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Convocation Address
Commencement Address by Professor Walter Consuelo Langsam of Union College, Schenectady, N.Y. Delivered at the Summer Convocation at Ohio State University in the morning of August 29, 1941.

Peace or Truce?

Vice-President Morrill, Distinguished Guests, Members of the Faculty, Graduates, Ladies and Gentlemen!

It was exactly fifteen days ago, you will recall, that President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill announced agreement on a list of eight so-called peace aims — eight general principles which, in their opinion, must be observed if any post-war settlement is to give promise of being more than merely another in a long series of truces, is, in other words, to provide a relatively enduring peace. This action of the two high officials was proof, if such were needed, that, in their informed view at least, the United States will be in position to exercise some influence at the peace conference which presumably is to follow the present war, which, indeed, is to reshape the world wherein we — you and I — are going to live.

Such a view must be based on the expectation of a German defeat, for if the Third Reich should win, Berlin presumably will try to settle the fate at least of continental Europe without asking the advice of anyone, certainly not of the United States. On the other hand, if Germany loses, we may expect to be represented at a future peace gathering whether or not we meanwhile have become active military participants in the war. In the latter case, we would have a claim to representation not only because of the aid short of war rendered to the victors, but because, in reconstructing war-torn Europe, the victors will have to draw on our economic strength, will need our foodstuffs and our medicines, will seek the benefit of our technical skills, and will want our aid in rehabilitation and in solving the problem of what to do with millions of hapless and homeless refugees.
This being so, it becomes important, in my opinion at least, for the people of the United States to center some of their best thought on a more detailed consideration of our own wishes in the matter of eventual peace provisions. The ideals have been officially defined in broad outline; it remains to fill in the details. And this process of filling in should be begun now, while we still are at peace, while we still are free from the hatred and spirit of vengeance which must come with actual loss of blood and destruction of things held dear.

Well, you may say, why not let the British define their aims in detail and then express our approval or disapproval thereof? That, I fear, would involve too long a wait, for the British Government is not in position to make public anything but general and vague peace hopes. Of war aims, the British have only one, as does every country actually at war. The only possible British war aim is to win the war. All else must be secondary. Only after the war is won can the highest officials turn their energies to peace aims and reconstruction. Furthermore, since Great Britain already is fighting for her very existence, her eventual peace aims cannot but be influenced by the circumstances of the war’s end. Their aims will differ, depending on whether the fighting stops next week, or next month, or next year, or the year thereafter. Finally, it does not seem possible that the British Government could ever think of a set of peace aims the publication of which would increase rather than decrease the feeling of unity in the country and in the empire. General terms may be phrased in language acceptable to most; but specific terms, be they generous, moderate, or harsh, cannot find universal acceptance in a land engaged in a life-and-death struggle for existence. And that, again, is why we should ponder the question and try to reach at least partial conclusions while yet we are free from some of these limitations which restrict the London authorities.
I do not mean that every Tom, Dick, and Harry should sit down, draft pet place plans, and then cry them all over town. Nor do I mean that clever groups should congregate, formulate terms to suit their own interests, and then seek to impose them on all others through subtle persuasion. The field is a fertile one for stuff and nonsense and for selfish ambition. It is necessary in considering the problem to resemble the outstanding individual in an audience that happened to be addressed by a somewhat breezy orator. The listener sneezed violently and frequently, until the speaker asked one of the attendants to shut a window in the hall. Still the auditor sneezed, and the speaker asked to have the remaining windows closed, lest the listener catch his death of cold. But before the ushers could respond, the sneezer called out: "Oh, never mind about the windows! The only thing I am allergic to is baloney!" And so I say, let us be allergic to baloney, and base our thoughts on the facts of the matter and on precedent. And since there is no time like the present for doing what is to be done, I should like to make a few suggestions, based on a long and patient study of the peace settlement arrived at in Paris in 1919 and 1920 and of a number of its predecessors in the previous century.

Such a discussion can best be considered under the three main headings, namely, certain aspects of pre-peace conference diplomacy, the technique or procedure at the peace conference, and the general psychology and philosophy of a peace settlement that is intended to be more than merely an armistice. First, then, a few words about the diplomacy which customarily precedes the convening of a peace congress. It would seem that any allies or associates ought to try in advance to establish among themselves a clearly defined unity of purpose and outlook. One of the greatest difficulties that confronted the delegates, particularly the idealistic ones, at Paris from 1918 to
1920 was the circumstance that the respective national aims had never been brought into harmony with each other and that every group advanced points of view and demands that conflicted seriously with those of the other deputations. It was this sort of thing which led the frank Clemenceau to exclaim, on one occasion: "Even God was satisfied with Ten Commandments, but Wilson insists on Fourteen!" Had Germany been represented at the conference, and had she chosen as her delegate a diplomat like Bismarck or Talleyrand, she might well have driven a broad wedge between one allied group and another, so fundamental were their differences of outlook and principle, not to mention their contradictory views on items of detail.

Secondly, an effort should be made to preserve a unity, insofar as this may be politically possible, at least throughout the early post-war years. One of the greatest weaknesses of the system set up at Paris, and the one most responsible for enabling Germany to forge ahead as aggressively as she did, was the inability of Great Britain and France to see eye to eye on international problems after the conference adjourned. Whereas France wanted Germany to remain disunited and in permanent economic bondage, Great Britain wanted Germany to recover her economic health rapidly so that they might renew their business relations as quickly as possible. This disparity in views eventually led to a serious rift in Anglo-French relations of which Germany was the unexpected beneficiary and which was not properly healed until it was too late to prevent general conflagration.

And this leads us directly to the next point, namely, that any victor or victors should bear in mind, in making any new international arrangements or agreements, that foreign policies after the war will be conditioned by the varying domestic needs and problems of each state. One of the greatest errors made in recent years, not merely

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by the statesmen of the western world, but by the historians and teachers of history, has been, I believe, the tremendous emphasis on international affairs without adequate regard for internal developments. In reality the two are closely intertwined and certainly domestic factors may influence foreign relations and policies as much as external affairs may condition domestic situations. A remarkable example of the unbalanced emphasis I have in mind appeared in a recent nine-hundred-page volume on the history of European civilization since 1815. This book, in many respects excellent, has exactly one page on the internal happenings in Austria-Hungary and Italy during the whole period from 1867 to 1914! On Austria-Hungary alone, the second largest state of Europe by area and the third largest in population, the state, indeed, whose internal difficulties actually precipitated the World War, on this Austria-Hungary the author provided only two short paragraphs! This attitude has been typical of much of our thinking since 1919; let us not perpetuate such mistaken emphasis.

Expectant victors, moreover, ought to be careful not to make any great distinction between enemy governments and enemy peoples in the matter of proposed punishment. Such a procedure may be justifiable up to a certain point for encouraging subversive elements in the enemy state, but if carried too far it is certain to cause trouble. Normally, the environment of a peace conference is not such as to render likely the generous treatment of the enemy population merely because it has got rid, temporarily, of the few leaders on whom blame can conveniently be placed. When, with the best of intentions, such broad preliminary promises are made, it is later generally found to be extremely awkward, if not impossible, to incorporate them in a written treaty. Hence they can lead only to cries of betrayal and to further bitterness among the defeated people.

We come now to the technique to be used in the actual drafting of the
peace settlement. It would probably be well to have two peace conferences, a preliminary one to put an end to the armed hostilities and perhaps to dictate the immediate military and territorial terms, and then a later conference, perhaps after a year, which would be a true conference called to negotiate a lasting peace agreement. Doubtless the decisions of the preliminary conference would have to be implemented by force, through the temporary use of occupying troops. But doubtless also the powers gathered at the second meeting would be able to discuss economic, social, and even political questions in an atmosphere less steeped in hatred and revenge than has usually been the case. A treaty drawn up and imposed by force in all its details immediately after an armistice must of necessity contain the germs of another war; a treaty drafted in conference twelve months after the military and territorial questions have been settled would at least be worth trying.

Treaty delegates would also do well to bear in mind the unwisdom of signing pledges or accepting obligations which would bind their countries to do things that public opinion at home or else potential foreign threats may later make it difficult to carry out. To accept an obligation merely because it is idealistic is not practical politics, and practical politics still largely govern international relations. There should, for example, be no pledge of disarmament in a treaty unless the delegates are sure that their constituents and the international situation will make it possible to abide by the promise. For such an unfulfilled promise long remains as a sore spot in both national and international politics. Besides, it freely supplies potential enemies with ammunition for propaganda campaigns designed to stir up extreme nationalism at home and general confusion abroad.

At the close of the war it doubtless will be necessary to seek at least a partial solution for Europe's jumbled minority prob-
lem. Despite announced intentions to restore various areas violently absorbed by Germany, it does not seem feasible to contemplate a simple redrawing of every boundary line as it existed before 1938. Most likely numbers will have to be taken into consideration in any honest effort to reduce nationalistic sorespots. Hence it would seem advisable before a peace conference meets to devise some reasonably fair system of holding plebiscites or referenda, and then to apply this method as uniformly as may be practically possible. To use plebis-
cites in one area and not in another, or to adopt one kind of referen-
dum here and another there, can lead only to unpleasant conse-
quences and even violent repercussions. Certain aspects of the
manner in which the minorities question was handled at Paris have
provided some of the most effective propaganda material used by the
forces intent upon upsetting the entire status quo.

A peace conference should not single out certain individuals
in the defeated state and stigmatize them as "war criminals" deserving
special punishment. This not only once more raises the distinction
between leaders and people, but also eventually in the raising of the
accused persons to the status of martyrs and national heroes.
It is the sort of thing which makes it easy for the beaten people to
shift the blame for their post-war ills from their own actions to
the treaty which they had to accept upon losing the war. For this
same reason the enemy should not be barred from any of the post-war
"green-table" meetings. To exclude him from such conferences will
only feed his hurt feelings, increase his self-pity, and help him to
move the blame for his difficulties onto those he does not like.
Nations, after all, are as fond of doing this as are individuals.

If the next peace conference decides to establish a new interna-
tional body, then this should be so organized that no one can see in
it a society of victors bent upon enforcing the peace terms. The old League of Nations, in its early years at least, did look to many like an international society monopolizing sanctions rather than a family of legally equal states. The eventual admission of the former enemies original did not remove the original stigma of their exclusion.

For the same reason no new international body should be handicapped by having to carry out punitive treaty terms. It was unfortunate that the League of Nations had to assume responsibility, for example, for governing some of the areas permanently or temporarily annexed taken from the defeated powers. It is automatically aroused hatred among millions and made of the League a football in the game of national and international politics. It is clear today that the covenant should not have been inserted in the very treaties designed to punish the defeated states. Probably the mistake was unavoidable in 1919; it need not be repeated if opportunity for building an international agency of cooperation again presents itself.

Some practical and specific provision for the peaceful revision of peace terms is essential. The last peace settlement recognized the need for peaceful change but did it in such a way that no actual step in that direction taken. A few of the men at Paris were aware that injustice might have been done in one part of the treaty or another, because in the existing atmosphere and confusion this could not be avoided. Hence the insisted on a provision for the later modification of any item that was working under hardship on the former enemy. But the revisionist clause was so phrased that twenty years could pass without its coming into operation.

And now a few paragraphs on the general philosophy of the future peace settlement. Inasmuch as one of the avowed principles for which this war is being waged by Great Britain is the preservation of the dignity of man, any future peace ought to be free of state or
It would seem to be a serious mistake to justify any treaty terms at any time on the ground that the losers were ethically unfitted to fulfill certain political functions which others are better fitted to do. Whether this accusation be true or not, it remains a fact that such an indictment only feeds the hatred and hurt pride of humans and furnishes further grist to the mill of elements intent upon capitalizing the spirit of nationality.

Any economic terms in the peace settlement, furthermore, ought to be drafted with a clear understanding and impartial appraisal of the actual productive capacity of the defeated area, and the relation in every way of the economy of this region to the rest of the world. This was not done on the last occasion and, indeed, the oversight led to much unrest, suspicion, ill-will, and trouble for all concerned. As a consequence, almost every economic Franco-German quarrel simultaneously became a Franco-British economic dispute, with the result that the former allies drifted farther and farther apart while Germany was the better able to nullify the terms of Versailles unilaterally.

Finally, it would seem that the victors ought not to justify any peace proposals they may advance or insist on by repeating obvious wartime propaganda or by citing moral charges. Statements and accusations which may be necessary during war itself, should not be perpetuated after the grounding of arms. If territories are to be taken away, political restrictions to be imposed, international rights limited, then let these be justified on the basis of hard-headed practical necessity and policy, not on the basis of a moral alibi. Otherwise the people accused will lose their perspective and find an angle of attack against the treaty terms in question which they never had in mind. Moreover, where it appears necessary to apply
apply traditional moral, ethical, or political principles, the application should be bilateral. A holier-than-thou attitude has no place at a peace conference table. Injected into a treaty it has no positive value and contains the germ of great harm. Thus, if the principle of self-determination of peoples should once again be advanced at a peace conference, then let it serve as a guiding principle generally, and not merely in cases where it would tend to weaken one side and strengthen the other.

These, then, are some of the fundamental principles which, it seems to me, might well be discussed, considered, and studied now, while we still are in a position of legal detachment and have no fish of our own to fry. On such a program it would seem possible to achieve national unity and also to appeal to what remains of free world sentiment. And only on some such basis can the next post-war settlement hope to be a peace, not merely another truce.