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Why the London naval conference has failed, 1930.

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"WHY THE LONDON NAVAL CONFERENCE HAS FAILED."

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER.

THE TEMPLE, SUNDAY MORNING,

MARCH 30, 1930, CLEVELAND, O.
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Within the last nine years three international naval conferences have been held looking towards a reduction or a limitation in maritime armament. Within these same nine years three events transpired which should have, by all the rules of logic, helped make the naval conferences successful. These three events were three major international agreements on the part of the principal powers of the earth never to resort to war and always to submit their disputes to arbitration.

In 1921 the World Court was finally ratified, and today some fifty nations have joined the list of those who ratified this court of international justice. This court was called into existence to hear and determine disputes of an international character which will be referred to it by the parties to the dispute. It is also authorized to pass advisory judgment on all questions which will be referred to it by the assembly or the council of the League of Nations.

Thus all the nations who were parties to the naval conferences signified their intention heretofore to refer disputes which may lead to war to this World Court for amicable judicial adjustment. Even the United States, who for many years refused to enter the court, has now practically indicated its adherence to this court under certain reservations.

✓ This was the first event which should have contributed to the success^{of} any conference for the limitation of naval armament. A few^{years}/later, in '26, the Locarno treaties were signed. By the terms of these treaties the great powers of Europe--England, France, Germany, Italy--pledged themselves never to have recourse to arms, and in any controversies which might arise they were always to refer their differences to arbitration. They furthermore agreed to come to the assistance of anyone of the signatories unjustly attacked. In case of an unprovoked attack the nations will at once appeal to the council of the League, which, after investigation, will determine whether the act of aggression was unprovoked and unjustified, and in that case it will immediately summon all the other signatory nations to come to the military assistance of the nation thus attacked. And France and Germany, particularly, pledged themselves to this new international mode of procedure.

✓ This was the second event which should have made easy the role of any conference, either for military or for naval disarmament; for having agreed not to fight, there is no sense in maintaining huge and costly armaments. And then in '28 came the historic Pact of Paris, which is better known as the Kellogg-Briand treaty for the outlawry of war, in which all the great nations, including the United States, pledged themselves for all times to renounce war as an instrument of national policy. Article I of this pact

reads: "The high contracting parties solemnly declare in the names of their respective people that they condemn recourse to war for the solution of international controversies, and renounce it as an instrument of national policy in their relations with one another." And Article II of this covenant reads: "The high contracting parties agree that the settlement or solution of all disputes or conflicts, of whatever nature and of whatever origin, which may arise among them, shall never be sought except by pacific means."

And yet in spite of this three-fold pledge, this three-fold solemn covenant on the part of the nations never to resort to war, never to use their armies and navies, always to settle their differences through arbitration,--in spite of these three major agreements enacted within the last nine years, three naval conferences convened during these self-same nine years failed either in limiting arms or in reducing them.

I refer, of course, to the Washington Conference of 1921, to the Geneva Conference of 1927, and to the London Conference which is just now passing through the agony of a slow death. For as far as any possible reduction in naval armament is concerned, the London Conference is as dead as a door nail. The party is all over. The sad thing about it all is that it wants to die and doesn't know how. Mr. Hoover would perform an act of

supreme mercy if he summoned Mr. Stimson and his colleagues back home. The conference is a failure, having failed to achieve any of the objectives for which it was convoked. The Washington Conference in 1921 was a failure in spite of the fact that it was acclaimed as a great triumph for disarmament; in spite of the fact that the bells of churches tolled out ecstatically on the day the conference opened, and Mr. Hughes made his historic declaration of America's policies. I sometimes suspect that when church bells begin to toll politicians begin to smile.

Since the Washington Conference in 1921, which was to limit naval armament, the five nations signatory to the agreements entered into at that conference have built since that time over a million and a half tons of new warships. England has built 72 new ships to a total of 404,000 tons; the United States 69 ships to a total of 389,000 tons; Japan 116 ships to a total of 331,000 tons; France 112 ships to a total of 238,000 tons; Italy 68 ships to a total of 118,000 tons. This was the result of the Washington Conference for the reduction of armament.

Some of these nations, especially the United States, France and Italy, are actually spending more money on their navies in 1930 than they did in 1922; and last year these five nations alone spent over a thousand million dollars on the upkeep of their navies.

So that the jubilation of the success of the

✓ Washington Conference was, to say the least, a bit too anticipatory. The Geneva Conference in '27 didn't get anywhere; it turned out to be a double failure; it ended in a deadlock; nothing was done; no agreements were entered into. And now the London Conference promises to lead at best to a general increase in naval armaments.

✓ It might perhaps be well to review, so that we may keep clear in mind what is going on in the world today, the story of these conferences, to see what are the motives back of them. Up to the World War England's navy outclassed America's navy completely in every sense.

✓ England was then spending about twice the money that we were spending on its navy annually. Nobody seemed particularly to mind it. We weren't losing any sleep in the years before 1914 over the fact that England's navy was about twice the size of our navy, and England wasn't particularly abusing us or maltreating us because of the superior strength of its navy. Then the war came, and the war was responsible for a vast shifting of power and prestige in our direction. Our commerce increased tremendously; our international interests therefore increased vastly. We became aware that in order to preserve our neutral rights during war, as we attempted to do in the early years of the war, we must have a powerful navy,--at least, so we thought,--to give force to our declaration in behalf of neutrality. And so as early as 1916, under the inspiration of President Wilson, the 1916 naval program was

adopted, which purposed to give to the United States in a few years a navy second to none.

That was the beginning of our rivalry with Great Britain in shipbuilding. A year later, in 1917, we entered the World War on the side of the Allies, and therefore we could not logically proceed to build in competition with Great Britain. It was found that Great Britain had enough of capital ships to take care of the enemy; so that we began to spend our money on auxiliary ships, on cargo ships, on submarine chasers and destroyers. But in 1919, immediately after the war, and almost simultaneously with the opening of the peace conference, we resumed our navy building program of 1916, and we began to build capital ships in earnest, in order to reach parity with Great Britain, or perhaps even to out-rank Great Britain; and our ships were to be of the newest, of the most powerful sort. Having learned, so the naval experts tell us, the experiences of the battle of Jutland, we were to profit by that experience and we were to build ships that would cower all the other battle-ships of any other great power. And in the three years between 1918 and 1921, when President Wilson's administration came to a close, we spent over a half a billion of dollars in the construction of new ships for our navy.

The English tried to dissuade us. The English saw their mastery of the oceans challenged, endangered. But we were not to be dissuaded. Harding's

administration was not addicted to the big navy idea as much as Wilson's administration was. The Republicans, however, felt guilty, as they sometimes do. Having defeated the League of Nations, having kept the United States from entering the League, they felt that they ought to do something to show America's interest in world peace; and so President Harding summoned the Washington Conference in 1921; and at this conference we did a most amazing thing. Mr. Balfour said that our declaration came to him and to his delegation as "a profound shock of surprise." Now when a diplomat uses such terms, that must have been a shock.

In 1921 we had actually reached parity with Great Britain's navy, and in some respects we were superior to Great Britain's navy, and the other naval powers were impoverished by the war, could not build, could not compete with us, and we could have carried on our building program until we would have had a navy perhaps as large as the two largest navies of the other powers; and yet, in spite of the fact that we were in that most unusual position of actual naval supremacy, we offered, through our spokesman Mr. Hughes, to reduce our navy to an absolute parity with Great Britain.

What it meant as far as we were concerned was that we would scrap fourteen of these newest and most powerful capital ships, some of which were already built,

some of which were being finished,--fourteen ships in which over five hundred millions of dollars had already been invested. We junked them all. And England, to show its good will, scrapped two capital ships which were still on paper! - along with some obsolete, antiquated ships. And Japan scrapped three battleships, and a few paper battleships.

Thus with one stroke, with one fine gesture, we sacrificed naval supremacy. We did more than that. We permitted ourselves to be outwitted. The conference was convoked to limit all types of ships,--not merely capital ships,--cruisers, destroyers, submarines. But somehow, by the time the conference adjourned, only the capital ships in which we excelled were limited. All other ships in which other nations excelled were not limited. The ratio of 5-5-3-3, for some reason or other--England blamed it on France, France blamed it on England; you know how things go,--for some reason or other that ratio was not applied to other types of ships except the major battleship.

We should never, of course, have permitted that to happen; we should never have consented to limitation of capital ships before the auxiliary ships were limited. That was our colossal blunder. England emerged from the Washington Conference, to its own vast surprise and gratification, triumphant,--its navy supreme;

and it is no wonder that Mr. Balfour, when he returned home, was made an earl.

Immediately following this Washington Conference in '21, England proceeded to build additional cruisers - for cruisers were not limited, you see; and before long this ratio went glimmering completely, and the United States found itself outclassed, and some citizens in America believed that there had also been what is technically known as the "double-cross"; and there was a vast amount of grumbling in the country.

So that President Coolidge called for a second conference which would limit the auxiliary ships which had not been limited at the Washington Conference. He invited these same nations, -- England, France, Italy, Japan, to come to a conference in Geneva, but none of them was particularly anxious to come to this conference. France and Italy declined the invitation completely. They felt they had been dealt with rather harshly at the Washington Conference. They would not come to another one. England accepted the invitation with reservations, and the reservations finally wrecked the Geneva conference.

At this Geneva Conference the American representative asked, and seemingly with justice, that the same ratio which had been applied in Washington to the capital ships be applied now to all other types of ships, and that the United States would be ready to reduce in

tonnage its ships to the minimum that any nation wants to go, just so there be an absolute parity in these auxiliary boats. The English delegation refused. They said that they are perfectly satisfied to have limitation as regards the class A cruisers. You may think I am speaking as a naval expert. I really know very little about it. I am quoting the facts which an average layman reading the facts can acquire. The English delegation maintained that limitation was all right for the larger cruisers and class A cruisers, which the United States seemingly needed, because we haven't as many naval bases as England has, and our ships must have a wider cruising radius. So as regards the class A ships, which we needed in larger numbers, England was willing to limit them, but as regards the smaller cruisers, for which we did not have particular need, but which England needed, England was not willing to have any limitations placed upon them. And so the conference came to a deadlock and was adjourned.

Six months later, in answer to this failure at Geneva, our naval appropriation committee presented to the Congress of the United States a new naval program, which meant we would build up principally in the cruiser class to a point where we would have parity or supremacy as regards England. This naval program called for the twenty-five cruisers, building in a few years of nine destroyers, thirty-two submarines and five aircraft carriers, amounting to the

neat sum of 725 millions of dollars. If England was not going to agree to a parity with us, we would show her.

This program was finally modified, because there was such a hue and cry throughout this country against this terrible expenditure of funds, especially at a time when we were announcing to the world that universal peace had been established through the Kellogg-Briand Treaty. This program was finally modified to fifteen cruisers of class A, which would be built within three years or so. That was our answer to Great Britain. But there was one proviso attached to it: that should in the meantime an international conference be convoked for the limitation of armament, the President of the United States is empowered to suspend work on any or all of these ships. In other words, the United States was still anxious to have limitation and still striving to find a way out.

In April, 1929, the preparatory disarmament conference met in Geneva, and we were there represented, and our spokesman, Mr. Gibson, again reiterated the American position: that we were ready to enter in agreement for the limitation and reduction of navies provided that reduction will hold good for all catagories of ships, and that we placed no minimum upon the tonnage. We are ready to go down to the very minimum of navies if other nations will do simultaneously. By that time the English

government had gone into the hands of the Labor party, and MacDonald had become prime minister of England. MacDonald is a peace-loving man, and one of his first efforts was to get in touch with our ambassador in London, Mr. Dawes, to begin discussions which would lead to an amicable understanding between Great Britain and the United States on the subject of naval limitation. And soon thereafter the prime minister announced in Parliament that negotiations had advanced to a point where success seemed likely; that he was to visit the United States in the near future to talk over the matters in detail with President Hoover, and that in the meantime he ordered that the construction of some cruisers and other naval ships shall be suspended; and in reply to his fine gesture President Hoover ordered the work on three of our cruisers to be suspended, and in Great Britain of last year the prime minister visited the United States. He was welcomed by the entire country as a true emissary of peace and international good will.

He had his meetings with the President, and a few days later they issued a joint statement, which I would like to read to you, because it was on the basis of this statement that the London Conference was convoked.

"The exchange of views on naval reduction has brought the two nations so close to agreement that the obstacles in previous conferences arising out of

Anglo-American disagreements seem now substantially removed. We have kept the nations which took part in the Washington naval conference of 1922 informed of the progress of our conversations, and we have now proposed to them that we should all meet together and try to come to a common agreement which would justify each in making substantial naval reductions. An agreement on naval armaments cannot be completed without the cooperation of other naval powers, and both of us feel sure that by the same free and candid discussion of needs which has characterized our conversation, such mutual understandings will be reached as will make naval agreement next January possible.

"In view of the security afforded by the Peace Pact (the Paris Pact), we have been able to end, we trust forever, all competitive building between ourselves, with the risk of war and the waste of public money involved, by agreeing to a parity of fleets category by category. Success in the coming conference will result in a large decrease in the naval equipment of the world, and, what is equally important, the reduction of prospective programs of construction which would otherwise produce competitive building.

"We hope and believe that the steps we have taken will be warmly welcomed by the peoples whom we represent as a substantial contribution to the efforts

universally made by all nations to gain security for peace, not by military organizations but by peaceful means, rooted in public opinion and enforced by a sense of justice in the civilized world."

But it is a far cry, my friends, between hopes expressed and fulfillment. In the very first days of the London Conference it became apparent that that conference is faced with insurmountable difficulties. In the first place, for the United States to have complete parity with England in matters of cruisers one of two things would have to happen: either that England would reduce its cruiser tonnage to the level of ours--in other words, doing now what we did in Washington--or we would have to build up our cruiser tonnage to meet England's level. If England were given to altruism in its international relationships, the first of these alternatives would have been adopted. England would have made a generous gesture, and would have said, "We will scrap a certain number of cruisers which we no longer really need, because we know that we are not going to war with you." And that would be the end of the story. But England is not given to altruism of this kind, and so the only other alternative is for the United States to build up, and that means that in the next few years we shall probably have to spend a thousand million dollars---one billion dollars to build up a parity with Great Britain in the matter of cruisers. So

that instead of having reduction in naval armaments we shall actually have an increase, and this pious hope of MacDonald and Hoover will remain a pious hope.

Just why we need parity with Great Britain, just why we have suddenly begun to worship this great god "Parity," just why parity should have become the sine qua non in our international armament program, I, for one, do not understand. For over a half a century and more we got along very well, even though we had no parity in battleships with Great Britain. None of our rights were trampled upon because of the fact; but seemingly parity has now become the new slogan, the new fetish, the new "Fifty-four-forty or fight." And that will be sounded over and over again in the ears of our people in the days to come.

How does parity insure peace? Nobody knows. Suppose we would have the same number of ships with Great Britain: would that insure there would be no war between us? - the unthinkable war? And what would prevent Great Britain from making an alliance with Japan against us? And then what would become of our parity? How long will peoples be beguiled by such stupidities as that?

Japan suddenly realized when the London Conference was called that the old ratio of 5-5-3 was no longer applicable. She now asks for 10-10-7, an increase rather than a decrease. Italy, carried away by Fascist

megalomania, now wants parity with France, which will mean another naval increase. France, nettled by this pretension of Italy, now demands a Mediterranean navy equal to that of Italy's, plus all the other ships that she will require in the other oceans and seas of the earth. Further increase.

With Italy and France demanding an increase in their navies, England, whose traditional policy has been to have a navy equal to that of the two largest naval powers in Europe, is actually confronted with the necessity of increasing its navy. And then on top of it all France declares now, as it did declare before the conference, that it cannot think of limitation, not to speak of reduction, until a new security pact is entered into to which the United States will be a party, which will protect France in case of an attack by another power.

France, in other words, has demanded the exercitation of the Kellogg-Briand Treaty. It now demands that the United States shall agree that when France is endangered that it will enter into consultation or conference with France. Now just what this consultative agreement, of which you have read a great deal in the newspapers recently, actually means, it is very difficult to say. It may mean nothing, and it may mean a great deal. Mr. Stimson maintains that it means nothing but talking things over. The French, I suspect, are

much greater realists in matters of politics than that. What they wish to gain by this agreement is to place the United States under a moral obligation so that when war is threatened upon France it will have the occasion to say to the United States: "You made us reduce our navy. Now you have got to come to help us." Whether that is practically a military alliance or not, I, for one, am not able to say. But surely the Senate of the United States will never consent to such a thing. And here again. is a seemingly insurmountable obstacle to success.

So that this conference, which began with such glowing hopes on the part of the President of the United States and the prime minister of England, is ending in disaster. Mr. Simonds, who is perhaps one of the best informed newspaper men at the conference, thus summarizes the London Conference:

"It has been said that the conference would result in limitation, if not reduction, but the truth is that the limitation which will follow has not been a consequence of the conference, but rather of economic and financial conditions of the five powers. All are going to build all that they can afford. Limits which may be set, if there be a treaty, will pretty exactly coincide with the money which they have to spend, or the yards which they have available for building. The main tasks of real reduction or even effective limitation will,

in any event, -treaty or no treaty, -be postponed to the next conference of 1935. The reason lies in the impossibility today of adjusting political questions in such a fashion as to persuade several powers to indulge in any real cessation of building or actual reduction. To get parity with Britain we must build; to keep pace with us Japan must build; to guard against German and Italian dangers, real or imagined, France must build; to be equal with France Italy must build. In the face of their building Britain cannot stand still. This is a picture of the reality at the London Conference. That is the reason why any conference called before political atmospheres have changed will end, not in reduction but expansions, and in limitation which must be chiefly illusory."

What is the way out? Why, seemingly, there is no way out at present. All the peoples suffer from the crushing burden of armaments, yet their statesmen cannot find the way out. Sometimes the sword is the only way of cutting the Gordian knot. Don't you see that as long as this political atmosphere of which Mr. Simonds speaks, of suspicion and distrust, remains, any conference is doomed to failure. Nations will disarm only when they begin to trust one another. That is a truism but a truism which cannot be stressed too often. In an atmosphere of distrust and suspicion and intrigue, no

✓ actual reduction of land armament or sea armament will
ever take place.

✓ Perhaps after another decade, or two
✓ decades, after the nations of the earth will have lived
✓ under the Pact of Paris and under the Locarno Treaties,
✓ and the League of Nations for a longer period of time,
✓ and have seen how their differences can be and are being
adjusted peacefully, and through that process will learn
to lose some of their mutual distrusts and fears, perhaps
then will be the time for the beginning of real reduction
in armaments. Until that time I am afraid nothing of a
substantial character can be done, and until that time it
is the bounden duty of every devotee of peace to continue
that type of peace propaganda and education which have
been responsible, at least in a measure, for the peace
efforts on the part of the nations of the earth.

We must continue to preach incessantly in
school, in pulpits, in clubs, in newspapers, at every
occasion, the dogmas of international dependence, and more
particularly of economic international dependence, so that
they become thought habits, thought patterns of the peoples
of the earth; and we must guard ourselves through a
veritable vigilance against those vast industrial or
capitalistic organizations controlling our international
relationships; for war, my friends, is almost always the
result of economic conflict. We in the United States

have begun to clamor for a larger and larger navy because our vast capitalistic organizations, bent upon economic imperialism and expansion, want to have a big navy back of them. If there is every to be a war - God forbid - between the United States and Great Britain, it will be brought about by the economic rivalry of a few vast corporations here and in England. Certainly our peoples don't want war and our peoples don't want to compete in armaments. The workingman in Cleveland who is out of employment has no quarrel with the workingman in London who is out of employment; nor does the man who is employed here and working honestly have any quarrel with his confrere in Manchester or Liverpool. Oil interests perhaps more than any other group are creating an atmosphere of bitterness and rivalry between these great peoples of the earth.

We must begin to guard ourselves against it. Recently I read a very remarkable statement - and with that I shall close - made by the man who is responsible for the Young plan, by which the financial troubles of the World War were finally straightened out. Owen D. Young, in a most remarkable statement, has this to say to the American people on the subject of economic interdependence of nations, and the political implications of that.

"What about the relationship of economics to politics and international cooperation? Well, my

answer is this: economic integration of the world is a necessary prerequisite to effective political cooperation in the world. America as the greatest creditor nation is more interested than any other in economic integration of the whole world. It is inevitable that from an economic point of view she take an interest in and be concerned in the material problems and affairs of every country on the globe. Isolation to America as an economic or political factor is impossible. The material development of countries will necessarily be to us a matter of great concern, both from an idealistic and practical point of view. If all peoples everywhere could be lifted in productive capacity and consuming power to a point equal to our own, envy and hatred would be alleviated, capital would be better employed, markets would be enlarged, unemployment would diminish, and a much more peaceful world would be insured. Let no man think that the living standards of America can be permanently maintained at a measurably higher level than those of the other civilized countries. Either we shall lift theirs to ours or they will drag our own down to theirs.

"Tariffs and other petty political barriers, temporarily justifiable, will in the long run only accentuate the trouble. Our experience at home during the last generation should teach us that segregation into different groups for the selfish purpose of benefitting one at the

expense of the other is a failure. It was not so many years ago that our industrial leaders in the United States thought that a low wage scale was necessary to enable capital to earn a profit. Now we have learned that a high wage scale may be consistent not only with low production costs but also with the greatest security to a return on capital investment. In a word, we are learning in America that the highest welfare of all rather than of any class is a wise objective even for the group previously privileged. How long will it take us to learn this fact, in a world so small that Commander Byrd talks from New Zealand on Wednesday at noon, in the fall of the year, with Adolph S. Ochs in Schenectady on Thursday, at 7:30 in the morning, in the spring of the year, and that the conversation can be heard by practically everybody in the world at varying times and seasons? How long can any people maintain isolation in such a world?

"It is too late, in our own interests, to think in terms of selfish isolation. To secure the advantages of economic equilibrium we must go beyond political frontiers. We may sign great declarations of peace, but we shall concurrently find, if we follow a narrow economic policy, an increasing resistance in countries less well off than ourselves to that disarmament which is the insurance of the peace we seek. Politics in America may start a program which politics cannot stop.

"And one more word," says Mr. Young.

"America is too rich to be loved. She is well enough off to be envied. The attitude of the world towards her will be largely influenced by her spirit. If it be one of selfishness in isolation, she will have failed in a great responsibility; if it be one of boastfulness in her success, she will have misused the things which God has given her. I pray for sober and sensible responsibility, a spirit of gratitude for the things we have, a spirit of friendliness and helpfulness and cooperation for all, a spirit of restraint in the use of any power which has been entrusted to us, and most of all restraint in speech. If drunk with the sight of power we loose wild tongues that have not Thee in awe, for frantic boasts and foolish words, Thy mercy on Thy people, O Lord."

Thus speaks a great American statesman, a man of vision. And we, the common people, who are not in the council chambers of the great, who cannot sit around the conference tables with the 110 millions of plain folks, who pay the bills for armies and navies, who carry the yoke, and who send our sons to the war to be butchered and mutilated,--we, the plain, common folks who are so often misled by propaganda, who are so often confused by contrary opinions, vociferously expressed,--we, the common folks can do but two things in the way of peace. One is to pray earnestly all the time for peace, and the other is

to learn the ways of peace and to teach them to our children, peace based not on mere sentiment but based upon the hard facts of life today; peace based on the fact that no nation can live today in isolation, that (j) no nation can be strong enough to defy the world, that no nation can prosper at the impoverishment of other nations, that all armies and navies have never insured peace, that there are no safeguards against war,--rather are they provocations and incitements to war; peace based upon the new international interdependence of mankind; peace in a world which has been drawn closely together and become smaller and smaller, so that we have begun to rub elbows one with another.

We are living together in one house, all of us, and we must find ways of living within that one house in peace, in justice and in good will.

Our program, then, is one of faith and education.

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