

AMERICA AND EUROPE

NEUTRALITY ISSUE JOINED

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TRADITION AND THE WAR

The definition or redefinition of neutrality will be the business of the emergency Session of Congress which will open at President Roosevelt's summons to-morrow.

From a Correspondent in the United States

It will be the task of Congress to decide the United States' first act of policy in the present war. Once war was declared, the emergency Session was inevitable. But it is typical of American political habit that the President's spring-time appeal to keep Congress in session throughout the summer, for fear the war should come to pass, was then violently rejected. And it is easy to see in the rocky progress of neutrality discussion this year a classic American pattern.

No nation so reveres, or quotes so often, the written records of its early founders, which is natural enough since the Federation was founded on a new idea in human government. Yet no nation is more unwilling to legislate ahead from that record and that idea. Every time neutrality has been mentioned in the past few years a Congressional *bloc* has quoted the colonial scripture and especially Washington's farewell address. Yet Congress always stops short of making convictions into law before the fact. This is a strange instinct in an extremely logical people. And the neutrality debate proved again that nowhere does one see so subtly and instinctively blended the warp of pragmatism and the woof of tradition. Now that the war has come, and the United States possesses no pre-defined policy, the people are on the whole well satisfied.

A GALLUP POLL

This lack does not mean that the American people lack sturdy convictions about the war and its causes. On September 3 the Gallup poll indicated that 87 per cent. of American popular opinion was overwhelmingly in favour of the Allied cause. The record of Adolf Hitler was well in mind. There was a remarkable absence of outraged feeling at the sinking of the Athenia. It is doubtful, indeed, if this event caused any considerable conversions, for the general opinion of it is best summarized in Mr. Howard Brubaker's tart comment:—"It would have been an act of sheer stupidity for the Nazis to shock world opinion by sinking a west-bound passenger ship. We may therefore safely assume that they did so." In spite of this majority sense the country was about evenly divided on the need for neutrality revision. Washington was generally agreed that if the President speedily summoned Congress he would not find it hard to have the present embargo lifted and even to restore the cash-and-carry clause which expired on May 1. But the President was anxious to anticipate the line of the opposition before Congress was in session. He wanted to discover the best way of assuring that the Session should be short and restricted to neutrality debate. He feared that a Congress arguing at length might soon get out of hand and give the country the disagreeable idea that the country itself was divided. There are other excellent reasons for the President's circumspection, and they must be summarized, but there is no doubt that before the battle begins he may have lost as much as careful generalship has gained him.

The opposition has had time to crystallize and to base its instinctive fears on forceful precedent. The newspapers have been able to reprint the previous war-time feuds over neutral rights at sea, which developed between the United States and the Allies, as well as between the United States and the Germans, before 1917. The magazines have marshalled their best isolationist spokesmen and noted that the United States now faces the identical problems in Anglo-American relations as it dealt with them, to the French advantage, in 1794. The biggest snag the Administration has run into, however, is the swift progress of the war itself. After 10 days of a new European conflict American merchant vessels are again being submitted to the very methods of search and detention in British harbours which only after three years of war produced the extreme tension last time, and which caused Sir Edward Grey to remark when the War was over, "We came nearer to a breach with the United States than even the most cautious of us realized at the time." During those 10 days Americans, trying to recall how embittered they had been 20-odd years ago by the holding up of American vessels in English ports, were suddenly offered anew the concrete examples of the Black Eagle and the Black Osprey. It is true that immediately after the American intervention in 1917 an exchange of Notes between the American Secretary of State and the British Ambassador at Washington detailed an agreement which virtually approved the contravention of what had been held to be neutral rights before 1917, and gave Britain the right to take on next time where it left off in 1918. Though true, it is unfortunate that Americans are better able to remember their fury, and their losses, than the *carte blanche* exchanged by them as subsequent allies.

It has been mentioned in Washington that the President, after his numerous telephone talks with party leaders, is assured of a majority vote of at least 50 in the Senate. But to-day he faces an aroused opposition and nothing can be taken for granted.

AN EXHAUSTIVE DEBATE?

English observers, who were told a fortnight ago that the cash-and-carry plan would be rapidly and automatically restored, may wonder at the President's delay. They may also, in the next two weeks, have cause to gird at what might become an exhaustive debate. The good relations of Great Britain and the United States can be helped by patience in these difficult days, but they may be helped a great deal more by the insistence that traditional principles, and not alone self-interest, are being consulted by a sincere opposition with the ancient lion of Idaho, Senator Borah, at its head. And it is in place here to summarize the traditional arguments, for the Presidential delay is as much due to watching and weighing them as to any merely political tactics.

The sheet-anchor of isolationists floundering against the tides of current emotion and prejudice is the Washingtonian doctrine that Europe has, and has continued to have, "a set of primary interests" which over and over again are vexed by "ambition, rivalry, interest, humour, or caprice," and which the United States can meddle in only at grave peril to the Republic. To these believers the Monroe Doctrine supplemented Washington's advice and gave final notice to Europe that the United States held European power-politics to be so insoluble that the best it could do would be to undertake the huge task