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## The Week

THE announcement from London of Mr. Lloyd George's intention of attending the Washington Conference will send a shiver down the back of many American liberals who remember the evil influence he exercised upon the deliberations in Paris. They will fear his uncanny powers of persuasion, his lack of principle and his reputed ability to "bamboozle" good but innocent Americans. These sceptical people should, however, also remember the change of conditions which has taken place since 1919 and the much stronger position occupied by the American government in reference to the purposes of the Washington Conference. The American government is now seeking to clean up a particular regional disorder in which British cooperation is peculiarly necessary. Lloyd George's presence will render it easier to bring about this cooperation. Not only would his absence have impaired the authority of the Conference and delayed its decisions pending

the result of cable communications with London, but it would have placed obstacles in the way of the necessary understanding between the heads of the British and American governments. Whether or not the United States can negotiate an agreement with Japan about China depends chiefly on the policy and temper of Great Britain. If the British join with the American government in asking Japan to relax her grip on China and Siberia, Japan will gradually come to consent. But if the British government refuses to join the American government and directly or indirectly connives at the continuation of the existing Japanese policy, Japan will feel strong enough to refuse or to offer only insignificant concessions.

THE importance of an explicit understanding between the two governments is rendered the more desirable by the recently announced change in the geographical distribution of the British fleet. Many years ago when the German menace forced the British Admiralty to concentrate most of its capital ships in the North Sea, Great Britain practically withdrew from the Pacific as a naval power. The protection of her possessions and interests in the Pacific was turned over to her Japanese ally and the Japanese fleet became the Far Eastern division of the naval force by virtue of which the British Empire remained mistress of the seas. It is the fact of Japan's employment of this fleet for her own purposes which has made Great Britain responsible for Japanese policy in Siberia and China. But it is a fact which is ceasing to exist. The British Admiralty has announced its intention of concentrating a large number of capital ships in Far Eastern waters, and of building at Singapore a naval base strong and capacious enough to enable them to become an effective fighting force. The meaning of this decision is clear. Great Britain agrees with the United States in considering the Pacific of more importance than the Atlantic in any future competition for naval preponderance.

The British government has revoked the franchise whereby Japan acted as its agent in the Pacific and has resumed its earlier policy of using the British navy as the guarantor of British interests and possessions in the Far East.

A LARGE British fleet permanently stationed in the western Pacific and based upon Singapore radically alters the conditions of political and naval strategy with which the Conference will deal. At present the Japanese fleet controls the Far Eastern waters. No matter how relatively powerful the American fleet might be, it could not contest the control of those waters with Japan unless the American government built an impregnable naval base at Guam. In the event of war with Japan the American navy could not prevent the capture by Japan of all territory in the Far East over which the American flag flies, and in the absence of an adequate naval base the task of recapturing the Philippines and Guam is stated by experts to be a strategic impossibility. A large British fleet adequately based on Singapore would destroy this Japanese invulnerability. It would protect Australia and New Zealand against Japanese attack and render them less solicitous about the Japanese alliance. It could contest the control of those waters with the Japanese fleet and in the event of a victory could blockade the Japanese ports. Finally, acting in cooperation with the American fleet, it could in the event of war bottle up the Japanese fleet and starve Japan into submission. Thus as the result of the change in policy Great Britain is transformed from a potential into an actual power in the Pacific—one which is of equal importance to the United States and Japan. She will be independent of Japan and will be equipped to back up her Far Eastern policy with an adequate armament. No wonder Mr. Lloyd George proposes to come to Washington. No wonder, too, that the American government wished him to come. His coming will give to the Conference a substantially improved chance of success.

THE curtain is falling on the fourth act in the tragedy of Upper Silesia. The first act was played at Paris, by the great peace makers who wrote their indecision into the Treaty of Versailles. The second act was played in Silesia by the representatives of the League of Nations who conducted a plebiscite with the cards stacked for Poland, and, when the vote turned in favor of Germany, connived at the attempt of Korfanty to take the province by force of arms. The third act was played by the Supreme Council and once more issued in deadlock between the British policy looking to the

recovery of Germany and the French, seeking her ruin. The reference of the question to the League of Nations was hailed as a triumph for that body, and would have been such if the League had had the intelligence and courage to use the opportunity. But again the decision merely registers indecision. From the point of view of Upper Silesia itself, of Germany and of Europe it was highly essential that the industrial district should remain intact. The committee of the League has reported in favor of dividing it; and the acceptance of this straddle by the Council will close the fourth act.

THE division as reported gives forty-three of the coal mines to Poland, and thirty-four to Germany. About one-third of the output of coal is left to the latter. The iron and steel mills are chiefly retained by Germany, but the larger part of undeveloped mineral lands and most of the zinc and lead industry go to Poland. The plan for the payment of the reparations by Germany is rendered impossible. The Germans adopted this plan and began to carry it out evidently on the understanding that the British government would support their claim to Upper Silesia. That understanding is broken. The Germans and the French had come to an agreement with regard to the restoration of the devastated regions. That agreement will fall to the ground. The Wirth government, which represents the most complacent attitude conceivable on the part of Germany toward the Entente, will hardly be able to survive the blow. The German people will rightly argue that it makes no difference in their treatment by their conquerors whether they fulfill their obligations or not. The League has apparently tried to counteract the effect of political division of the district by a complicated device to insure industrial unity. Their administration of such an organization will be difficult—the more so as the mines within the Polish boundary belong to Germans, some of them to the Prussian state. The earlier attempt of the League to control the district argues ill for its success under the new and more trying conditions. The League itself may conceivably be wrecked in the storm of its own contriving. The dramatic materials for the catastrophe have been assembled. The fifth act is ready to begin.

A WASHINGTON despatch to the Tribune confirms what has been generally believed, that Debs on his visit to Washington some months ago was offered a pardon on condition of refraining from the rest of his life from taking part in "Red" propaganda and promising "that he would not lend his influence to inspiring opposition to the laws of the

country." This is further evidence of the naïveté of our authorities with regard to political prisoners. A thief may properly be required to give parole as a condition of release from prison; why not a political prisoner? A man is sentenced for speaking against a law at a time when his opposition may doubtfully be held to have inspired other persons to break it. What is more reasonable than to demand his recantation as a condition of pardon? It does not surprise us to read that "the Attorney General is disgusted with the attitude assumed by Debs"; or that "Officials here are at a loss to explain Debs's attitude."

INTERESTING in the same connection is the statement to the American Civil Liberties Union by James A. Finch of the Department of Justice to the effect that the attitude of the government toward the I. W. W.'s serving sentence as a result of war-time prosecution is largely dependent on the present views of applicants for pardons in regard to "sabotage and the methods pursued by the I. W. W. organization in fomenting strikes for the purpose of embarrassing the government during the war period." There is no evidence that these men participated in strikes or sabotage for the purpose of embarrassing the government in war time. There is thus no question of recantation but merely of the removal of a gross misconception on the part of the Department of Justice. The I. W. W. prisoners should take part in educating the Department by applying at once for pardon and restating their views.

AT the coming election in New York the voters will decide, among other important matters, whether or not they wish by constitutional amendment to give to the veterans of the war preference for positions in the civil service. This amendment ought to be defeated. The Willard Straight Post of the American Legion is right in characterizing it "as a wholly unjustifiable assault upon the established merit system of the Civil Service. . . . This proposal is only a dishonest attempt to obtain something for nothing, to create at the expense of the public a permanent class of military officeholders who, by advocacy of this amendment confess inability to compete upon equal terms with their fellow citizens. Such an attempt in our opinion is un-American and should be vigorously opposed by all members of the Legion as contrary to the professed principles and ideals of the Legion."

THE position of the United States as the creditor of its allies becomes daily a source of deeper embarrassment to the world. We will not permit this

debt to be funded at interest; we will not forgive it outright; we will not allow it to be paid in the only way in which it can be paid—in goods. Great Britain who stands second to us as a creditor nation has proposed to cancel her claims if we would cancel ours against her to an equal amount. We refused. Now two journals, the London Nation and the London Chronicle propose to cancel the British claims independently of our action, hoping by force of example to bring us to decency if not to reason; while the New Age proposes that the British government should offer to pay its debts to the United States in any kind of goods we may elect, and force us to a showdown. We should either have to cancel the debt or accept payment—with the ruin of our industries.

WE sympathize cordially with the British in their exasperation. It must indeed seem to them as if that "vast imbecility" which Thomas Hardy conceives to be the ruler of the world, had made us its chosen people. Yet we cannot forbear reminding them that they profited by that fact, as Sir Gilbert Parker frankly recounts, during the war. They must have patience. Undoubtedly the leading thought in the minds of not only the English but the French and Italian delegates to the Washington Conference will be this subject of international indebtedness, credits and exchange. There is no opportunity for formal discussion of these things according to the agenda, but we suggest that the foreign delegates might combine to make them a special order of the day on the ground that unless something is done to rectify exchange they will not be able to pay their hotel bills in Washington, or their return passage to Europe.

THE American newspapers have paid altogether too little attention to President Harding's message to the Honolulu Press Congress. "Democracy," he said, "has come to its great trial and the verdict will depend largely on its capacity to make men think." Are the newspapers helping the American people to think? A journalist himself, the President evidently doubts whether the American press does help the public to think. During the war, he says "propaganda became a well-nigh universal habit;" and "propaganda aims primarily at shutting up the minds against other conclusions than those which the propagandists design to implant." But "the primary purpose of the press as a social institution is the opening of men's minds rather than the closing of them." It follows, consequently, that, according to Mr. Harding, the press during the war was false to its primary purpose as a social institution.



## The Railroad Strike

A GENERAL railroad strike is at best an almost intolerable public inconvenience and at worst a veritable public disaster. It is a hideously and absurdly expensive method of settling a dispute between the management of the railroads and their employees. It imposes upon practically all the people of the country privation and in the end positive distress, and they not unnaturally retaliate by condemning the party to the dispute which initiates the hostilities and their resulting discomfort. The chiefs of the Railroad Brotherhoods fully realize these facts. They share the ideas and outlook on life of the ordinary American citizen of the middle class and so do the great majority of their followers. They dislike to be considered outlaws and they suffer from public reprobation far more than would the ordinary wage-earner of foreign origin who has not enjoyed the advantage of social assimilation. If, consequently, they decide to strike with practical unanimity, they must have what seems to themselves an extremely serious grievance to which they cannot call attention in any other way.

Such is most assuredly the case. During the war when the government operated the railroads, its policy was favorable to union labor. It permitted and even promoted unionization, and it accepted union standards concerning hours, rates of pay and working conditions. It was, indeed, so complacent that many abuses injurious to the efficient operation of the roads crept into the operating methods. But on the whole the government policy during its period of control was economical and humanly sound. It aimed to create a large body of contented and loyal employees who identified their own interest with that of the railroads, whose opinions were consulted and whose welfare was adequately safeguarded.

This policy was very different from that which the railroads had pursued under private management. Their executives had considered it their primary function to produce dividends—if necessary at the expense of their employees' interests. When the government returned the railroads to them, they deliberately resumed their former policy and to that end they proposed to get rid not only of the abuses which had crept in during national operation, but of the endeavor of the national railroad administration to adjust its operating policy to the standards and the ideas of organized railroad labor. Some of the railroad executives went so far as to repudiate the idea of negotiating at all with union labor and did what they could to break down the newer and weaker unions. The arrangements which Congress provided in the act

which returned the railroads to their owners aided the railroad executives in pursuing an anti-union policy. It did not, indeed, leave the railroad employees to the mercy of the railroad executives. It set up a Railroad Labor Board which was intended to mediate between the two contending parties. But it subjected the decisions of the Railroad Labor Board to a condition which rendered a clash with the railroad unions ultimately inevitable.

The New Republic in its issue of October 5th explained this condition and predicted the coming conflict. We pointed out that the "Board is forced by the exigencies of the situation to make awards and is at the same time unable to base its awards upon factors which labor thinks ought to be considered. Over the whole range of managerial, operating and financial policies it has no control. It must take all of these for granted and at their face value without question or criticism or even suggestion. It is left only with jurisdiction over wages and working rules. And these it must adjust with reference to private ownership and the resulting clamor for reduced operating expenses. Under these circumstances a large part of every decision which the Board has made in the past year and will probably make in the future must represent a paring away of gains which the workers have won in the past. For, under the present system of management, lower labor cost is conceived as coming only through reduced wages and modifications in the severity of working rules."

Inasmuch as it was Congress which devised and established this irrepressible conflict between railroad management and railroad labor, it is in a sense true, as the executives claim, that the proposed strike is directly against the government. But it is also true that Congress in constituting the Labor Board left the railroad employees no alternative but to submit to a steady impairment of their standards of living and working conditions or to protest by striking. As the railroads are now organized, there is assumed to be only one effective way of reducing costs and increasing dividends and that is at the expense of labor. The success of private management is made to depend upon taking away from the employees as much of their wages and as many of their working standards as they will give up. In their argument on behalf of an additional ten percent reduction of wages the railroad executives did not even attempt to justify it by calling attention to a reduction in the cost of living. They argued merely that they could not survive unless they carried more freight and earned more dividends, that they must reduce the rates in order to provoke the offering of more freight and that they could not afford to lower rates without taking the difference out of the wages of their