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Shortening the War by the Food Embargo, 1917

Francis Mairs Huntington-Wilson

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SHORTENING THE WAR BY THE FOOD EMBARGO.

At last, under the embargo provisions of the "Espionage law" and the President's Proclamation thereunder, the export of food and other war necessities is to be confined to shipments authorized by the Division of Export Licenses, under the Department of Commerce. So far so good. We shall next see whether or not this great political weapon is boldly used to hasten our victory over Germany, which is now the paramount national interest.

The President very properly puts our own necessities first and then the necessities of our Allies as the objects to be subserved in the administration of these powers. He then says:

"As to neutral nations, however, we also recognize our duty. The Government does not wish to hamper them. On the contrary, it wishes and intends by all fair and equitable means, to cooperate with them in their difficult task of adding from our available surpluses to their own domestic supply and of meeting their pressing necessity or deficits. In conserving the deficits of food supplies this Government means only to fulfill its obvious obligations to assure itself that neutrals are husbanding their own resources and that our supplies will not become available, either directly or indirectly, to feed the enemy."

Let us examine this duty to neutrals to which the President refers with so much sympathy. Let us see whether we are not ^{in danger of} forgetting our duty to ourselves. Let us see what it would mean really to make sure (that neutrals were husbanding their own resources and that our supplies should not become available, either directly or indirectly, to feed the enemy.)

First as to these neutrals, and in particular the small

countries near or contiguous to Germany. Are they neutrals? They talk piously of themselves as neutrals and grow piteous over their sad plight if we should cease to supply them. At the same time they grow fat in the trade of supplying our enemies. Are they neutrals, in conscience and common sense?

The American theory of the favored nation clause is that we shall extend to a given foreign country as favorable trade treatment as we extend to any other foreign country provided that the given foreign country gives us treatment equivalent to that accorded us by the most favored nation. There is thus a standard of treatment of us which must be met by all who claim from us favored nation treatment. Can we not discover an analogy between this principle and the question of the rights of these neutrals? The rules of international law, like those of good manners, only stand by the test of principles of right and justice.

Now there is a standard for the treatment by belligerents of nations not engaged in their war. That standard is the observance by belligerents of the rules of international law as affecting neutrals and the scrupulous respect by belligerents of the rights of neutrals. Now if one belligerent completely fails to live up to that standard (as Germany has done), and the other belligerent does meet that standard; then, if the neutrals still accord precisely the same treatment to both belligerents, are not such "neutrals" really unneutral? They are returning the same treatment to those who give them good equivalent and to those who give them no equivalent. Or, viewed from another angle, in this

situation the law-abiding belligerent is giving these "neutrals" the full measure of their legal rights in return for an empty "neutrality" while the lawless belligerent is giving them nothing and getting in return a benevolent and materially useful neutrality. The situation does not stand the test of common sense or common justice. These countries are not really neutral. The Entente Allies may accidentally tread on their toes: Germany hits them over the head with a club by murdering their sailors, destroying their shipping, cutting off their lawful trade. To the two belligerents they turn a face of mawkish impartiality. They do not even avail of their legal right openly to sympathize with the Entente Allies!

As to husbanding their own resources, the published statistics show that these neutrals are exporting to Germany many times as much of their food products as they did before the war. The statistics are indeed shocking. They are certainly not husbanding their own resources.

To keep our supplies from going directly or indirectly to the enemy through these neutrals is the next question to examine. One neutral sends cheese, butter, meat, etc. to Germany. Now while we supply that neutral with wheat it can send all the more cheese, butter and meat to Germany. And so far as this is *so*, our wheat as effectually supplies the enemy as if it were re-exported and the neutral itself consumed its own product made surplus by our wheat. No neutral that exports food to Germany should have food from us. Let it consume, instead of selling to

the enemy, its own food product.

In the case of one neutral it is argued that some of its industries are dependent upon coal, etc. which Germany gives in return for food, and that therefore it cannot deny Germany this food. It would be unfortunate, of course, if the industrial system of one of those small countries should be disrupted; but after all, why should they not share in the discomfort of a world war one object of which is to protect well-behaved small nations? Like the Belgians, those small nationalities should be protected, if possible, from starvation. Beyond that the Entente Allies owe them no more consideration than they may find it to their own interest to accord them or than consists with their own actual safety, *and with justice, true reciprocity, and right.*

Then there is the shipping question. These neutrals allow Germany indiscriminately to destroy their ships at sea. Other ships they keep tied up for safety and ask for our exports while themselves contributing to the shortage of shipping that confronts us. If they help feed the German murderers of their sailors and lawless destroyers of their ships, to be really neutral on the ship question they should be entirely complacent if the Entente Allies should commandeer all their idle shipping.

Their "neutrality" works out very favorably to Germany. *It is* Not a real neutrality because not true to the principle of equivalence of quid pro quo. America and the Entente Allies are now refraining from the complete exercise of their legal right rigorously to enforce a blockade of Germany's neighbors un-

der the doctrine of "continuous voyages". For this consideration we are getting nothing in return. Germany is refraining from nothing -- legal or otherwise; - and is being helped with food et cetera and even spared the frank expression of hostile feeling.

With all its faults, the present Administration has never been accused of the crime of slavish consistency. Our policy of pin-pricking Great Britain as to neutral rights to export to Germany's neighbors despite the British blockade was a mistake. The thing to do is to forget it. It was an unsound policy not justified by reason. In the Civil War we even stopped British exports to a British port in the West Indies upon the ground that they would be reshipped by sea to the Confederacy. Now there is obviously no difference in principle, in morals, or in common sense between reshipment across the open sea and reshipment by rail or through territorial waters. The doctrine of "continuous voyages", which is an American doctrine, applies perfectly to exports to all Germany's neighbors.

If Britain's blockade is maintained out in the Atlantic Ocean it is just as valid as if her ships lay off the North Sea ports. The old mental picture of a blockade, consisting of picturesque frigates in a combined landscape and marine view riding off some colorful port smelling of the "spices of the Indies", should have been erased with the advent of steam plus wireless. The old blockade is gone. At the London Maritime Conference years before the war the American Admiral officially

present agreed that a legal blockade might be maintained effectively, say, 1000 miles off from the coast blockaded.

As Senator Knox said in a recent speech:- "This power
"of embargo, wisely and boldly exercised, should also serve to
"hasten the day when many more peoples, still neutral through
"fear or indifference and not through conviction, shall join the
"powers arrayed for freedom and civilization in a death struggle
"with ruthless militarism and the lust for world dominion. The
"President's new power to control exports will at last end the
"absurdity of our supplying the necessities of life to countries
"which find it possible to export to Germany similar or corres-
"ponding necessities....."

One hopes that it will. One hopes that our own
policy will also take as basic the idea expressed in the same
speech, that "those not with us are against us."