

Ex-Secretary Stimson's Letter on Foreign Relations

Following is the text of former Secretary of State Henry L. Stimson's letter on the foreign policy of the United States:

To THE EDITOR
OF THE NEW YORK TIMES:

There is an increasing number of our people who feel that, in the face of the situation abroad, our government should follow a policy of frightened affirmative action rather than one of drift and negation. Their belief is that in the former lies the best hope for the prevention of war, while by the latter we should run the most serious risk of becoming ultimately dragged into war.

Recent actions indicate that this may be also becoming the policy of our government. I refer for example to the action of the Secretary of State in persuading our airplane manufacturers not to sell planes to nations—notably Japan—which are engaged in bombing helpless civilian populations; the action of the Export and Import Bank in making a loan of \$35,000,000 to China; the action of the government in encouraging the sale of large numbers of airplanes to Great Britain and France in the emergency which confronts those nations; the very frank and outspoken answer which Mr. Welles of the State Department addressed to the German Ambassador on the subject of the provocative utterances of the government-controlled Nazi press; and finally the January address of the President to Congress indicating that it was the intention of our government to bring our influence to bear upon aggressor nations by methods which were "short of war, but stronger and more effective than mere words."

Danger in Isolation

I have long been in favor of such a policy. I believe that our foreign policy cannot with safety be geographically limited to a defense of this hemisphere or of our own continental boundaries. On the contrary, I think that if we should stand idly by without protest or action until Britain, France and China are either conquered or forced to make terms with militaristic aggressors, our own hemisphere might become economically so affected and militarily so endangered that it would be neither a safe nor happy place to live in for a people with American ideals of life. On this point I think that the statements of the President in his January address to Congress and of Secretary Hull last year are sound and timely.

These great and fundamental issues are now being widely discussed. The policy of the government has been sharply criticized. It may not be inappropriate for me to attempt to analyze some of these criticisms and what seem to me to be the answers to them. By way of premise I fully recognize that this problem of war prevention has become much more serious and difficult by the setback to world cooperation for peace and by the growth of international lawlessness which has taken place during the past decade. But that does not relieve us of the problem. We must still face it and solve it if possible.

One very common objection to such an affirmative policy of our government is in substance that we are needlessly irritating and antagonizing nations with whom otherwise we might safely live in peace and that we are meddling with what really does not concern us. These critics say that democracies have lived in the same world with autocracies before; therefore they should be able to do so now. I think that the fundamental error involved in this objection is an imperfect appreciation of the basic aims and methods of the so-called fascist governments, by which term I mean the three nations united by the so-called Berlin-Rome-Tokyo axis.

Recent history has thrown much light on these characteristics, but even now it is hardly appreciated what a complete reversal of the whole trend of European civilization they represent. If all that modern fascist meant were a system under which a nation voluntarily submitted itself to an autocratic ruler and under which was willing to live quietly

and at peace with its neighbors, we might agree that it was a domestic matter which concerned that nation alone, and that it was not our business to meddle with it.

Attack on Democracy

But it is becoming every day more clear that fascism is not such a system. On the contrary, it is now evident that it is a radical attempt to reverse entirely the long evolution out of which our democracies of Europe and America have grown, and that it constitutes probably the most serious attack on their underlying principles which those principles have ever met.

We know now that the inhabitants of those countries from childhood up, by means of meticulous and absolute government control and by the skillful use of modern engines and methods of mass propaganda, are being taught to reject freedom; to scorn the principles of government by discussion and persuasion instead of force, and to despise the neighboring nations which practice such principles. We now know that those Fascist nations have created a skillful technique for foreign aggression and that they are in fact girded under virtual martial law for threats and, if necessary, for acts of force upon their neighbors. In succession the attacks upon Manchuria, North China, South China, Ethiopia, Spain, Austria and Czechoslovakia have shown us the error of likening modern fascism to a domestic system with which the rest of the world could live in peace.

Furthermore, fascism has involved a serious moral deterioration; an increasing and callous disregard of the most formal and explicit international obligations and pledges; extreme brutality toward helpless groups of people; the complete destruction within their jurisdiction of that individual freedom of speech, of thought, and of the person which has been the priceless goal of many centuries of struggle and the most distinctive crown of our modern civilization. Such a loosening of the moral and humane ties which bind human society together gives powerful confirmation of the basic unfitness of such a system for organized international life.

It strongly suggests that in our modern interdependent world Lincoln's saying holds true, that a house so divided against itself cannot permanently stand. Today the neighbors of a fascist nation are compelled to live in anticipation of immediate forceful attack. Such a situation is obviously the reversal of all civilized international society as we have known it in the past. Today, instead of the family of nations being composed only of States whose individual sovereignty is mutually recognized and respected, it also contains a powerful and united group of States armed to the teeth which is continually threatening and attacking some of its neighbors.

Soft Words Ineffective

Does any thoughtful man believe that inaction or soft words from us would prevent similar attacks being made against the United States today if a fascist government believed that such attacks would be useful and could be carried through with success? On the contrary, it is now clear that we are confronted with serious danger which will exist until the liberal movement regains its faith, its courage and its momentum, and until the people of the fascist nations themselves become convinced of the futility of their systems and compel the necessary changes.

Today those people are so shielded by censorship and controlled by government propaganda that no early change can be anticipated. It may be delayed until economic or military disaster compels it, but in the meanwhile the danger of a general war hangs over us. The prospect is as unpalatable as it is without parallel in our experience. The danger is as formidable as it is imminent. In my opinion it can be successfully resisted only by the far-sighted readiness and cooperation of the nations which are opposed to such a system.

Another objection to an affirmative policy by our government is

that it will drag us into war. This is an objection which seems to me to be based partly on confused thinking and partly on undue timidity. As in fact, as history has shown, that if a general war actually takes place we shall very probably be ultimately dragged into it. When war has once begun, the combatant nations become so desperate and so reckless that, however cautious we may be, our rights and interests will eventually be so trampled upon that our people will insist on defending them by force.

But that is not the present question. What we are discussing now is the prospect of preventing such a general war from actually breaking out. That is an entirely different matter. Even if they are impervious to moral reasons, these aggressive fascist nations understand very well the possible dangers as well as the possible advantages of force, and they may be deterred from beginning a war by timely and vigorous warning of the dangers which they will thereby certainly incur. Even more important, peaceful nations may be encouraged not to make surrenders which will ultimately endanger our safety, if they now receive from us in advance encouragement and actual assistance which it lies within our power to give them.

No one realizes more strongly than I do the uniquely secure position, geographically as well as in the possession of vital natural resources, which the United States occupies today. Today we are more nearly self-contained than any other nation in respect to the raw materials necessary for making war, and today we are also practically safe from that new terror of war—the bombing of large cities from the air.

A Choice for Us

But the question now is: Having these unique and powerful advantages, how shall we use them? Having this present security from attack, how shall we conduct ourselves in this threatening world? Shall we bury our heads in the sands of isolationism and timidly await the time when our security shall be lessened and perhaps destroyed by the growing success of lawlessness around us? Or shall we use our present strength and security from attack to throw our weight into the warring scales in favor of law and order and freedom? Today our government can with safety speak unwelcome truths to a dictator or to an unwelcome act, which it might be extremely hazardous for a weaker European neighbor of the dictator, either to do or utter. Recent events have indicated that such activity by us may produce extremely wholesome reactions in the cause of peace. On the other hand, it is far from inconceivable that a threatened or devastated France or Britain or Holland might be forced to cede to a fascist nation some of its possessions in the Western Hemisphere or in the Orient or make commitments to that nation which would be even more dangerous to our safety. Would our position be bettered by idly waiting for that to occur?

There is a flood of reaction and violence overrunning the world today. Our faith is that this is temporary; that the great progress of many long centuries will not be permanently lost but that after the social and economic dislocations caused by the Great War are readjusted the progress in freedom and in the humanities will be resumed. In the meanwhile and until the present violence has spent its force that good must be held back from overwhelming us. During that interval each liberty-loving nation which stands confident in its own strength and freedom is a strong point of defense. But that defense is not complete unless there is created among all such nations the fullest sympathy and encouragement as well as a readiness to assist to an extent proportionate to the danger.

What I have written may explain why I am unalterably opposed to the doctrine preached in many quarters that our government and our people must treat the nations on both sides of this great issue with perfect impar-