CHAPTER IX

THE WASHINGTON CONFERENCE

The Washington Conference, and the simultaneous conference, at Washington, between the Chinese and Japanese, have somewhat modified the Far Eastern situation. The general aspects of the new situation will be dealt with in the next chapter; for the present it is the actual decisions arrived at in Washington that concern us, as well as their effect upon the Japanese position in Siberia.

In the first place, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance has apparently been brought to an end, as a result of the conclusion of the Four Power Pact between America, Great Britain, France and Japan. Within this general alliance of the exploiting Powers, there is a subordinate grouping of America and Great Britain against France and Japan, the former standing for international capitalism, the latter for national capitalism. The situation is not yet plain, because England and America disagree as regards Russia, and because America is not yet prepared to take part in the reconstruction of Europe; but in the Far East, at any rate, we seem to have decided to seek the friendship of America rather than of Japan. It may perhaps be hoped that this will make our Chinese policy more liberal than it has been. We have announced the restoration of Wei-hai-wei--a piece of generosity which would have been more impressive but for two facts: first, that Wei-hai-wei is completely useless to us,

and secondly, that the lease had only two more years to run. By the terms of the lease, in fact, it should have been restored as soon as Russia lost Port Arthur, however many years it still had to run at that date.

One very important result of the Washington Conference is the agreement not to fortify islands in the Pacific, with certain specified exceptions. This agreement, if it is adhered to, will make war between America and Japan very difficult, unless we were allied with America. Without a naval base somewhere near Japan, America could hardly bring naval force to bear on the Japanese Navy. It had been the intention of the Navy Department to fortify Guam with a view to turning it into a first-class naval base. The fact that America has been willing to forgo this intention must be taken as evidence of a genuine desire to preserve the peace with Japan.

Various small concessions were made to China. There is to be a revision of the Customs Schedule to bring it to an effective five per cent. The foreign Post Offices are to be abolished, though the Japanese have insisted that a certain number of Japanese should be employed in the Chinese Post Office. They had the effrontery to pretend that they desired this for the sake of the efficiency of the postal service, though the Chinese post is excellent and the Japanese is notoriously one of the worst in the world. The chief use to which the Japanese have put their postal service in China has been the importation of morphia, as they have not allowed the Chinese Customs authorities to examine parcels

sent through their Post Office. The development of the Japanese importation of morphia into China, as well as the growth of the poppy in Manchuria, where they have control, has been a very sinister feature of their penetration of China.[84]

Of course the Open Door, equality of opportunity, the independence and integrity of China, etc. etc., were reaffirmed at Washington; but these are mere empty phrases devoid of meaning.

From the Chinese point of view, the chief achievement at Washington was the Shantung Treaty. Ever since the expulsion by the Germans at the end of 1914, the Japanese had held Kiaochow Bay, which includes the port of Tsingtau; they had stationed troops along the whole extent of the Shantung Railway; and by the treaty following the Twenty-one Demands, they had preferential treatment as regards all industrial undertakings in Shantung. The railway belonged to them by right of conquest, and through it they acquired control of the whole province. When an excuse was needed for increasing the garrison, they supplied arms to brigands, and claimed that their intervention was necessary to suppress the resulting disorder. This state of affairs was legalized by the Treaty of Versailles, to which, however, America and China were not parties. The Washington Conference, therefore, supplied an opportunity of raising the question afresh.

At first, however, it seemed as if the Japanese would have things all their own way. The Chinese wished to raise the question before the

Conference, while the Japanese wished to settle it in direct negotiation with China. This point was important, because, ever since the Lansing-Ishii agreement, the Japanese have tried to get the Powers to recognize, in practice if not in theory, an informal Japanese Protectorate over China, as a first step towards which it was necessary to establish the principle that the Japanese should not be interfered with in their diplomatic dealings with China. The Conference agreed to the Japanese proposal that the Shantung question should not come before the Conference, but should be dealt with in direct negotiations between the Japanese and Chinese. The Japanese victory on this point, however, was not complete, because it was arranged that, in the event of a deadlock, Mr. Hughes and Sir Arthur Balfour should mediate. A deadlock, of course, soon occurred, and it then appeared that the British were no longer prepared to back up the Japanese whole-heartedly, as in the old days. The American Administration, for the sake of peace, showed some disposition to urge the Chinese to give way. But American opinion was roused on the Shantung question, and it appeared that, unless a solution more or less satisfactory to China was reached, the Senate would probably refuse to ratify the various treaties which embodied the work of the Conference. Therefore, at the last moment, the Americans strongly urged Japan to give way, and we took the same line, though perhaps less strongly. The result was the conclusion of the Shantung Treaty between China and Japan.

By this Treaty, the Chinese recover everything in Shantung, except the private property of Japanese subjects, and certain restrictions as

regards the railway. The railway was the great difficulty in the negotiations, since, so long as the Japanese could control that, they would have the province at their mercy. The Chinese offered to buy back the railway at once, having raised about half the money as a result of a patriotic movement among their merchants. This, however, the Japanese refused to agree to. What was finally done was that the Chinese were compelled to borrow the money from the Japanese Government to be repaid in fifteen years, with an option of repayment in five years. The railway was valued at 53,400,000 gold marks, plus the costs involved in repairs or improvements incurred by Japan, less deterioration; and it was to be handed over to China within nine months of the signature of the treaty. Until the purchase price, borrowed from Japan, is repaid, the Japanese retain a certain degree of control over the railway: a Japanese traffic manager is to be appointed, and two accountants, one Chinese and the other Japanese, under the control of a Chinese President.

It is clear that, on paper, this gives the Chinese everything five years hence. Whether things will work out so depends upon whether, five years hence, any Power is prepared to force Japan to keep her word. As both Mr. Hughes and Sir Arthur Balfour strongly urged the Chinese to agree to this compromise, it must be assumed that America and Great Britain have some responsibility for seeing that it is properly carried out. In that case, we may perhaps expect that in the end China will acquire complete control of the Shantung railway.

On the whole, it must be said that China did better at Washington than

might have been expected. As regards the larger aspects of the new international situation arising out of the Conference, I shall deal with them in the next chapter. But in our present connection it is necessary to consider certain Far Eastern questions not discussed at Washington, since the mere fact that they were not discussed gave them a new form.

The question of Manchuria and Inner Mongolia was not raised at Washington. It may therefore be assumed that Japan's position there is secure until such time as the Chinese, or the Russians, or both together, are strong enough to challenge it. America, at any rate, will not raise the question unless friction occurs on some other issue. (See Appendix.)

The Siberian question also was not settled. Therefore Japan's ambitions in Vladivostok and the Maritime Provinces will presumably remain unchecked except in so far as the Russians unaided are able to check them. There is a chronic state of semi-war between the Japanese and the Far Eastern Republic, and there seems no reason why it should end in any near future. The Japanese from time to time announce that they have decided to withdraw, but they simultaneously send fresh troops. A conference between them and the Chita Government has been taking place at Dairen, and from time to time announcements have appeared to the effect that an agreement has been reached or was about to be reached. But on April 16th (1922) the Japanese broke up the Conference. The Times of April 27th contains both the Japanese and the Russian official accounts of this break up. The Japanese statement is given in The

Times as follows:--

The Japanese Embassy communicates the text of a statement given out on April 20th by the Japanese Foreign Office on the Dairen Conference.

It begins by recalling that in response to the repeatedly expressed desire of the Chita Government, the Japanese Government decided to enter into negotiations. The first meeting took place on August 26th last year.

The Japanese demands included the non-enforcement of communistic principles in the Republic against Japanese, the prohibition of Bolshevist propaganda, the abolition of menacing military establishments, the adoption of the principle of the open door in Siberia, and the removal of industrial restrictions on foreigners. Desiring speedily to conclude an agreement, so that the withdrawal of troops might be carried out as soon as possible, Japan met the wishes of Chita as far as practicable. Though, from the outset, Chita pressed for a speedy settlement of the Nicolaievsk affair, Japan eventually agreed to take up the Nicolaievsk affair immediately after the conclusion of the basis agreement. She further assured Chita that in settling the affair Japan had no intention of violating the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Russia, and that the troops would be speedily withdrawn from Saghalin after the settlement of the

affair, and that Chita'a wishes in regard to the transfer of property now in the custody of the Japanese authorities would be met.

The 11th Division of the troops in Siberia was originally to be relieved during April, but if the Dairen Conference had progressed satisfactorily, the troops, instead of being relieved, would have been sent home. Japan therefore intimated to Chita that should the basis agreement be concluded within a reasonable period these troops would be immediately withdrawn, and proposed the signature of the agreement by the middle of April, so that the preparations for the relief of the said division might be dispensed with. Thereupon Chita not only proposed the immediate despatch of Chita troops to Vladivostok without waiting for the withdrawal of the Japanese troops, but urged that Japan should fix a tine-limit for the complete withdrawal of all her troops.

Japan informed Chita that the withdrawal would be carried out within a short period after the conclusion of the detailed arrangements, giving a definite period as desired, and at the same time she proposed the signing of the agreement drawn up by Japan.

Whereas Japan thus throughout the negotiations maintained a sincere and conciliatory attitude, the Chita delegates entirely ignored the spirit in which she offered concessions and brought

up one demand after another, thereby trying to gain time. Not only did they refuse to entertain the Japanese proposals, but declared that they would drop the negotiations and return to Chita immediately. The only conclusion from this attitude of the Chita Government is that they lacked a sincere effort to bring the negotiations to fruition, and the Japanese Government instructed its delegates to quit Dairen.

The Russian official account is given by The Times immediately below the above. It is as follows:--

On April 16th the Japanese broke up the Dairen Conference with the Far Eastern Republic. The Far Eastern Delegation left Dairen. Agreement was reached between the Japanese and Russian Delegations on March 30th on all points of the general treaty, but when the question of military evacuation was reached the Japanese Delegation proposed a formula permitting continued Japanese intervention.

Between March 30th and April 15th the Japanese dragged on the negotiations re military convention, reproaching the Far Eastern delegates for mistrusting the Japanese Government. The Russian Delegation declared that the general treaty would be signed only upon obtaining precise written guarantees of Japanese military evacuation.

> On April 15th the Japanese Delegation presented an ultimatum demanding a reply from the Far Eastern representatives in half an hour as to whether they were willing to sign a general agreement with new Japanese conditions forbidding an increase in the Far Eastern Navy and retaining a Japanese military mission on Far Eastern territory. Re evacuation, the Japanese presented a Note promising evacuation if "not prevented by unforeseen circumstances." The Russian Delegation rejected this ultimatum. On April 16th the Japanese declared the Dairen Conference broken up. The Japanese delegates left for Tokyo, and Japanese troops remain in the zone established by the agreement of March 29th.

Readers will believe one or other of these official statements according to their prejudices, while those who wish to think themselves impartial will assume that the truth lies somewhere between the two. For my part, I believe the Russian statement. But even from the Japanese communiqué it is evident that what wrecked the Conference was Japanese unwillingness to evacuate Vladivostok and the Maritime Province; all that they were willing to give was a vague promise to evacuate some day, which would have had no more value than Mr. Gladstone's promise to evacuate Egypt.

It will be observed that the Conference went well for Chita until the Senate had ratified the Washington treaties. After that, the Japanese felt that they had a free hand in all Far Eastern matters not dealt with at Washington. The practical effect of the Washington decisions will

naturally be to make the Japanese seek compensation, at the expense of the Far Eastern Republic, for what they have had to surrender in China. This result was to be expected, and was presumably foreseen by the assembled peacemakers.[85]

It will be seen that the Japanese policy involves hostility to Russia. This is no doubt one reason for the friendship between Japan and France. Another reason is that both are the champions of nationalistic capitalism, as against the international capitalism aimed at by Messrs. Morgan and Mr. Lloyd George, because France and Japan look to their armaments as the chief source of their income, while England and America look rather to their commerce and industry. It would be interesting to compute how much coal and iron France and Japan have acquired in recent years by means of their armies. England and America already possessed coal and iron; hence their different policy. An uninvited delegation from the Far Eastern Republic at Washington produced documents tending to show that France and Japan came there as secret allies. Although the authenticity of the documents was denied, most people, apparently, believed them to be genuine. In any case, it is to be expected that France and Japan will stand together, now that the Anglo-Japanese Alliance has come to an end and the Anglo-French Entente has become anything but cordial. Thus it is to be feared that Washington and Genoa have sown the seeds of future wars--unless, by some miracle, the "civilized" nations should grow weary of suicide.

FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 84: See e.g. chap. viii. of Millard's Democracy and the Eastern Question.]

[Footnote 85: I ought perhaps to confess that I have a bias in favour of the Far Eastern Republic, owing to my friendship for their diplomatic mission which was in Peking while I was there. I never met a more high-minded set of men in any country. And although they were communists, and knew the views that I had expressed on Russia, they showed me great kindness. I do not think, however, that these courtesies have affected my view of the dispute between Chita and Tokyo.]