

THE ROAD TO THE "WAR OF GREATER EAST ASIA"

By K. H. ABSHAGEN

On December 8 war broke out in the Pacific. We have asked our Tokyo collaborator to describe the road to this war on the basis of his observations as a journalist in the Japanese capital and taking into account the documentary material published during the last few weeks. (Some of it is to be found in our documentary appendix.)

Mr. K. H. Abshagen is known to our readers by his penetrating and amusing article "Society Dies Hard" in our December issue.—K.M.

What is it that was responsible for the bitter hostility of the United States towards Japan, a hostility which has now culminated in war? Is it to be found in the economic field? Hardly.

The stake of the United States in China was small compared with British interests, and American exports to Japan over a long period of time have been from two to four times as high as those to China. Japan has been one of the United States' best customers.

And yet, since the days when Townsend Harris, the first United States consular and diplomatic envoy to Japan, complained of what he regarded as duplicity and ill-willed procrastination on the part of the Japanese negotiators, the road of Japanese-American relations has been strewn with boulders of misunderstanding and reciprocal misrepresentation of motives and intentions.

It would be too simple to try and explain these misunderstandings merely by an alleged incompatibility of Eastern and Western ideas. What we are witnessing is the final clash of two very definite national mentalities.

THE MISSIONARY SPIRIT

Ever since the United States in the nineteenth century began to take an interest in areas beyond their own far-flung frontiers and commenced commercial and diplomatic activities in the Far East, these activities have

been permeated with a strong missionary spirit. It is more than mere chance that the majority of Christian missionaries in China and Japan are Americans and that there is no region in the whole world where American missionaries are so numerous as in the Far East. One would do the great majority of these workers in the Lord's vineyard grave wrong if one doubted the purity of their intentions. On the other hand, very many of them, coming as they did into the domains of a civilization many centuries older than their own with the fixed idea of saving poor illiterate heathens, must have had an exasperating effect on the people whom they came to save.

The Chinese with their innate sense of humor succeeded in making the best of it, deriving what advantage they could from the works of the missionaries, particularly their hospitals, schools, and universities. Moreover, they made very clever use of missionary organizations as a channel for their own propaganda in the United States, in the same way that they succeeded in making Geneva, as long as it lasted, a powerful sounding-board for their complaints and desires.

The Japanese, on the other hand, a people who derive their origin from heaven, never took very kindly to the missionaries and their works. Their pride forbade them to curry favor with them; their insularity of outlook made them underrate the political value

of the propaganda organ at their disposal. Thus from the outset the missionaries became a powerful factor in China's favor, which at the same time was bound, unintentionally, to influence public opinion in the United States in a manner unfavorable to Japan.

All this might not have been of decisive importance. However, it is an undeniable fact that the whole diplomacy of the United States has carried the stamp of being quasi-missionary. Nothing has been more exasperating to the Japanese mind than the oft-repeated enunciation of general principles by successive administrations in Washington. From John Hay's Open Door notes in 1899 to Elihu Root's revised draft of the four Balfour Principles in 1922; from Henry Stimson's "idealistic" interference with the Manchukuo and Shanghai affairs in 1931 and 1932 to Cordell Hull's recent statements of principles, there exists a long series of pronouncements of the successive United States administrations, most of them full of self-righteousness, all of them saturated with good intentions, high principles, and moral superiority.

MUTUAL SUSPICION

The Japanese might have taken more kindly to such lecturing if they had been able to believe in its sincerity. But the demand for the Open Door in China was accompanied from a very early date by the erection of higher and ever higher legal fences against the immigration of Japanese and their enjoyment of equal rights in the United States. Furthermore, while America assumed the right to criticize Japan's measures in Manchukuo and China, what is generally called "Dollar Diplomacy" was carried on in the Latin American countries, if possible with even less disguise than before. The enforcement of anti-Japanese trade policies in a number of South American states during the last few months under US pressure and the ejection of the recalcitrant President of Panama are the most recent examples.

On the other hand, Japan's declared policy of a New Order in East Asia has not found a sympathetic echo on the other side of the Pacific. America has never believed in the sincerity with which Japan regards her mission in East Asia. She has seen in it only the camouflage for a rapacious imperialism.

UNREQUITED LOVE

In addition to all this, the history of Japanese-American relations is the old, old story of unrequited love. When Japan in the Meiji Era began to adopt Western technical civilization, it was primarily to the United States that she went for instruction and models. American high schools, universities, and technical colleges trained many of the men who became the leading spirits in the wholesale introduction of new industrial methods and processes into a land that for centuries had been intentionally cut off from every intercourse with the outside world. Strong sympathy for America continued to exist in Japan in spite of American discrimination against Japanese, in spite also of the long series of disagreements in the naval disarmament conferences and the refusal of naval parity by the Anglo-Saxon powers. It is a small yet significant item that Townsend Harris, who laboriously negotiated and concluded the first commercial treaty between his own country and Japan, is an almost forgotten man in America, while his memory is to this day alive and honored in Japan. On the eastern shores of the Pacific, the echo to Japanese sympathy, expressed and unexpressed, has been weak. A strong current of pro-Chinese sentiment has long dominated public opinion in America. Indeed, it has been so strong that it probably decisively influenced the negotiations of last autumn at various stages, for the Washington administration would not have dared face the public with any agreement which, by Japanophobe propaganda, could have been represented as "selling four hundred million Chinese down the river."

THE CHINA INCIDENT

It is against such a background as this that the attempts at conciliation must be judged. For a considerable time before the beginning of the Washington negotiations last April, Japanese-American relations had been going from bad to worse. Since the exchange of messages between Koki Hirota and Cordell Hull, at the former's initiative, in 1934, a more cordial atmosphere had prevailed for a time between the two countries, an atmosphere which had not even been too badly influenced by the final breakdown of the naval agreement in 1935. Immediately after the outbreak of hostilities in China in 1937, however, a new deterioration set in. The first reaction of the American Government after the outbreak of hostilities was a statement by Secretary of State Cordell Hull (July 16, 1937) limited to generalities: condemning "the use of force" and the "interference in the internal affairs of other nations"; advocating "faithful observance of international agreements" and making the modification of treaties subject to "orderly processes carried out in a spirit of mutual helpfulness and accommodation" without specific reference to the Far East. But meanwhile the *Panay* incident had inflamed anti-Japanese feelings in the United States, and the continued fighting in China resulted in more and more open support of the Chiang Kai-shek Government on the part of America.

ENTER THE NEW ORDER

In the diplomatic exchanges that went parallel to the military events, the American Government based its various protests and claims mainly on the Nine Power Treaty of 1922. In her note of November 18, 1933, Japan stated that there was no intention of interfering with American rights and interests in China. For the first time she made it clear that she could not allow the New Order in China, which she was trying to establish, to be hampered by the dead letter of a diplomatic document; for this docu-

ment had become obsolete through developments which, at the time of the conclusion of the treaty, had been unforeseeable. This difference of opinion in the years 1937 and 1938 is typical of the attitudes of the two sides such as can be observed in all the following negotiations up to the final events in the winter of 1941.

TWO VIEWS ON EUROPE

A new element was introduced into Japanese-American relations when Japan, in September 1940, signed the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy. It will be useful to remember that, from the very beginning, a fundamental difference can be observed between the two valuations of this pact—Japan's on the one hand and the United States' on the other. This difference is in turn closely connected with the policy of both states in relation to the question of the limitation or extension of the war in Europe. Japan consistently followed a policy of concentration on her own immediate aims in the Far Eastern sphere. She made no use of Britain's weakness after Dunkirk to obtain, either by threats or by main force, British territories in China or the Malay Peninsula; nor did she even undertake a great commercial drive into parts of the globe where the industries of the European belligerents were now hampered by blockade and counter-blockade. Japan's adherence to the Tripartite Pact, in the light of events between its conclusion and the outbreak of the present war in the Pacific, seems to have been dictated by the desire to limit the European conflict, to avoid a clash in the Pacific, and to concentrate all her forces on the establishment of what has become known as the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, with as little interference as possible from outside.

The United States, on the other hand, or at least President Roosevelt, militantly unfurled the banner of democracy from the very beginning of the war in Europe. As time went on it became increasingly clear that, even at the time when the Neutrality Legis-

lation was still nominally valid, the Washington administration was taking not only an active but a leading part in the fight against the European Axis powers. The question was only how quickly the forming of American public opinion—subjected to a powerful interventionist publicity campaign from the White House—and the transfer of American industry from peace to war production would permit the full and open participation of the United States in the war. This is why the United States Government regarded the Tripartite Pact as a menace to its own war policy and has been trying, unsuccessfully, to undermine Japan's loyalty to its Axis partners in Europe.

WASHINGTON PROCLAIMS GENERAL PRINCIPLES

In the series of negotiations which began last April, Washington took the initiative with a draft proposal ranging over a wide field of political and economic problems. Though the details of this proposal are not so far available, from the Summary of the Negotiations published by the Japanese Government it can be assumed that the general principles proclaimed by Cordell Hull in July 1937 and which descend in a direct line from John Hay's Open Door notes were again extolled. But this time they were coupled—the Japanese Summary is definite on this point—with the demand that Japan should undertake not to go to war in the Pacific against the United States should the latter participate in the war in Europe "in self-defense." The only other detail of the American draft proposal available so far is that the US Government offered to use its good offices to initiate peace negotiations between Japan and Chungking "on such terms as were acceptable to the United States." Obviously the US Government was not prepared to accept the Japanese conception of the New Order in East Asia. Yet the Japanese Government agreed to negotiate.

THE KONOYE MESSAGE

The danger of a complete breakdown arose when in July the Japanese con-

cluded the agreement for the common defense of French Indo-China, and, according to its terms, garrisoned Japanese troops in southern Indo-China. Prince Konoye, however, made a further determined attempt to save the negotiations. In his message to President Roosevelt last August, he suggested a personal meeting with the President, but the US Government, putting the cart before the horse, insisted that agreement on fundamentals and essentials must precede such a meeting. It was at this stage that in circles inside and outside of the Japanese Government the suspicion became almost a certainty that the US Government was not serious in its desire to reach an agreement, the more so since the military preparations directed by all the countries of the ABCD front against Japan were steadily increasing in intensity. In spite of this the Japanese Government repeatedly submitted new proposals, and the Tojo Cabinet, though at its formation branded by the Anglo-Saxon Press as a war cabinet, went even further in its concessions to United States demands than any of its predecessors.

The only result was that, after repeated exchange of draft proposals and conversations, in which Ambassador Kurusu took part, Secretary Hull on November 26 handed the Japanese negotiators a memorandum which the Japanese considered a slap in the face. From the very proposals contained in this document and the inquiries addressed concurrently to the Japanese side by Undersecretary Sumner Welles in President Roosevelt's name, it seems as if the US Government thought Tokyo would anyway eventually accept whatever Washington demanded. The unpreparedness of the US Pacific Fleet when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor seems to bear out this interpretation of the intentions behind the Hull Memorandum of November 26.

FACTS VS. PREACHING

But let us return for a moment to the substance of the negotiations as far as it can be gauged from available information. The Japanese Press

reflecting, it may be assumed, the official viewpoint, repeatedly complained, during the weeks preceding the final breakdown, that the American side continued to propound generalities and failed to face the real situation in East Asia. The data contained in the documents published by the Japanese Government on the whole bear out the contention that, to every attempt on Japan's part to come down to the realities of the situation, the US Government replied in the tone of the priest talking down to the sinner, preaching in the best—or worst—missionary style.

However, the various American proposals and counterproposals, besides the enunciation of general principles, contain some concrete suggestions which allow one to judge of Washington's underlying intentions. There was first the question of the Tripartite Pact. Washington demanded nothing less than denunciation *de jure* or at least *de facto* of a treaty freely signed and especially solemnized by an Imperial Rescript. In this the United States Government not only clearly overreached itself, but acted in a manner which does not tally with the oft-repeated American pronouncements in favor of unconditional observance of international treaties.

OLD FRIEND IN NEW GUISE

Next there was Washington's insistence on the "principle of non-discrimination in international commercial relations"—old friend Open Door in new guise. Here the Japanese Government turned the tables on the United States by recognizing the principle to be applied to the whole Pacific area, including China, on the understanding that it also be applied to the rest of the world. But the Roosevelt Government finds general principles useful only as long as they fit into its own plans or apply to other nations, while it is not willing to submit its own actions to the same standards. Unconditional acceptance of the Open Door policy in China, coupled with what the Japanese call joint international control of China: such were the demands

which were brought forward in answer to Japan's compromise formula—demands which, if accepted, would have meant the end of Japan's New Order and of the Co-Prosperity Sphere.

In the third question, that of the evacuation of Japanese troops from China and French Indo-China, the Japanese Government went as far as could be expected of a proud military nation. In her proposals of November 20 Japan offered to remove her troops stationed in southern Indo-China to the north of the country, upon conclusion of the proposed agreement, to show that she was not planning further military expansion toward the south. Cordell Hull's answer, however, was the blunt demand for total withdrawal of all Japanese troops from China and Indo-China. It is difficult to imagine how any responsible person in Washington could have believed that Japan would or could accede to such demands, unless, as we suggested before, he assumed that Japan had been weakened by economic warfare and encirclement to the point where she would swallow practically anything.

THE ROLE OF GREAT BRITAIN

There remain two further points in the last phase of the Washington conversations, regarding which the documentary evidence so far available admits only of guesswork. There is in the first place the question of the part played by the other members of the ABCD front, especially that played by the British Empire. And secondly there are the reasons for the sudden stiffening — to breaking-point — of Washington's attitude as expressed in the Hull Memorandum of November 26 following the more accommodating, though never — from the Japanese viewpoint — satisfactory proposals brought forward by the American negotiators during the preceding exchanges. There is reason to believe that these two questions are closely related.

It is not by accident or willful omission that we have so far dealt

almost exclusively with the Japanese-American angle of the problem. As a matter of fact, the role played by Great Britain during the whole course of the negotiations has been that of a vassal state to the United States. Great Britain and the British Dominions at every single moment of the controversy took their cue from Washington. They followed suit when Washington opened economic warfare against Japan, and they did not even try to take an active part in the negotiations but were satisfied to give Washington their views, if any, in private. All this in spite of the fact that it was easily discernible from a glance at the British press during the critical stages of the Washington talks that Great Britain, for more than one reason, was in deadly fear of open conflict in the Pacific; for, whatever its outcome, it was bound to put an end to her powerful political and economic position in China and reduce to nought the hundreds of million pounds sterling invested in Shanghai and the Yangtse valley as well as in Hongkong.

JAPAN'S CHOICE

The Netherlands East Indies, under the influence of the refugee government of Holland in London, followed the British example. And one might say here that Japan did not even try the policy of *divide et impera* by seeking direct negotiations with one of the weaker partners of the ABCD front. She took the bull by the horns and, with Oriental patience and thoroughness, outwardly unmoved but inwardly forgetting nothing, carried on the negotiations with the United States to the bitter end. The last hope went with Cordell Hull's Memorandum of November 26, and with the President's refusal to consider a three-months' stopgap agreement for a further attempt to surmount the crisis.

On November 29 the United Press reported from Washington: "The United States yesterday took an apparently immovable position in the face of the acute Far Eastern crisis,

insisting on maintenance of the *status quo* together with removal of Japanese influence in China and French Indo-China. The highest authoritative quarters in the Government stated that the question of continued peace in the Pacific depends on whether Japan responds at the last moment to American efforts to induce her to fulfill this program. The highest Government source said that no compromise was possible on the China question, thereby crushing Japanese hopes for a stopgap agreement whereby Japan would hold her present gains but would not attempt new aggressions."

The idea of such a temporary agreement during the month preceding the breakdown of the negotiations had been repeatedly mooted by diplomats in Washington and Tokyo. By openly dropping this idea just one day after the handing of the Hull Memorandum, the President made it quite clear that he wanted a decision one way or the other and that there was no alternative for Japan other than war or submission.

What induced the President to take that stand, we, again, can only guess. But to all appearances it is more than mere chance that, in the days immediately preceding the fateful decisions in Washington, the Chungking Ambassador was particularly active and made no secret of his determination to do his utmost to prevent any agreement between Japan and the United States, even a temporary one for three months, if necessary by the threat of Chiang Kai-shek's secession from the ABCD camp. We have already said that Washington could ill afford to run foul of the pro-Chinese propaganda in America. And so it seems that the moderating counsel from Britain, offered *in camera* only, was of no avail.

War became inevitable. Again, as in the case of Germany and the USSR, it was a question of speed against mass. On December 8 Japan struck quick and hard. The "War of Greater East Asia" was on.