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Should America Favor the Allies, circa 1917

Francis Mairs Huntington-Wilson

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"SHOULD AMERICA FAVOR THE ALLIES"

by

Huntington Wilson

From

The Paget Literary Agency

25 WEST 45th STREET

NEW YORK



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It is quite possible to conceive that the greatest danger to America that lurks in the present international situation may be the danger of our not joining the Allies. Assuming that the Allies will ultimately win overwhelmingly, then Prussianism will be crushed. The doctrines that might make right, of "frightfulness," of trampling on treaties whenever expedient will cease to menace the world. That "Kultur" which is so efficient and often beneficent at home and so threatening abroad will be kept at home. There its bad features will probably die out and the Germans of the future will be thankful, - while the world adapts its efficiency to higher aims. An end will be put to the spread of a civiliza-

tion that appears to be far too much based on those doctrines and maintained by an arrogant soulless philosophy, a ruthless cynicism, a farcical suffrage, and a privileged military caste. The world will be a safer place. No one but its nearest neighbors, perhaps, will be more benefitted than we by the elimination of such Prussianism. It is entirely obvious that in heart, mind, and soul our own civilization is the diametrical opposite of the present militant Prussianism. At least our materialism is still touched with chivalry: if beauty is nearly swamped in material abundance, it is still appreciated in the ethical: scientific education has not transcended the standards of the simple virtues. The two civilizations cannot remain equally powerful in the world at the same time, if one looks to the future; and looking far into the future should above all inform present policy. If the war is indecisive, the peace will be only a truce.

It was great luck for us that Prussianism did not in some way gain Britain's neutrality and then seize, say, Brazil or Venezuela or Columbia, and thrash us, - instead of attempting the far harder task of elbowing all Europe for Central European invincibility and Near Eastern Empire to begin with. That we were "on the cards" seems clear enough. To cite just a little circumstantial evidence, a few years ago Germans moved heaven and earth to get the port of Darien, with vast concessions and a railway right up to the Canal Zone. Some well known political

and financial names in Prussia were lent the scheme. It was pushed with tireless vigor and only stopped by our Government's blunt veto of the Panaman Republic's making the concession.

A government-supported German interest acquired lands for harbor works, coal depots, and plantations and built some railway just beyond Panama at the mouth of the Atrato River in Columbia. This is a convenient base and is where, it will be remembered, there was said to be a possible route for another canal up the Atrato and down the San Juan to the Pacific. At the imminent risk of his health the German Minister to Columbia himself went over the route. The Germans minutely surveyed the Venezuelan island of Margarita and kept a warship there many months. They have colonized greatly in Brazil and elsewhere. Their government supports schools in South America to spread their "Kultur" and their language. It is said to subsidize newspapers. Their banks and ships and tradesmen are everywhere. Their activities just about the Caribbean and the neighborhood of the Canal (where we should be active) are peculiarly notable and suggestive. The open contempt their publicists have expressed for our Monroe Doctrine is notorious. Yes indeed; we were "on the cards," it seems clear enough.

Still assuming the complete triumph of the Allies, we shall gain safety from a very real peril of Prussianism, for our policies, our interests, and our kind of civilization. So the Allies are quite right if they say they are, it chances,

fighting our battle also. Upon the background of this view they ^{have} seen us silent and non-committal on the issue of this great battle of civilizations, of spirits, of ideas: silent in the face of our vital interest in the issue. They saw us, such noisy humanitarians about the Congo and the Putumayo, silent before bad faith and atrocities in Belgium, silent while Germany broke Hague Conventions signed with us; silent before scientific barbarities repugnant to civilized warfare; silent before the insulting activities of Dernberg and of others still more responsible (we who sent away Sackville-West for less in 1884). Then the world heard us roar over a few cargoes of cotton, a matter of dollars. It ^{saw} ~~sees~~ some of us complacent to the ridiculous suggestion that we violate our neutrality by an embargo on the export of war material. [If Yale and Harvard were in the middle of a game of foot-ball and Harvard was winning through superiority, say, in the forward pass, suppose the Yale captain to propose that the rules be then and there changed to bar the forward pass. You would not stop to think him unsportsmanlike: you would think him crazy.] ~~Such is the essence of German complaints and contentions.~~ ? Whatever ancient rules or engagements happen to work to German disadvantage are suddenly become unfair and must be broken or changed. So convenient a theory would seem childishly naif were it not branded with the mark of "might makes right!" Still, some swallow such talk along with the sentimental appeal against the perfectly

fair seige-like method of reducing Germany, and the wail about "starvation," while ^{The British and} we amiably relieve Germany of the heavy duty of feeding some millions of Belgians, - whose plight, of course, is quite proper because "made in Germany."

At last the ^{German} submarine ~~war-zone~~ policy, inherently violative of all that is permanent and immemorial in international law, namely its humanitarian principles, evoked our protest, reiterated when the unspeakable crime of the "Lusitania" ^{had} capped the climax of Prussian madness and arrogance, ^{frustrated after the Sussex horror, renewed eloquently, no doubt, in each of the long lists of}

If we ^{had stood} stand uncompromisingly upon the demands of the ^{first} three notes to Germany, we shall ^{should have begun} begin the revindication of our prestige. ^{Best we did not.} If we allowed ourselves to be manœuvred into a ^{balancing of} bargaining Prussian crimes against British illegalities of blockade that ^{were} are relatively trifling, ~~if existent, if, in~~ ^{quite} short, we ~~back down at all,~~ Can we be much surprised if the Allies and the world, - the Prussians seem to feel for us hostile contempt already, - hold us in a regard so low as to cripple our prestige and our influence? And may we not even engender a hostility so deep as later to jeopardize our peace and force upon us ^{quite} excessive burdens for defence? So the vital interests and the future of America have enough at stake, always assuming the triumph of the Allies.

Now let us imagine that, through its marvelous preparedness in war material and training, Prussianism should triumph. Quite clearly we should be next. It would be as if

two men were attacked by a powerful highwayman and one stood politely aside while his friend was thrashed, in order to await his turn to enjoy the highwayman's exclusive attention.

It ~~thus~~ seems axiomatic that the United States could not afford to see the triumph of Prussianism. It is therefore scarcely conceivable that any well informed and utterly impartial and cold-blooded American could deny that our interest is on the side of the Allies. We have the authority even of leading German law writers like Bluntschli that we are entitled, as neutrals, to sympathize, and indeed to lean officially, to the side where our interest lies. Yet, excepting a few so-called "German-Americans," we seem mostly cowed to silence by exaggerated ideas of neutrality, - a purely legal affair. This great war will have been an incident in the history of a couple of generations; in the world politics of a few decades. Is it nothing to us whether it leaves us the friendship or the dislike of a long list of great Powers? Each little legal issue is a mere flea-bite to the great issue and the great principles at stake. A myopic discussion of details is always an anodyne when a great question awaits decision. But sound public opinion and wise policy can be ^{based} ~~informed~~ only ^{upon} ~~by~~ fearless and frank consideration of the real issues, viewed from the standpoint of America's vital interests in the future.

If we feel that America could not afford to see Prussianism triumph, then, in the name of humanity, let this be

known and have its effect. We should always keep both eyes on the ultimate interests of America. If the time comes when these can no longer be subserved without the abandonment of neutrality i.e. if Germany fails squarely to meet our just demands, or if the triumph of militant Prussianism ever appears probable, - then our duty will seem pretty clear. We are already interested parties; but it would not be our war as it is that of the principals. Money, munitions, moral weight, diplomatic, commercial and financial non-intercourse with Germany would be our obvious chief contributions. An insurance against triumphant Prussianism, the discharge of a duty to our kind of civilization, a renewed prestige, valuable friends would be our reward. The deterrent lesson to that kind of militarism would be a stroke for the cause of peace. Its triumph would put a premium upon every one of its vices.

It is a government's duty to determine its course according to the ultimate paramount interests of the Nation. Popular indifference or obliviousness to those interests nowise exonerates a government from that responsibility. In foreign affairs a government must lead with far-sighted wisdom; it must ^{foster} ~~inform~~ a sound public opinion instead of reflecting a thoughtless one. In such a crisis how dangerous are the faddists and the schemers who, like ~~Mr.~~ Bryan, by sectional or group appeal, by ignorant flattery of ignorance, distil the worst poisons of democracy as if deliberately seeking to prove it a failure.