

The Washington Merry- Go-^{Pact} 9.7.43 Round

—By Drew Pearson—

(Editor's note—This is the first in a series of Washington Merry-Go-Round columns on the State Department, now holding the spotlight in Washington.)

EXCEPT for two brief and faltering steps from 1918 to 1920 under Woodrow Wilson and from 1930 to 1932 under Henry L. Stimson, the United States has never attempted to take any world leadership for peace.

After Wilson's attempt failed, Secretary of State Stimson picked up the Kellogg Pact, tried to give it teeth, and used it to the best of his ability to check the first Japanese rampage and the World War which he felt was sure to follow.

Both of these attempts were blocked, partly by inertia at home, partly by old-fashioned European diplomacy in which British balance-of-power politics played its role, and partly by lack of preparation by our own diplomats to play a major role in world affairs.

The game was too new to us. Our State Department had been rutted too long in the comfortable grooves of traditional American isolation. Our diplomats had dinned into them with their first ABC's that the U. S. A. would keep its fleet in the Pacific, rely on the powerful British fleet in the Atlantic and Mediterranean. Never in their wildest dreams did they conceive the day when a badly crippled British fleet would rely on the United States Navy in European waters and that an American Army would be fighting in the Mediterranean.

Britain's Seapower

Since the British fleet dominated the Old World, the cardinal policy of the State Department was to follow British diplomacy not only in Europe but

the Near East, the Middle East and to a considerable extent the Far East. Only in Latin America did United States diplomats exert any degree of independence.

This is cited here now not as a criticism, but to indicate how dependent our diplomacy was in those relatively simple days, and how much our diplomacy has to learn if we are now to write a permanent peace.

This is something in which the entire Nation is vitally interested. The boys at the front are not doing any name-calling now. They are not even doing much talking. But if, when they come home, they find the peace they have won run into the ground, then they may hurt some ugly, four-letter, Rooseveltian words at those responsible.

The boys who are doing the dying are glad to do it, as long as the kids they left behind won't have to do it all over again. But they didn't give anyone a blank check to follow old-fashioned diplomacy which will sign away the lives of their sons 20 years from now.

New Methods

They have seen what a streamlined War Department can do with new, lightning methods which have revolutionized warfare. They have seen the Navy perform miracles with armor plate, radar, and listening devices. They know that American genius and American efficiency are equal to anything. They expect that genius and that efficiency to be applied to winning the peace just as effectively as they have applied it to winning the war.

Some of the President's best friends, including many inside his Cabinet and his Administration, feel that putting American foreign policy, and the State Department which administers it, on the same streamlined basis as the War Department, is the most important and neglected task facing him.

When Thomas Jefferson, the first Secretary of State, moved into his headquarters in Philadelphia, he had a staff of four clerks, one French interpreter, three ministers and 16 consuls. His letters to ministers were laboriously copied in the American letter book, required four to six weeks to reach their destination by clipper ship, and sometimes were written in invisible ink with a notation on the outside: "To be sunk in case of danger from the enemy."

The State Department has made great progress since then. Today, a battery of telegraph

operators working all night shifts, send and receive messages from every corner of the world. They are decoded, mimeographed and placed on the desks of the Secretary of State and his assistants within an hour after their arrival.

Covering the World

On the top floors of the State Department are voluminous files covering every section of the world, plus diplomatic notes and consular reports dating back to the Founding Fathers.

On paper also the State Department's machinery is perfect. It is divided into geographical divisions, the European division, the Far Eastern division, the American republics division. Under each, a man is detailed to study a certain country, its trade, politics, its leaders and its problems. Many of these men are most intelligent, and among the Nation's most conscientious public servants.

The fact remains, however, that most people in the United States, even in Washington, think of the State Department as a club of blue-stocking Bostonians who wield their forks with their left hands and are no more representative of American life than the Redskins whom their ancestors pushed West.

Broadly speaking, this is not true. Yet there is just enough truth in it to make the picture persist. Out of the several thousand diplomats, consuls, clerks and stenographers who really make up the State Department both at home and abroad, only a few deserve the epithets they get. However, these happen to be placed in strategic places where they constantly and consistently act as a cinder in the public eye.

Unfortunate Position

There are two other concrete reasons for the State Department's unfortunate position.

First, a sense of self-importance is inspired by association with Monarchs and Ambassadors which turns the head of almost every young man even though he comes from a small town, shaves his neck and has a nasal twang which sends cold shivers down the spine of the chief of protocol.

Second, is the fact that Cordell Hull consistently has held back against getting more funds and more good men to help mold foreign policy at a time when it largely holds the Nation's future.

(Another column on what's wrong with our State Department will follow soon.)