

Outlook At Last For Settlement In Europe

Though Way May be Long and Hard, With Temporary Setbacks, Path to Peace Seems Now Reasonably Clear and Not Impracticable of Passage

By FRANK H. SIMONDS
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Washington, May 10—While the returns from the German election seem sufficiently obscure to raise some doubt as to immediate German policy, and while in addition we still have to deal with the results of the French election, it none the less seems possible now to forecast with reasonable accuracy that the Dawes plan for dealing with the German reparations is almost certain to be put into operation and that any clash which can be expected will come after the application and not before.

The decisive gesture, that gesture which at all times was bound to be decisive, has come from the British Prime Minister. The declaration of Ramsey MacDonald to his own Welsh constituents that so far from seeking the isolation of France it was the precise thing which he desired to avoid and his appeal for Anglo-French co-operation mark a complete and final break between the Lloyd Georgian and so-called "liberal" school of thought and the present Premier.

Underlying all the criticism of France which has been in general circulation both in Great Britain and in America, in all the years since the Paris Conference, has been the double assumption that the French position was inherently wrong and that by some curious process of isolation France could be subjected to the coercion of the world at large and thus brought to heel.

This was the last phase of British foreign policy under Lloyd George and it went down to final disaster at Genoa, two years ago, when the British Prime Minister discovered that, so far from achieving the isolation of France, the combination of his avowed policy and the sudden publication of the German-Russian treaty at Rapallo had consolidated around France the smaller Central European states, notably Poland, Czechoslovakia and Rumania.

Where George Met Defeat
Genoa represented something like an open break between France and Great Britain and the consequences were disclosed when Turkey, in part through French and Italian encouragement, succeeded in breaking the military strength of the Greek forces in Asia Minor and came back to the Straits with a victorious and intransigent army. The Lloyd George policy having led Britain to the edge of a new war in which she was almost certain to find herself alone, its author was overthrown and the Bonar Law Tory Cabinet succeeded the Lloyd George Coalition.

Hard on this came the occupation of the Ruhr, which was an inevitable consequence of the divergence of British and French policy and of the French resentment at Lloyd George methods. Bonar Law, himself a dying man, had striven to prevent the occupation, but failing saw quite clearly that short of a war with France, which was unthinkable, nothing could be done to procure French evacuation. Britain merely stood aside, declined to participate and in the due course of time challenged the legality of the occupation.

Baldwin succeeded to Bonar Law. Curzon in the Foreign office strove earnestly to get Germany to make proper peace proposals, but failed. And the Ruhr War continued until it ended through the collapse of Germany, after it had wrecked her currency and shaken her economic machine in the hopeless practice of passive resistance. Finally Germany was forced to surrender unconditionally. Meantime the visit of Stanley Baldwin to Poincare in Paris had for a moment suggested an improvement of Franco-British relations, but the hope had come to nothing.

Then Baldwin went to defeat over the tariff proposal and the general election which followed his appeal to the country suddenly took the control of foreign affairs out of the hands of the Tories, who had been divided between friendliness with France and opposition to the whole French program. Like all the other heirs of Lloyd George, Ramsey MacDonald inherited a gravely compromised situation.

When Outlook Was Dark
Measured by the past record of the Labor Party and even judged by some of his own statements, MacDonald seemed bound almost at once to antagonize the French. A duel between Poincare and MacDonald, even fiercer than that which had ended in the fall of Lloyd George, seemed inescapable. But no sooner had he taken office than MacDonald turned not to Berlin but to Paris and began that series of gestures which, in the brief period of four months, have certainly totally transformed the atmosphere of the discussions between the two countries.

Now the interesting and significant fact about the MacDonald policy so far, was and is the recognition on the part of the Labor Prime Minister of the fact that France could not be coerced and did occupy a position from which she must be either turned out by force or by persuasion; and the fundamental concessions to the French demands, above all to the French insistence that—having taken guarantees and sanctions as a result of the wilful German default—she would not relinquish them un-

til such time as she was insured against the consequences of any new German default.

If, as was insistently argued by the critics of France, the French purpose was not to take sanctions against payment and relinquish them when payment was proffered; if it was, under cover of the present coercion, to bring about the disintegration of Germany, the situation was always hopeless, because France possessed the strength, if she had the will. She was in the Ruhr and on the Rhine, she had the troops, the allies, everything needful, if that were her purpose.

But the course of events since the publication of the Dawes report has served pretty thoroughly to demolish the legend of a France refusing reparations and seeking German destruction. The belief that France would reject the Dawes report was destroyed by the prompt acceptance of the report by Poincare. But there remains the problem of substituting for the French guarantee, consisting of French possession of the Ruhr industries, actual German control and operation, without depriving France of some method of prompt redress if Germany should again break faith.

MacDonald Shows His Hand
That was the precise point at which events had arrived when Mr. MacDonald, in his York address, seemed to indicate that Great Britain would not consent to any preparation in advance against German default. This speech was interpreted in Paris as meaning that Britain would insist that German good faith be assumed and French transfer of actual possession of German industries in the Ruhr should take place without any agreement in advance between the Allies as to the steps which would follow new German evasion.

The York speech seemed to bring all the fat into the fire again. But its evil effects were promptly lessened by assurances sent to Paris by MacDonald that while Britain did not wish to do anything to suggest a formal challenge of German good faith in advance, she was prepared to act and act energetically if Germany should default. This speech was followed very closely by that in Wales, which I have already cited.

Taken together with the conversations which attended the visit of the Belgian Premier to Chequers, it would seem quite clear that we are not menaced by any new conflict between two wholly irreconcilable policies but simply that there is going on a pretty open and frank feeling-out of positions, and that MacDonald has not the smallest intention of undertaking to impose British views without regard to France.

Of course, when all is said and done, the most important cards remain in French hands. They do hold the Ruhr and they are exploiting the coal and railway systems. Moreover, they maintain garrisons all through the Ruhr and the Dawes report did not suggest the withdrawal of these, although it did insist upon the return to Germany of control of the economic instruments of production. If French purpose were then to destroy Germany, she could still carry out that purpose and justify it by the refusal of the Allies to give her adequate protection.

But, despite the commotion to the contrary, the best judges of French public opinion at the moment agree that the mass of Frenchmen are very eager to dispose of the whole burden of economic exploitation of the Ruhr and that their single concern is to dispose of this burden in such fashion as to insure that they shall get the reparations, in pursuit of which they originally marched into the Ruhr sixteen months ago.

The French Position
If, then, the French do not desire to stay in the Ruhr and are not seeking the ruin of Germany, but are still insistent that they shall not be turned out of the Ruhr without adequate guarantees of support if Germany defaults again wilfully; and if the British recognize quite clearly that the French cannot be turned out, but can only be persuaded to retire as they are protected against the future, it must be transparent that we are approaching a period of discussion which may be friendly and must involve frank recognition of fundamental facts on both sides of the Channel.

France will not withdraw her troops. That is understood. The Dawes report could not and did not deal with this question. But the mere presence of the troops need not interfere with German exploitation of her own resources, as the German occupation of Eastern France well demonstrated after 1871. On the other hand nothing is possible unless France does agree to surrender economic control. And as the situation stands, the bargaining promises all to turn around this point.

You must see, then, what a complicated series of negotiations are to come now: negotiations between Great Britain and France which must be had and must end in agreement before anything can come of the Dawes report; and then negotiations between the Allies and Germany, through the Reparations Commission, which must cover the general reorganization of German finance and the carrying out of the Dawes Report recommendations

generally—the most important of which, in certain phases, is the transfer from French to German hands of the Ruhr industries.

But always the key to the situation will remain the relation between Great Britain and France. If these two powers cannot work together, neither can impose its will upon the other and the paralysis of the past months will continue. But if this paralysis continues German fiscal collapse is inevitable and a similar French smash can hardly be averted. The collapse of both France and Germany financially, with all the inevitable repercussions upon the Continental nations generally, would be a catastrophe for Britain, still cursed with immense unemployment.

International Loans Wanted
Both France and Germany want international loans. World finance and particularly American capital is presumably available at the precise moment when the political obstacles can be removed. But it is almost axiomatic that no American or other money will be available for France or Germany until the proposals of the Dawes Report have been accepted and translated into fact. Obviously then, France, Germany, Britain and Belgium have large immediate stakes in the restoration of something like order in the situation. What remains the single danger point is that there are limits beyond which no country can or will make concessions even to insure settlement.

France needs money desperately, but she will not, merely for small loans now—comparatively small—jeopardize her whole future prospect of collecting reparations and into the bargain expose herself to a new attack from a Germany economically restored and politically and militarily dangerous. Britain, by contrast, will certainly not go beyond a fixed point in giving assurances to France. As for Germany, she will do nothing save as she finds France and Britain agreeing in demanding her performance.

The hope in the situation lies in the fact that we are getting much nearer to realities than ever before. Germany has well-nigh wrecked herself by her policy of evasion and the ruin would be complete if her rejection brought, as it inevitably would, a recurrence of the chaos which followed the protracted struggle over the Ruhr. There must be a point at which Germany would prefer payment to suicide. Perhaps the Dawes report marks that point.

France has gone through illuminating experiences of her own. The crisis over the franc was significant. Her occupation of the Ruhr has, doubtless, contributed to bringing about the situation which exists. General Dawes himself endorsed it as an essential step toward the end which has now been reached. But France realizes that she cannot collect reparations by the bayonet. The best she can do is to procure a state of mind which might lead to payment, provided the bayonets were sheathed.

All Are Wiser
As for the British, it would seem that they have discovered that they cannot alone or with any available help impose their views upon the French. They would seem also to have discovered that some sort of Franco-British understanding is the essential preliminary step to any European adjustment. The question of how much Germany can pay annually has been fixed, the conditions under which her finances and currency can be reestablished have been laid down, but underlying all else is the inescapable fact that there must be French, British, German, even American cooperation—even though the last be unofficial—if anything is to happen of use to the world.

Despite superficial evidences to the contrary in the German election, then, I believe that all European indications now combine to encourage the belief that before the summer is over and as a consequence of long, laborious and probably temporarily depressing conditions, the Dawes report will result in some actual agreement and by the end of the year it will be actually in operation. And I confess I believe this quite as much because of the signs and symptoms which I saw personally in Europe as because of new circumstances and new official attitudes.

My conviction is that Europe, speaking generally, wants peace. Russia as a disturbing element is out of the question for some time. Germany is potentially a danger and it is manifest that the process of cooling off has gone a much shorter distance there than anywhere else in Western Europe. Until the Dawes report was made, the statesmen of European countries were more concerned with the dangers incident to surrendering things which were demanded by their publics than with bearing the responsibility for postponing or even preventing adjustment. This was because the publics were, speaking generally, far more insistent upon their rights than they were convinced of the need of sacrifice and compromise.

The familiar pictures of wicked statesmen—leading innocent and peace loving peoples astray seems to

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me always to have been purely fantastic. Actually the statesmen could not safely undertake compromises while popular sentiment remained uncompromising. Clemenceau attempted it at Paris and was driven out of public life, denied the presidency because he had yielded French interests to British and American opinions. Erzberger and Rathenau attempted it in Germany and both were assassinated. One of the grave indictments lodged against Stanley Baldwin in Britain was his alleged "softness" with France. Briand, for his part, fell because of his apparent yielding to Lloyd George.

The Weakness of Statesmen
The weakness of statesmen has lain in their refusal to educate their publics. They have been satisfied to let their peoples cling to impossible hopes. But the education of the publics of all nations has made remarkable progress in the past year. The occupation of the Ruhr may yet turn out to have been beyond debate the turning point in the post-war adjustments, because it demonstrated that nothing was possible; save as there were profound concessions made on all sides.

Mr. MacDonald is going to bargain with France. He is going to get an unlimited chance for the Dawes report program, but he is not going to get it for nothing. He is going to get Germany into the League of Nations and he is going, insofar as he can, to transform the League into a real force in European affairs. But along the way he will have to discuss inter-allied debts, Anglo-French relations in case of new German attacks upon France and a whole variety of other questions. None of these questions is new, but up to date it has never been possible to discuss any one of them usefully, because of the state of mind in the several countries.

In a sense MacDonald may now find himself in something of the position occupied by Woodrow Wilson at Paris. All things considered, he has today the confidence of Europe to an extent enjoyed by no man since Mr. Wilson. He has a great advantage over Mr. Wilson, due to the fact that he has spent practically all his mature life in Parliament and in the closest sort of personal relations with men and affairs, and with Continental as well as British groups.

In all the months since he took over the conduct of foreign affairs from Viscount Curzon at a moment when British prestige was at the lowest point in modern times, he has made no serious mistake, and he has accomplished much. It is due to his course that the Dawes report is now to be discussed in an atmosphere totally different from that which has prevailed in all the recent international gatherings, not excepting the Washington Conference. Moreover, his formal and public repudiation of a policy seeking the isolation of France seems to me a turning point in the whole discussion.

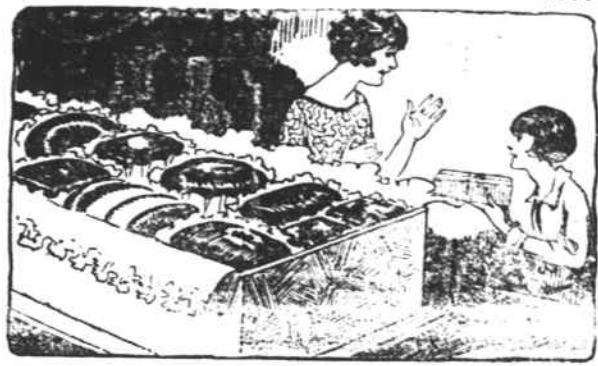
Whether the Dawes report will work when put into operation, what the ultimate consequences may be of what is confessedly the hugest international economic experiment in human history, these are problems for the future. But now I feel certain that it will be put into operation, following substantial Franco-British agreement, and that European skies will become clearer and clearer in the next few months. Meantime it would be hard to exaggerate the importance of European events and news in the period which will be covered by the American domestic political campaign.

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