

THE LIMA CONFERENCE - SUCCESS OR FAILURE?

By Charles A. Thomson.

(The following article was sent from Ecuador by Mr. Thomson, who is en route to the United States after attending the Eighth Pan-American Conference at Lima, Peru.)

QUITO, Ecuador, Dec. 30.- The most lasting value of the Lima Conference may be its use as a case study in the application of democratic methods to international relations. It revealed the limitations of that method in securing prompt and concrete results. But it may also demonstrate the long-term value of such procedure for the development of realistic understanding and freely given cooperation.

The United States delegation came to the Conference primarily concerned to forge inter-American unity against commercial and cultural penetration and possible armed aggression by the totalitarian states. Secretary Hull, in his opening address, asserted that an "ominous shadow falls athwart our own continent" and proclaimed repeatedly that there should not be "a shadow of a doubt anywhere" concerning the determination of the American nations to oppose either a military or an ideological invasion of the Western Hemisphere. For this program the United States found substantial support in a Caribbean bloc of twelve nations, made up of Mexico, the Central American countries, Panama, Colombia, Venezuela, and the three West Indian republics.

A distinctly different point of view was voiced by a South American group headed by Argentina, and including the neighboring states of Uruguay, Paraguay and Bolivia. Chile, and, to a lesser degree, Brazil were also found

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in this camp. Argentina refused to show alarm at the immediacy of the Nazi-Fascist menace. It was unwilling to sign any document which might be interpreted as a slap at a specific European nation. This attitude, according to the Argentines, was determined not by mysterious or sinister influences, but by sound reasons of national self-interest. The economic life of Argentina and the countries which supported it depends to a major degree on European markets. A large proportion of their population is made up of European immigrants, whose ties with their home lands still foster vital currents of sympathy and interest. Moreover, Argentine foreign policy has traditionally favored a universal rather than a regional emphasis. Buenos Aires has long viewed the United States as its leading rival in the Western Hemisphere, a habit of mind which five years of the Good Neighbor policy have not entirely erased. Argentina consequently declared its willingness at Lima to cooperate against any real threat to the inter-American order, but at the same time reserved its freedom of action. It saw no need for specific pacts to maintain "continental solidarity". Thus at the moment when the United States gave indications of offering to the American nations the type of "entangling alliance" which it had always refused to Europe, its proposal fell on deaf ears. Ironically enough, Argentina's policy - general support of international cooperation with opposition to specific commitments - was almost an exact parallel of what Washington has demanded for itself in the past both in European and inter-American affairs. As late as the

1928 Havana Conference, the United States fought shy of any political ties with New World nations.

In view of the Argentine position, Secretary Hull and his colleagues were forced to choose between two courses. By pressure tactics they might have marshalled an impressive numerical majority for the United States program. But this procedure would necessarily have isolated Argentina, made it the possible nucleus of a future opposition bloc, and definitely disrupted Pan-American unity. Or the United States might have sought to go only so far as common agreement would permit. It was decided to follow the latter course, and Mr. Hull's policy of unanimous support for important decisions, initiated in 1933 at Montevideo, was continued at Lima.

Working harmony was thus maintained, but only at considerable cost to tangible achievement, particularly in cementing an inter-American front. The United States delegation had brought to Lima a reported draft for a protocol to the consultative pact signed at Buenos Aires in 1936. This draft provided for joint defense against external aggression, with establishment of a permanent consultative commission, made up of the Foreign Ministers of the American countries. Opposition from the Argentine bloc forced the scrapping of this project, and instead, after protracted negotiations, a Buenos Aires proposal for "A Declaration of the Solidarity of America" was finally adopted on December 22, with only slight changes from its original text.

This document substituted for any clear-cut obligation to cooperate in mutual defense, a reaffirmation of

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"continental solidarity" and a declaration on the part of the American states that

"in case the peace, security or territorial integrity of any American Republic is thus threatened by acts of any nature that may impair them, they proclaim their common concern and their determination to make effective their solidarity, coordinating their respective sovereign wills by means of the procedure of consultation ... using the measures which in each case the circumstances may make advisable."

It was further provided that, to facilitate consultation "the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the American Republics, when deemed desirable and at the initiative of any one of them, will meet in their several capitals by rotation and without protocolary character". This cautious pledge of cooperation did not go substantially beyond the Declaration of Inter-American Solidarity adopted at Buenos Aires, in which the American nations went on record in favor of consultation. But the clause prescribing how consultation was to be carried out represented a definite, if small, advance. A second project approved at the Conference provided that consultation might be invoked for economic and cultural as well as political questions.

While the Conference avoided any open expressions of hostility to the Fascist states, various resolutions adopted at Lima indicated determination to check the tactics of divisive penetration. A Brazilian resolution opposed introduction into the Western Hemisphere of the principle of political minorities. An Argentine resolution, directed at the plebiscite of German residents recently held in the Latin American countries, declared against the collective exercise by foreigners of political rights granted by countries of origin. A Cuban proposal
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condemning racial and religious persecution, after being watered down in subcommission, was finally adopted.

In the economic field, Secretary Hull secured unanimous support for the introduction and approval of a resolution recommending "reasonable tariffs in lieu of other forms of trade restrictions" and "the negotiation of trade agreements, embodying the principle of non-discrimination". This move, however, only reaffirmed similar action taken at the Montevideo and Buenos Aires Conference.

On the previously controversial question of women's rights, the Conference adopted compromise measures, which may possibly presage an end to the struggle waged between the advocates of "equal rights" and those favoring protective legislation for women. "The Lima Declaration of Women's Rights" proclaims that women are entitled to equal political and civil status with men. but also "to the most ample opportunities for work and to be protected therein" and "to the most ample protection as mothers". Provision was made for continuance of the Inter-American Commission of Women as a consultative body.

In tangible results, the Lima Conference fell far short of the two preceding Pan-American gatherings at Montevideo and Buenos Aires. Its failure to conclude a single treaty or convention is matched by only one other Pan-American Conference - the first, held in 1889. It refused to take action on mediation in the Spanish civil war and avoided discussion of the refugee question.

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Its cautious and limited affirmation of inter-American solidarity revealed that the American republics are unwilling to form an opposing front, not only toward Europe in general, but against the totalitarian states in particular. Equally clear was the reluctance of the leading South American nations to support the type of ideological war apparently favored by many in Washington, or to join in any concerted program of rearmament against the possible threat of external aggression.

On the other hand, the Lima Conference was free from the open manifestations of inter-American friction which marked the 1923 and 1928 conferences at Santiago and Havana. It conserved the gains made at Montevideo and Buenos Aires, and made some improvements in the machinery for inter-American consultation. In positive achievements, the Conference may be ranked as a failure. Negatively, it may claim to be a success; for it at least took no backward steps. At a time when general retreat characterizes the forces of peaceful cooperation and international understanding, it held ground previously won and kept the road open for further advance in the future.