the House of Commons that “war between Germany and Great Britain is unthinkable” just as Macdonald and Hoover are now declaring that “war between England and America is unthinkable.” And at the very moment when the incense of peace talk was rising to the heavens, a solitary shot dispelled the roseate cloud and revealed armies mobilized, nations armed to the teeth, ten-year old secret agreements, strategic plans all worked out, the world at war.

The average man has lost count of the many “peace” and “disarmament” conferences that have taken place in the last ten years. The very number of them is a suspicious symptom of the strained international situation and the nearness of a new world war.

What have they achieved in the way of disarmament? According to Hoover's message to Congress of December 4, 1929, the American army was never as big in any previous peace year as it is today. And the American cruiser fleet was never

as big, not even while the United States was fighting in the world war. Every imperialist power is spending more than it did in preparation for the last world war. Since 1924, in the thick of the billows of peace talk and disarmament conferences, the United States has jumped its military budget, the size of its fleet and armed forces, and every other item of war expenditure, every single year without exception. And, says Hoover, “programs now authorized will carry it (the military budget) to still larger figures in future years.”

In other words, the “disarmament” conferences are only disarming those who might fight against war while the nations participating in them are arming at top speed.

Why They Had to Call the Conference

The London Conference is an outgrowth of two previous ones, at Washington in 1922, and at Geneva in 1927. The Washington Conference, presided over by Secretary of State Hughes, was called by the United States, amid a great ballyhoo of peace publicity, for the purpose of compelling Great Britain to abandon its age-old position that it must have a navy equal to that of the next two naval powers put together, for the purpose of compelling Great Britain to accept parity with the United States. The calling of the conference by the United States was a virtual ultimatum to England: “Either you accept parity with us, or we, being richer, will out-build you.”

England maneuvered skillfully, accepting parity only in big battleships—an arm of little importance in the next war (as will be shown in a later article)—and evading the acceptance of parity in cruisers and auxiliary ships. The Conference included the five leading naval powers, America, Britain, Japan, France and Italy, and set their battleship ratios

as 10:10:6½:3½. That is to say that Japan was to have 6 ships for every ten of England and the United States, while France and Italy were to have 3½ each for every ten of the two leading powers.

The United States had determined to have “a navy second to none” in every respect (just as Germany challenged England's naval supremacy before the world war) and so the American government began a big program of cruiser construction after the battleship parity agreement, thereby compelling Britain to enter into another conference, the Geneva Conference of 1927. France and Italy, disgruntled by their small ratio in the Washington Conference and being busy building, refused to attend Geneva. The “peace” conference was stormy from the very outset. America demanded bigger cruisers with 8-inch guns, Britain smaller cruisers and more of them, with 6-inch guns. England preferred the latter building program because it has many naval bases throughout the world and widely scattered colonies. Therefore it can use efficiently ships with a smaller cruising radius. The United States, lacking adequate and strategically placed naval bases, can only fight effectively if it has bigger ships of a wider cruising radius. So the “disarmament” conference at Geneva ended in a scandalous smashup and again the nations built at top speed—the wealthy United States adopting the 15-cruiser-in-three-years program.

On the Brink

England countered with a secret agreement with France against the United States—giving France what she wanted in the way of a superior standing army in return for a promise of backing against the United States in the naval dispute. When the agreement leaked out, the U. S. State Department sent an ultimatum to England ordering the cancelling of the Anglo-French Agreement—the sharpest ultimatum that has been sent by the American Government to any imperialist power since the *Lusitania* note with which it prepared its entrance into the world war.

War was thus brought very close, but Britain was not prepared to fight just

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yet. The Conservative Government of Great Britain, which had brought war too close at too high a speed, was substituted by a "Labor" Government and to Ramsay MacDonald was entrusted the task of retreating a bit and saving Britain's face in the awkward and dangerous situation. His Majesty's "Labor" Premier took a "good-will" trip to the United States, Hoover and MacDonald both declared that war between England and the United States was "unthinkable" showing that they were both thinking about it, came to an agreement against French submarines (which France has refused to pay any attention to) and decided to discuss cruisers again at the London Conference.

The purpose of the London Conference was announced to be reduction of armaments. France entered London with a declaration that it did not challenge the ratio set for it by the Washington Conference. At the same time, however, its "minimum needs" were for a navy of 725,000 tons by 1936 and its submarines were untouchable. If England and America were to build up their navies to keep the ratio to the French set by the Washington Conference, they would have to build up 2,537,000 tons, more than twice as much as even the huge building program at present adopted, provides for.

Italy declared it would increase its navy as rapidly as France—"parity with any other continental European power"—which means that Italy, since its entire fleet is in the Mediterranean, and only part of France's and England's are there, demands naval hegemony in the Mediterranean.

Japan demanded an increase in its ratio from 10:10:6 to 10:10:7, that is a fleet 70% of the size of the British and American. Since its entire fleet is in the Pacific and only part of the British and American fleet are there, this means that Japan demands naval hegemony in the Pacific.

England declared that it wanted a fleet equal to any two European powers put together, which means equal to France and Italy. At the same time it continued to maneuver against French submarines, against American battleship replacements and for more and smaller cruisers as against the American demand for fewer and bigger cruisers.

The London correspondent of the *New York Times* on February 15, painted the situation as follows:

"Italy wants as much as France. France wants enough to beat Germany and Italy together. England wishes to maintain her position in the Mediterranean . . . America wants as much as England because we must have parity, and Japan seeks to improve her situation."

"And that, it should be said, is all among five nations which have promised never to fight each other and who are in danger from no power not represented here, because the five powers at the London conference have 90% of the war-ships of the world."

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