

## "Armed Neutrality"

**A**FTER a protracted delay, during which the nation has waited impatiently for clear evidence of headway and direction in the policy of the administration, the President has finally acted. He has made another address to Congress, in which he renders an account of the situation and asks for authority to arm merchant vessels and for money to be used in protecting the property and lives of American citizens. His utterance, now that it has come, falls short of what the occasion required. He describes the situation of the country as "fraught with the gravest possibilities and dangers"; he declares "that the necessity for definite action may come at any time"; but he expressly declines to make definite proposals or to give any indication of the "form in which action may become necessary." Thus although he asks in substance for full authority, he considers it unwise to enlighten Congress or the country as to how the authority may or should be used. He asks them to be content with the assurance that war, if it comes, will be imposed upon him and not chosen by him. In the meantime he proposes an intermediate policy which is neither peace nor war and which is characterized as "armed neutrality."

There can be no objection to armed neutrality, provided it is understood to be a temporary expedient, designed to meet the necessity of keeping American vessels afloat. If carried out in a resolute and thoroughgoing way, it may well do the immediate job. Hitherto, according to the President's own account, German terrorism has been succeeding. It would not be unnatural for the Germans to anticipate that owing to American apprehensions, timidity and irresolution, they can, so far as this country is concerned, make the submarine blockade sufficiently effective without wasting torpedoes on American ships. It is necessary above all and at the earliest possible moment to dispel any such impression. The boats of the American line should sail for Liverpool loaded with the mail which constitutes the most essential part of our communications with Europe. They should be dispatched under government orders and armed fore and aft for adequate defense. The orders issued to the captain should be published and they should authorize him to consider the approach of any submarine a hostile act. The announcement should be made that the torpedoing of any one of them will be considered evidence of the existence of a state of war between Germany and the United States. Only by some such public and deliberate challenge can the effects of German terrorism be checked, and the vital national inter-

ests and the moral self-respect of the American nation vindicated.

Inasmuch as the "armed neutrality" proposed by the President provides a practicable method for deliberately challenging Germany to carry out her threats, it may be accepted for the present, but unless Germany should back down, it is an impossible permanent policy for any government with a record during the war such as that of Mr. Wilson. Even as a temporary expedient it presents grave dangers. If the neutrality for which we are arming is differential, it would be open to the criticism of being hypocritical and ineffective. If it were not differential, it would be disastrous. The phrase "armed neutrality" has been appropriated and rightly appropriated by William Randolph Hearst to describe the policy advocated by him—the policy of enforcing all American rights impartially and drastically against all beligerents. In his opinion Congress should itself define as a measure of American national policy what constitutes a merchant ship and a lawful voyage, and should grant to the President full authority to protect merchant ships during lawful voyages. It should also define lawful and unlawful blockades, and conditional contraband, absolute contraband and non-contraband goods. It should instruct the President to protect American ships in their right to pass through the lines of any blockade which has been defined to be unlawful. As the British blockade would have to be defined as unlawful, this policy would mean the use of naval or economic force not only to protect American vessels against torpedoes, but to break the British blockade. Unless Great Britain yielded, as she would not, we should soon be waging economic or actual war upon the Allies and using our power to secure German success. That would be the inevitable effect of a policy which by means of arms sought to enforce honest neutrality.

Neither is it out of the question that consequences similar to those described above may not follow from the official promulgation of a policy of arming merely to protect American neutral rights. As we go to press the Senate is considering a bill framed to carry out the President's policy which authorizes the commanders of American vessels to arm and defend them against "unlawful" attacks. Let us assume that there sails for a Dutch port an American vessel, whose captain considers the British orders to put into Halifax or Kirkwall to be "unlawful," as according to the precedents of international law they undoubtedly are. Let us suppose that the captain should resist the attempt of a British patrol to force on him obedience to these orders. Would

not the American government which was pursuing a policy of "armed neutrality" be obliged to back him up in his resistance? This hypothetical case is perfectly possible. It may occur whenever weapons are supplied to merchant captains, provided our policy remains officially one of arming to protect the rights under international law of individual citizens. It constitutes so grave a danger that, as we suggest elsewhere, the sinking of the *Laconia* should be made the excuse of declaring an immediate embargo on the export of all commodities which are not guaranteed against a destination to Germany. Such a measure would give official sanction to our past attitude of differential neutrality and would relieve our temporary policy both of an unpleasant hypocrisy and of a dangerous ambiguity.

The predicament in which the American nation now finds itself will never be properly understood until the fact of a previously existing benevolent neutrality is fully admitted. We are involved in our existing quarrel with Germany exclusively because we have never been honestly neutral. Germany would always have traded the submarine campaign on commerce for any action on our part similar to that advocated by Mr. Hearst, which would have tended to mitigate the British blockade. With such a record "armed neutrality" as a permanent policy would be tantamount to using force in order to sustain a subterfuge. Even so, it might be a conceivable policy, in case our benevolent neutrality had been based on a very small preference for one over the other group of belligerents, in case the security of the world's highway which is now being violated by Germany and policed by Great Britain was of minor importance to the United States, or in case we were a small and weak country, as we were in 1798, whose friendship or enmity would not be a factor of any importance making for the success of either group of belligerents. But all of these conditions are absent. The original preference of American public opinion for the cause of the Allies was emphatic and it has been enormously strengthened by the German invasion of the international maritime territory, whose inviolacy and good order is indispensable to American security. The success or the failure of the German aggression may depend upon whether or not it meets with sufficient resistance on the part of this country. If any nation were ever obliged to follow through on its own choice, that nation is the United States under the circumstances of the existing emergency. The time has come to show what it has meant by its benevolent neutrality, whether it means anything more than a weakness for indulging in conversation about our own rights and that of other

people without any disposition to act so as to make those rights survive and prosper.

The truth of these contentions is in substance proclaimed by President Wilson in his recent address to Congress. "I am thinking," he said, "not only of the rights of Americans to go and come about their proper business by way of the sea, but also of something much deeper, much more fundamental than that . . . of rights which our hearts support and whose foundation is that righteous passion for justice upon which all law, all structures alike of family, of state and of mankind must rest, as upon the ultimate base of our existence and our liberty." If the goods which are imperiled by the German submarine warfare against commerce can be credited with a reasonable percentage of the social value attributed to them in the foregoing sentences, the policy of meeting the attack with no more than armed neutrality would be repellent in its timidity, and humiliating in its inconsistency and ineffectiveness. Armed neutrality means that if German submarines seek to destroy American property and life, a sufficient answer to the attempt is the armed protection of individual Americans in the pursuit of their lawful objects. It ignores the public significance of the German submarine campaign, the consequences of success or failure in pursuing the attack, and the effects of the national moral consciousness of returning so impoverished a retort to so ominous a challenge. We should be applying to one of the great crises in the world's history in relation to one of the most fundamental issues which has ever been raised between two nations, the weapons, the prejudices and the values of a helplessly and hopelessly legalistic provincialism.

## To Defeat the Submarine

**I**MAGINE England at last forced to her knees, not by arms, for that is impossible, but by the agony of universal starvation, which may at least be conceived. Imagine that she has been forced to yield her fleet and to submit to the dismemberment of her colonial empire. Imagine so much, and logic will force you to go farther. You will see, as night follows day, a plunge of Russian power into the circle of German influence. Russia cannot stand alone; her western allies beaten into impotence, she must stand with Germany. You will see Japan fitting herself into the new scheme of German hegemony, reluctantly or with alacrity, it does not matter, for until her own wealth and might correspond with her ambitions, Japan must make her arrangements with those who rule the seas. What would be the position of the United