

sider unrestricted U-boat warfare not only one, but the *only* effective instrument of war at our disposal capable of bringing England to consider peace negotiations. . . . So far as this situation is concerned [the probable entry of the United States into the war] *America's step from secret war in which it has long been engaged against us, to an openly declared hostility can effect no real change.* Hindenburg and Ludendorff grew more and more impatient of the civilians' incurable timidity about war with the United States. They renewed their attack at the end of August, and Holzendorff of the Admiralty Staff carried their complaints to Bethmann. "The objections to this mode of warfare are not considered mainly from the standpoint of the effect upon England, but from that of the reaction upon the United States. . . . *The United States can scarcely engage in more hostile activities than she has already done up to this time.*" On August 31 at Pless, the civilian and military elements fought it out, with Jagow, Helfferich, and Bethmann standing firmly together against the generals. All three warned that war with the United States must inevitably follow resumption of submarine warfare, and that active American participation would be fatal to Germany. For the time being they again won their point, and it was agreed that final decision might await the outcome of the Rumanian campaign. Even after that Bethmann was permitted to try his hand at peace negotiations in December, but their complete failure, coupled with Wilson's inability to mediate, inevitably brought renewed pressure from the military. Ludendorff on December 22 told the Foreign Office again that formal American participation in the war would alter nothing, and on the same day Holzendorff brought in an

Admiralty report to much the same effect. It dismissed the danger of American troops by showing how much time was needed for their training and transport; it calculated that the American supply of munitions—already at capacity—would be less rather than more available to Germany's enemies because they would be reserved for American use. Positive advantage would accrue to Germany from restored freedom of action in sinking even passenger ships which carried munitions. The only disadvantage conceded by the report was the possible increase in American loans to the belligerents, but the amount of these was already so tremendous a factor in the economic strength of the hostile coalition that little additional danger from that source was to be anticipated. Bethmann had for some time been yielding to the arguments and the importunities of the military, and the conference at Pless on January 9, 1917 sealed his defeat by the decision to renew unrestricted submarine warfare. Hindenburg's final words were, "It simply must be. We are counting on the possibility of war with the United States, and have made all preparations to meet it. *Things cannot be worse than they now are.* The war must be brought to an end by the use of all means as soon as possible." The United States declared war on April 6, 1917.

The civilians were right and the military were wrong in their calculations as to the ultimate importance of a formal declaration of war by the United States. But the arguments of the military were plausible and they carried the day. Their promise to reduce England speedily to prostration was tempting, but it was essentially a gamble, and it is hard to see how they could have overborne civilian opposition if they had not had so plaus-



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### Neutrality and Economic Pressures

ible an answer to the one serious argument that the civilians presented. The answer was always that formal participation of the United States in the war would bring no change in the fundamental situation of American economic support to the Allies. The major influence in shaping the decision which brought the United States into the war is to be found in American policy in the economic sphere, specifically the decision of the Wilson administration in August, 1915 to abandon a policy deliberately adopted in the interest of neutrality early in the war. It was government permission to bankers to float loans for belligerent governments in order to finance American export trade that provided the Allies with resources which Germany could not obtain. That in turn weighted the scales in favor of the extremists and against the moderates in Germany, and provoked the decision which forced the United States into the war.

It is equally clear that the administration yielded to pressures which no administration is likely to withstand. The alternative policy of strict adherence to its earlier standards of neutrality meant economic depression on a national scale. It is scarcely drawing the long bow to say that the fundamental cause of the failure of American neutrality policy was economic, nor is it unreasonable to suppose that the same economic factors will again in the future make a genuine and strict policy of neutrality unworkable, no matter what laws may be written on the statute books to enforce it. The only sensible course is to renounce our illusions and to face the world of reality where there is no longer any such thing as neutrality. In the face of a possible collapse of the collective security system as an alternative to ostrich isolationism

and "neutrality" the area of choice is tragically narrowed. It would seem to involve a choice between deciding whether we should now affirm our decision publicly that we will align ourselves with the democracies of the world in the event of war on the long chance of preventing the war, or follow that policy of drift which will sooner or later involve us in inevitable war without our having any very clear cut program of war aims to achieve.

#### IV

Is such realism conceivable in the present state of confusion of mind? Probably not, because of the tenacity of outworn but hallowed concepts and policies. Neutrality has a long history and its own particular folklore. Two of its high priests, Borchard and Lage, treat it as an all-sufficient decalogue when rightly interpreted and strictly adhered to. . . . Neutral rights were as clear in 1914 as was any other branch of public law, and while the law was grossly violated during the war, it has not thereby been ended or modified." The real difficulty they discover in Wilson's repudiation of "the very basis of American tradition in foreign policy." The submarine controversy with Germany is made to turn on Wilson's "insistence as a matter of National Honor that American citizens were privileged to travel unmolested on belligerent vessels." It follows that there was no adequate excuse for the United States to break "with its fundamental principles by the unprecedented decision to participate in a European war. . . ." Consequently there is no need to explore the economic background against which the drama of neutrality was played out, unless indeed there was no such drama at all, but only a skillful bit of play acting. Borchard and Lage devote exactly



one page out of a total of three hundred and fifty to the administrator's retreat from its original prohibition of loans to belligerent governments, with the remark that "No more than casual reference needs to be made to one of the more egregious lurches into unneutrality, whereby the United States and its people were led into financing the munitions supply of one set of the belligerents, the Allies." In their account this appears as but a minor detail in a general policy of partisanship of the Allies' cause. And so at the end they reject the argument that the conditions of the modern world make American neutrality impossible as "humiliating to American independence." Denying the efficacy of any improvised formula, they recommend "an honest intention to remain aloof from foreign conflict, a refusal to be stampeded by unneutral propaganda, a knowledge of the law and capacity to stand upon it, meeting emergencies and problems not romantically but wisely." It can be argued plausibly that President Wilson fought against overwhelming odds to realize exactly that program.

At least historians should not become victims of the legal exegesis that obscures the unreality of the neutrality concept. But the latest and most comprehensive account of American intervention in the World War, Tansill's *America Goes to War*, is almost totally lacking in interpretative treatment and completely lacking in synthesis. His very full chapters on the events leading to abandonment of the administration's loan policy are written largely in terms of "War Profits Beckon to 'Big Business,'" with very little reference to the administration's concern with the economic condition of the country as a whole. Moreover he fails completely to show the political and

diplomatic implications of the economic ties in his concluding paragraph that deals with them. "The real reasons why America went to war cannot be found in any single set of circumstances. There was no clear-cut road to war that the President followed with certain steps that knew no hesitation. There were many dim trails of doubtful promise, and one along which he travelled with early misgivings and reluctant tread was that which led to American economic solidarity with the Allies." Tansill leaves it at that without any attempt to pursue the profound effect of this economic solidarity on the equilibrium of political forces in Germany which I have been at pains to trace in the central portion of this essay. This is all the more remarkable because Tansill is the only writer on the subject who has conscientiously studied that unstable equilibrium extensively in the German official documents. He has used most if not all of the documents I have cited to prove the decisive effect of the economic argument on the submarine decision—and many more—without ever apparently noting the presence of that argument at all. In his quotations from the documents he simply does not quote the passages where the argument appears. Despite his failure to see relationships, and his avoidance of interpretation, his account is still the fullest treatment available of all the complex phenomena, economic, political, psychological, inherent in the neutrality problem. But it is a compendium devoid of significance for an intelligent understanding of the neutrality problem.

The definitive study at once analytical and interpretative as well as comprehensive has yet to appear, and until it does appear there is small hope of enlightenment.

