

**PEACE HISTORY CONFERENCE:IMPERIAL WAR
MUSEUM, 24th-25th APRIL 2009.**

**AMERICA’S DON QUIXOTE: THE HENRY FORD
PEACE SHIP OF DECEMBER 1915.**

Thank you very much. Good morning ladies and gentlemen, and welcome once again to the Imperial War Museum. As those of you who attended earlier Peace History conferences may recall, I have previously spoken on three inter-war attempts to abolish conflict, namely the League of Nations, the Briand-Kellogg Pact and the 1932 Disarmament Conference. All those were officially-inspired, governmental efforts, but this morning I will be talking about an effort to end the First World War, not by governments nor by international organizations, but by a private individual, namely Henry Ford, the great automobile manufacturer.

I suppose there is more than a certain amount of irony in the fact that at a conference devoted to history, I should speaking this morning about a man who is famously remembered for the damning judgement that, “History is bunk.” Nevertheless, I think that there are certain lessons that can still be learned from this almost forgotten incident from the First World War, a conflict which most people hoped would truly be “The War to End all Wars”.

In 1909, Henry Ford also famously declared:

“I will build a motor car for the great multitude. It will be large enough for the family but small enough for the individual to run and care for. It will be constructed of the best materials, by the best man to be hired, after the simplest designs that modern engineering can devise. But it will be so low in price that no man making a good salary will

be unable to own one-and enjoy with his family the blessings of hours in God's great open spaces."

Ford was as good as his word. The Model "T" went on sale in October 1908 at the cost of \$850 for the large open touring model. 10,000 were sold in the first year of production, 18, 664 the next and double that number the following year. In 1913-1914, a staggering total of 248,000 Model "Ts" were sold, and the cost had come down from \$850 to \$360. All of which, of course had made Henry Ford a very, very rich man. A recent biographer describing Ford noted that he was:

"capable of deviousness, petty cruelty, and impetuous, overwhelming acts of generosity. He felt with good reason, that he had proven the correctness of his own intuitive vision over and over again, and could be stubborn to the point of perverseness when convinced he was right."

Furthermore, the overwhelming success that Ford enjoyed in the world of automobile manufacture had, by the time war broke out in August 1914, convinced him that he had also gained invaluable expertise in all other fields of human endeavour. But despite his success in the world of cut-throat world of business, Ford remained personally very naïve. The American writer and historian John Dos Passos wrote of Ford and his philosophy:

"(his) formation was that of a rural mechanic. To the mind of a simple rural mechanic from the American Middle West war was plumb madness. Why couldn't these crazy Europeans be made to see reason? Give up murder and destruction and go to work. If they spent the billions they were throwing away into massacre and destruction on useful production, they could make more money in a year than any of the odd lots of real estate they were fighting for was worth."

Ford's viewpoint was shared by many millions of his fellow countrymen. They were still mindful of George Washington's warning about "foreign entanglements," as in August 1914 they watched the European powers engage in what appeared to be yet another dynastic and fratricidal conflict.

At the White House in August 1914, as Europe plunged into war, President Woodrow Wilson was facing a severe personal crisis His beloved wife Ellen was dying of Bright's disease, complicated by tuberculosis of the kidneys. "I think of nothing, nothing when my dear one is suffering," he told his daughters on the day that Germany declared war on France. Emotionally prostrated by Ellen's death on 6th August, Wilson went through the motions of his office, writing to a close friend, "It is amazing how one can continue to function in all ordinary, and extraordinary, matters with a broken heart." Like almost everyone else, Wilson had been both surprised and shocked by the suddenness in which war had come after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand at Sarajevo on 28th June 1914.

And it is almost impossible for us today to try and comprehend how little the United States loomed in the calculations of the European powers as they went to war in August 1914. Or indeed the sense of helplessness that seized the leading members of the Wilson Administration as they faced up to the prospect of a major European war. The 32 year old Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin Delano Roosevelt wrote to his wife Eleanor:

"To my astonishment on reaching the (Navy) Department nobody seemed the very least excited by the European crisis- Mr Daniels, (FDR's superior, Josephus Daniels, the Secretary of the Navy), feeling very sad that his faith in

human nature and civilization....was receiving such a rude shock....these dear good people like William Jennings Bryan, (Wilson's Secretary of State) and Josephus Daniels have as much conception of what a general European war means as Elliott, (the Roosevelts' 4 year old son), has of higher mathematics. I nearly boil over when I see the cheery 'manana' way of doing things."

To which Eleanor replied:

"I am not surprised at what you say about Josephus Daniels or William Jennings Bryan for one could expect little else. To understand the present gigantic conflict one must have at least a glimmering of understanding of foreign nations and their histories."

At this point, ladies and gentlemen, should you think that that the Roosevelts were being unfair in their observations on Secretary Daniels, it is on record that that same year he invited the Swiss Navy to take part in the opening of the San Francisco Exposition!

Just over a fortnight after Britain declared war on Germany, Wilson, still deeply grieving for his wife, issued a statement on American neutrality. It must be, he told his fellow countrymen, a neutrality, "in fact as well as in name." Furthermore, Americans should be, "impartial in thought as well as in action." Incidentally, in September 1939, when it was *his* turn to proclaim America's neutrality, Franklin Roosevelt was careful to say:

"This nation will neutral nation, but I cannot ask that every American remain neutral in thought as well. Even a neutral has the right to take account of facts. Even a neutral cannot be asked to close his mind or his conscience."

In public, Wilson scrupulously observed his admonition. The German ambassador in Washington, Count Johann Von Bernstorff wrote in his memoirs:

“No unneutral remark of Mr Wilson, even in private, has ever reached my ears. He always resisted the pressure of the Entente party in spite of the fact that he was entirely surrounded by anti-Germans.”

But Wilson’s views in private were another thing altogether. The very same week he proclaimed America’s neutrality he told his brother-in-law that a German victory would be a disaster, leading to universal militarism. To his friend Brand Whitlock, US Minister to Belgium, who told Wilson that he was “four square for the Allies”, the President replied:

“So am I. No decent man, knowing the situation and Germany, could be anything else. But that is only my own personal opinion and there are many others in this country who do not hold that opinion. In the West and Middle West frequently there is no opinion at all. I am not justified in forcing my opinion upon the people of the United States and bringing them into a war which they do not understand.”

Others in the Administration shared the President’s view; Secretary of the Interior Franklin Lane noted that he had two cousins, and his wife three, fighting in the British army. More importantly, the President’s *eminence grise* and right-hand man Colonel Edward Mandell House was a secret strong advocate for the Allied, and especially, British cause. House had been horrified when he visited Germany in May 1914. From Berlin he had prophetically written to Wilson:

“It is militarism run stark mad. Unless someone acting for you can bring about a different understanding, there is some day to be an awful cataclysm. No one in Europe can do it. There is too much hatred, too many jealousies....It is an

absorbing problem. I wish it might be solved, and to the everlasting glory of your Administration and our American civilization.”

If Wilson, House, Franklin Roosevelt and many others in official Washington were, despite a public stance of neutrality, secretly for the Allies, the Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan really did endeavour to be truly neutral in deed and word.

Bryan had been the Democratic Party presidential candidate in 1896, in 1900, and finally in 1908. Despite these election defeats, he retained great public support and affection. Bryan also possessed great moral authority both in America, and abroad, and it was more or less incumbent on Wilson to name him Secretary of State in March 1913. Bryan was a strict teetotaller and prohibitionist, and one of his first measures at the State Department, and not a popular one with the capital’s diplomatic community, was to stop wine being served at state dinners.

A more popular measure was the negotiation of no less than thirty treaties of arbitration. If nations in dispute could agree to a year’s cooling off period, Bryan argued, while a neutral fact finding commission investigated their causes of friction, declarations of war would be postponed long enough for hot tempers to cool down. With the significant exception of Germany, most nations approached by Bryan agreed to the treaties. At the treaty signings, Bryan distributed paperweights made out of US Navy swords inscribed with the verse from Isaiah about beating swords into ploughshares and his own dictum, “ Nothing Is Final Between Friends.” In December 1913, Bryan told diplomats:

“We know of no cause today that cannot better be settled by reason than by war. I believe there will be no war while I am Secretary of State....I hope we have seen the last great war”.

As Franklin Roosevelt noted, when war did come in August 1914, it overwhelmed Bryan. He was almost totally unprepared and unequipped to deal with the practicalities of directing American foreign policy in a world at war. And, to do him justice, he was also profoundly, if naively, shocked that the European great powers had so quickly resorted to war to settle their differences. Wilson, as is so common with most presidents in modern times, was really his own secretary of state, amply aided by Colonel House. By the way, I should point out that the House's rank was a purely honorary one, bestowed on him by the Governor of Texas for political services rendered to the Democratic Party.

Thus, it was House, and not Bryan, who went to Europe early in 1915 to see if there was any hope of bringing the fighting to an end. And House was in London on 7th May 1915, when the British passenger liner "Lusitania" was sunk by the German submarine U20. 1153 passengers and crew perished, including 114 American citizens, many of whom were women and children. The Colonel told William Hines Page, the extreme anglophile US ambassador, "we shall be at war within a month." But in the event, America remained neutral. To be sure there was a tremendous initial wave of indignation against Germany, especially in the pro-British South and the Atlantic seaboard states, but this died down remarkably quickly. Wilson spoke for most Americans when in a statement three days after the "Lusitania" sinking he said:

"The example of America must be a special example. The example of America must be the example not merely of peace because it will not fight, but of peace because peace is the healing and elevating influence of the world and strife is not. There is such a thing as a man being too proud to fight. There is such a thing as a nation being so right that it does not need to convince others by force that it is right."

Despite the President's noble words, which echoed the Secretary of State's own feelings, within a few weeks of the "Lusitania" sinking, Bryan had resigned. On the verge of a nervous breakdown, at a cabinet meeting Bryan had shouted out, "You people are not neutral. You are taking sides." To which Wilson had replied in the iciest of his very icy tones:

" Mr Secretary, you have no right to make that statement. We are all honestly trying to be neutral against heavy difficulties."

Shortly afterwards, the two men had a private meeting at the White House. A distraught Bryan told the President, " Colonel House has been Secretary of State, not I, and I have never had your full confidence." He offered the President his resignation which was accepted immediately. Bryan was succeeded by Robert Lansing. Lansing was a non-partisan State Department official who even before Bryan's resignation had been reporting directly to the President. It must be said that for the next five years, Wilson regarded Lansing as little more than a clerk or presidential messenger boy with no real responsibilities of his own and with minimal influence on American foreign policy.

As the war approached its first anniversary, America was still technically neutral. Notes of protests were dispatched equally to Berlin about sinkings by U Boats, and to London concerning the highhandedness of Britain's blockade and its interference with the rights of neutrals. But the "Lusitania" sinking, Germany's atrocities, real and invented, in Belgium and France, together with her espionage and sabotage activities in America, determined that many Americans favoured the Allied cause over that of the Central Powers.

Henry Ford was not one of those Americans. In early 1915, he had started making public attacks on the American

military preparedness movement led by ex- President Theodore Roosevelt. Ford also expressed a general hatred of war and the willingness to spend his massive fortune to end it for all time. In an interview with the “New York Times” published on 11th April 1915, Ford told the paper, “the word ‘murderer’ should be embroidered in red letter across the breast of every soldier,” no matter what his nationality. Wars, according to Ford, occurred only because the capitalists and Wall Street financiers profited from them. Ford was not alone in his views. The Niagara Section of the New York Peace Society was prepared to raise a million dollars to set up a commission, not only to investigate the causes of the war, but to produce a plan for bringing it an end. The same month that Ford gave his interview to the “New York Times”, American peace activist Jane Addams was presiding over the International Congress of Women at The Hague. The Congress came up with a plan to set up a commission of neutrals to conduct “continuous mediation” between the belligerents. Miss Addams returned from the Netherlands and had an interview with Colonel House. The Colonel politely told her that her plan was a mistaken one. The President, House said, knew better than she did about what the best methods were to gain peace.

The truth to tell, both Wilson and House were both suspicious and resentful of the many non-official attempts to bring the war to an end. Indeed Wilson regarded them as “dangerous” and House treated them as cranks. He believed:

“their intentions were good but they had no idea how to set about them; they were like children entering for a chess tournament before they learnt the moves.”

But if the Colonel treated most of them, including Jane Addams, as impractical cranks, Henry Ford could not so

easily be dismissed. At the beginning of November 1915, Ford was visited by Rosika Schwimmer, a flamboyant and extrovert Hungarian campaigner for such causes as votes for women, birth control and trade unionism. With her was Louis Lochner, the secretary of David Starr Jordan who headed the American Peace Society. Ford and his wife Clara were both impressed with the sincerity of their visitors. Clara immediately offered to donate \$10,000 to pay for citizens to flood the White House with telegrams calling on Wilson to officially support the process of continuous mediation. Ford himself surprised Schwimmer and Lochner by telling them that he had proof that the war had been deliberately started by German Jewish bankers, but nevertheless agreed to sponsor the peace campaign saying, “men sitting around a table, not men dying in a trench, will finally settle the differences.”

Matters now began quickly to gather pace. In New York later that month, Ford met with a number of American peace workers including Jane Addams. They all agreed to send, if possible, an official mediating commission to Europe, and failing that, a representative private group. Further, Ford, accompanied by Lochner, would go to Washington to try and obtain Wilson’s official blessing for the scheme. Before leaving New York for the meeting the President, Ford and Lochner had an hour long interview with Colonel House on 21st November. In his notes on the meeting, the Colonel complained that earnest Lochner monopolized the conversation and would hardly let Ford get a word in edgeways. House wrote:

“ ...just as soon as I got him discussing his great industrial plant at Detroit and the plans for the uplift of his workers, the young man would break in...Ford I should judge is a mechanical genius...who may become prey to all sorts of faddists who desire his money.”

House was also suspicious of Ford's real motives, wondering if the whole idea was not just one great publicity stunt to boost the sales of Ford automobiles. In any case, the Colonel found Ford's ideas about peace both "crude and unimportant."

Nevertheless, Ford was too important a public figure to be brushed off, and especially with a presidential election only a year off. And so on 22nd November, he and Lochner met with President Wilson at the White House. The President was in a good, almost skittish, mood that day. Earlier in the year while still in deep mourning for his wife Ellen, he had met a Washington widow Edith Bolling Galt and fallen head over heels in love with her. Their marriage was going to take place in less than a month's time. Under his fiancée's influence, the normally reserved, not to say aloof, president had become much more forthcoming, indeed jocular, as Ford was to find. Lochner described how the interview began:

"Mr Ford slipped unceremoniously into an armchair and during most of the interview had left his left leg hanging over the arm of the chair and swing back and forth."

Ford complimented Wilson on his appearance; how did the President keep so trim? Wilson replied that he tried to relax completely after the dispatch of official business and enjoyed a good joke. To this Ford replied with a joke of his own. He had seen a grave digger excavating an extra large hole in a cemetery. Asked if a whole family was going to be buried there, the grave digger answered No, saying that the deceased had wanted to be buried in his Ford Model T because it had pulled him out of every hole he'd ever been stuck in, and he was sure it would pull him out of this one.

The President laughed at Ford's joke and capped it with his favourite self-mocking limerick:

**For beauty I am not a star,
There are others more handsome by far,
But my face, I don't mind it,
For I am behind it-
It's the fellow in front that I jar.**

Incidentally, when the British diplomat and diarist Harold Nicolson met the President for the first time during the 1919 Paris Peace Conference , he wrote:

“one does not see the teeth except when he smiles, which is an awful gesture.”

After their would-be witty exchanges, the Wilson and Ford got down to business. Ford explained his mission. He urged the president to appoint a neutral commission, which he himself would finance. A peace ship had already been chartered, and furthermore, in order to gain peace, Ford told the President, he was willing to sacrifice his entire fortune, disingenuously adding, “ I guess I know how to make some more.” Wilson, involved with his own secret schemes to end the fighting-he was on point of sending House off to Europe again in only a few weeks' time-was reluctant to complicate matters by appointing a commission of well-meaning amateurs. He told Ford that while he approved in principle of continuing mediation, a better plan might materialize and he did not wish to be tied to one project. Despite the president's unwonted bonhomie, it was obvious to Ford that nothing was going to be forthcoming from the White House. Just as he was about to leave, Ford startled Wilson by saying, “if you feel you can't act, I will.” Walking away from the White House, Ford told Lochner that in his opinion the President was “a small man” incapable of seeing the enormous potential of Ford's scheme.

True to his word, the next day at a press conference at New York's Biltmore Hotel, Ford announced his plans "to go it alone" and in his own words, "...try to get the boys out of the trenches before Christmas....the main idea is to crush militarism and get the boys out of the trenches. War's nothing but preparedness. No boy would ever kill a bird if he didn't first have a slingshot or a gun." He explained to reporters, "I've chartered a ship, and some of us going to Europe." He hoped to assemble on board a group, "of the biggest and most influential peace advocates in the country, who can get away on this ship," and named among them, ex-Secretary Bryan, Jane Addams and his great friend the inventor Thomas Alva Edison.

And when a sceptical reporter asked, "Do you actually expect to get the boys out by Christmas?" Ford replied, "Well, there's New Year's and Easter and the Fourth of July isn't there?"

Ford was pressed for further details, but he remained firmly non-committal as the following exchange amply illustrates:

"We're going to stop the war."

"But how are you going to do it?"

"Oh, you'll see."

"Where are you going?"

"I don't know."

"What country will you head for?"

"I don't know."

“But what makes you think you can put it over?”

“Oh we have had assurances.”

Despite this, initially the general tone of the American press towards Ford’s Peace Ship initiative was more or less respectful. The “New York Times”, a paper that reflected the opinion of politically sophisticated East Coast pro-Allied Americans, was afraid that an immediate armistice on the lines that Ford was suggesting would leave the Germans in possession of all of Belgium and northern France. The paper thought that on the whole Ford’s peace mission would do, “as little harm as good,” and would perhaps highlight, “that immediate peace, enormously desirable as it is...might be attained at costs in comparison to which those of continuing the struggle would be negligible.”

But the pro-Allied “New York Tribune” was mocking, with headlines that read:

“GREAT WAR ENDS

CHRISTMAS DAY

FORD TO STOP IT”

Very soon, this tone began to be adopted by most other influential newspapers. Throughout 1915, American public opinion was more or less anti-German. Only six weeks before, Edith Cavell had been executed in German-occupied Brussels for aiding fugitive Allied soldiers to escape. She had been shot despite pleas to show mercy from Wilson’s personal friend the US Minister to Belgium Brand Whitlock. Such German ruthlessness confirmed many Americans in their belief that only an Allied victory and the crushing of German militarism could bring about a satisfactory and

lasting peace. Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin Roosevelt expressed the thoughts of many WASP Americans when he wrote to a friend, "...I long to go over into the thick of it & do something to help right the wrong. England's course has been magnificent...."

Ford was now seen in the press as hopelessly swimming against this tide. Perhaps he was even pro-German? The "New York World", a newspaper usually sympathetic to him, described the peace ship enterprise as, "an impossible effort to establish an inopportune peace." The "New York Herald" considered it, "one of the cruellest jokes of the century," while the "Hartford Courant" told its readers that, "Henry Ford's latest performance is getting abundant criticism and seems entitled to all it gets." And the "New York World" published this mocking verse:

**"I saw a little Fordship
Go chugging out to sea
And for a flag
It bore a tag
Marked 70 h.p.
And all the folk aboard ship
Cried "Hail to Hennery!"**

Neither, it must be said, was Ford helped in his relations with the press by the rather priggish, self-righteous Lochner nor by the "manipulative egotism" of Schwimmer, nor indeed the assorted collection of "cranks and crackpots" who now latched on to him.

The ship that Ford had chartered to take the peace mission to Europe was the "Oscar II" of the Scandinavian-America Line. It was due to sail on Saturday 4th December. This left only nine days both to plan the European part of the mission, and to assemble the company of the "biggest and most influential peace advocates." Ford sent telegrams to

political, business and peace leaders inviting them to sail on the “Oscar II”, which the press was already dubbing “The Ship of Fools.” Many of the more responsible figures that Ford invited cried off, put off by the air of “circus ballyhoo” that was surrounding the voyage. Ex-president William Howard Taft, Cardinal Gibbons, Rabbi Stephen Wise, Thomas Edison and Colonel House all politely turned down their invitations. Less polite were attacks made on Ford and his peace mission by other senior American statesmen and politicians. Ex-president Theodore Roosevelt declared that, “Mr Ford’s visit abroad will not be mischievous only because it is ridiculous.” Alton B Parker, Roosevelt’s Democratic opponent in 1904 called Ford, “a clown strutting on the stage for a little time.” And in Ford’s own stronghold of Detroit, a local paper described his voyage as, “a humiliation to his city and his country.”

Some support was garnered. Helen Keller announced that she was with Ford, “heart and soul,” and Governor Hiram Johnson of California telegraphed Ford, telling him, “I cannot too highly commend you.” There was great disappointment however when, on 1st December, Jane Addams pulled out of the mission. She had been suddenly taken ill, and it looked as if she would have to an operation which would immobilize her some time. In fact, Miss Addams had argued against the whole idea of the voyage, rightfully anticipating the mockery that would surround it. Her loss to the expedition was a grave one, for her presence might have given it both the authority and stability which it was sadly lacking.

It was hoped that William Jennings Bryan would join the mission. He met Ford in New York just before the “Oscar II” sailed, and issued a statement to the press that he both approved of the mission and that he proposed to join it at The Hague. While there was nobody quite of Bryans’ stature on the voyage, Ford had persuaded a number of prominent

Americans to join him. These included the publisher S. S. McClure, Governor Louis B Hanna of North Dakota and Judge Ben Lindsey of Denver who had shot to fame with his progressive ideas on how to deal with that perennial problem of juvenile delinquency. Also on board was Inez Milholland Boissevain, described as:

“ (a) feminist firebrand...who was famous for her beauty and intelligence, as well as for leading suffragette demonstrations on a spirited white charger.”

In all there were eighty-three delegates, fifty secretarial staff, three film cameraman and no less fifty-five reporters including a future US ambassador William C Bullitt and Elmer Davis who was to head Roosevelt’s Office of War Information during the Second World War. On the business and clerical staff was future songwriter Irving Caesar, who with George Gershwin was to write “Swanee” for Al Jolson. There was even a stowaway, Western Union messenger boy Jacob Greenberg who was allowed to stay on and join the ship’s technical staff.

On the day of sailing, Ford gave one last press conference to the press at the Biltmore Hotel. Had he a last word for the American public, he was asked.

“ Yes, tell the people to cry peace and fight preparedness.”

“What if the expedition fails?”

“I’ll start another.”

Ford finished by saying, “We’ve got peace-talk going now, and I’ll pound it to the end.”

In fact, Ford was under pressure from an unexpected source to abandon the whole expedition. His wife Clara had become

appalled at the autocratic way Rosika Schwimmer was behaving both with the press and with the other peace campaigners. Mrs Ford resented too the way Miss Schwimmer was spending her husband's money, especially when she found out that a necklace given to her as a present by Miss Schwimmer had been paid for by Ford. Nor did the humourless and self-righteous Louis Lochner inspire much confidence or enthusiasm. But despite the tearful entreaties of Clara and the more restrained objections of his religious counsellor Reverend Samuel Marquis, Ford went ahead with his plans.

4th December 1915 was a bright, bitterly cold day in New York. "Oscar II" was to depart from Hokoben dock where a an estimated crowd of 15,000 had gathered to see off the "Peace Ark." As Clara Ford had feared, the ship's departure had a distinctly Barnum and Bailey character to it. Brass bands played the hit song of the moment among American pacifists, "I Didn't Raise My Boy To Be A Soldier" while German sympathizers sang "Deutschland ueber Alles. This was immediately countered by renditions of "La Marseillaise" and "God Save The King" from Allied supporters. William Jennings Bryan arrived to see off the ship. He insisted on shaking hands with all the peace delegates, and on board in the first class saloon acted as a witness at the marriage of poet Berton Braley and Marian Rubicam. Not for nothing was Bryan dubbed "The Great Commoner." Thomas Edison also came to see Ford off. Ford pleaded with his friend to remain on board, and according to William Bullitt offered him \$1 million to do so. Despite this inducement, the inventor smiled and shook his head.

All was not sweetness and light as the ship prepared to depart. A brawl took place on the dock between peace delegates and press men who were using their luggage as a grandstand. Dr Charles Griffin Pease, President of the Anti-

Smoking League was ordered off the ship after an attempt to smuggle his girl friend into his cabin. The puritanical Ford was “shocked to the marrow” at Pease’s “immoral behaviour.” He was annoyed too by the arrival of two caged squirrels, sent by an anonymous practical joker, to live among the “nuts.” He was even less pleased when he heard that the newsmen on board had nicknamed them “William Jennings Bryan” and “Henry Ford”.

Eventually, the ship got underway. A crate of white doves were released and Ford threw down red roses to his wife Clara who was still in tears on the dockside. A final touch of farce was added to the ship’s departure when a certain Urbain J Ledoux, calling himself “Mr Zero”, plunged into the icy waters and swam towards the “Oscar II”. Picked up by a harbour tug, Ledoux told the police that he was swimming to reach public opinion not the ship. Either way, the authorities were unimpressed and Ledoux was fined \$25.

As the “Oscar II” sailed into the Atlantic, it encountered very rough weather. Many of those on board suffered from severe sea-sickness which hampered serious discussion as to what should be the plan of action once Europe was reached. Already there were signs of dissent, with “factions among the delegates formed, broke apart, and reformed.” The rather nebulous course decided upon, was for the ship first to stop off in Norway, pick up delegates there, and then do the same in Sweden and Denmark before ending up in Holland. There, the delegates would make their way to The Hague where they would be ready to conduct negotiations. In the meantime, on board discussions took place in which delegates deplored the “excessive military history” to be found in school textbooks and the allowing of children to play with toy guns. One delegate suggested, “ schoolhouses should not be painted the incendiary colour red.”

Naturally enough, Ford himself was the centre of attention, at least until he caught a severe cold after being drenched by a wave. The sceptical Bullitt was won over by Ford's sincerity, calling him, "an absolutely unselfish egoist," and even "Christlike." When asked if he thought the Peace Ship expedition a "Holy Cause", Ford replied:

"No, I don't know what you mean by 'Holy'. Instead of a 'Holy Cause' I consider this expedition a people's affair."

"Are you not sailing with faith?"

"Yes," Ford replied, "but it is faith in the people. I have absolute confidence in the better side of human nature...People never disappoint you if you trust them. Only three out of six hundred convicts in my factory have failed to make good." Ford admitted that his expedition might not bring peace immediately, saying:

"The chief effect I look for is psychological...I consider that the peace ship will have been worthwhile if it does nothing more than it has done already in driving preparedness off the front page of newspapers and putting peace on the front page."

Three days out from New York, Ford sent wireless messages to members of the US Congress. He urged them, "to give the peace mission your support and encouragement so that it may succeed at the earliest possible moment." He also sent messages to the heads of state of the warring European powers, telling them:

"Enough blood has been shed, enough agony endured, enough destruction wrought."

Ford entreated them to declare an immediate truce and by “mediation and discussion” to settle at the conference table what was not being settled on the battlefield.

The same day that Ford sent his wireless messages to Congress, 7th December 1915, President Wilson delivered his Third Annual Address to both its houses. The President told senators and congressmen that, “the whole face of international affairs has changed” and he asked for substantial increases in both the United States Navy and Army. Wilson’s address caused a crisis on board the “Oscar II”. Meetings were held to determine the response of the peace delegates to the President’s call for American preparedness. On the 9th December, Louis Lochner put forward the proposal that the delegates should unanimously support immediate and unilateral disarmament. A number of delegates demurred at this. For example, S. S. McClure stated that:

“For years I have been working for disarmament....But I cannot impugn the course laid out by the President of the United States and supported by my newspaper. I should like to go on working with the party, but I am unable to sign that part of its declaration of principles which would place me in opposition to my Government.”

Lochner was indignant at the lack of positive response from delegates and told them, “ Any one who accepted the invitation of Mr Ford, and now refuses to sign this resolution, came for a free ride.” This only served to poison the atmosphere on board even more, as did the highhanded behaviour of Rosika Schwimmer who, annoyed at the attitude of the reporters, denied them access to the vessel’s radio room. “This did not tend to produce any undue amount of good feeling,” William Bullitt drily noted.

Many of the delegates shared the pressmen's view of Miss Schwimmer. She was never seen without a black bag which supposedly contained secret documents which promised that the European belligerents were ready to start negotiations to stop the fighting. It was on these "documents" that Ford had based statements to the press that his peace mission had a fair chance of bringing the war to an end. Miss Schwimmer refused to let other delegates see the contents of her infamous black bag, and it soon became obvious that she had not told the truth about its contents. The Reverend Marquis warned Ford that the chances of his mission's success was thus compromised, and that it would be best if he abandoned the mission and returned to America as soon as possible, but Ford was still reluctant to give up his efforts completely.

"Oscar II" arrived at Christiania, (now Oslo), Norway, on Saturday 18th December and the delegates disembarked the following day. Ford went to his hotel where, apart from taking part in a snowball fight in a nearby park, he stayed, still suffering from a severe cold. He was now a very disillusioned man, believing that he had been taken for a ride by Rosika Schwimmer, Louis Lochner and some of the other peace delegates on board. Encouraged by the Reverend Marquis, he decided to return home and started off for New York on Christmas Eve.

But this was not the end of Ford Peace Mission. The rest of the delegates, although greatly disappointed at their leader's return to the USA, and recognizing that they had lost their major source of credibility, resolved to carry on. After pro-Allied Norway they journeyed to pro-German Sweden, and then on to a more neutral Denmark. From there, in a sealed train across northern Germany, they finally reached The Hague on 8th January 1916. Sadly, the Ford delegates found the Dutch less than enthusiastic about their mission. The Dutch already had a peace society of

their own. This had already been working to bring about an end to the fighting when the Ford Mission burst on the scene. Not unnaturally, the Dutch were apprehensive that their own restrained efforts would be submerged by the sensationalist nature of the Ford Mission and especially by the formidable Rosika Schwimmer. Indeed wherever Miss Schwimmer went in Europe, she seems to have caused bad blood, and the Dutch even sent a formal protest about her to Henry Ford.

All however was not lost. It was decided that Stockholm should become the permanent seat of the Neutral Conference for Continuous Mediation to which there would be five delegates from the United States. These and alternates were duly chosen, while the rest of the Ford Peace delegates returned to America on two Dutch ships during the second week of January 1916. The work of the Conference, based at Stockholm's famous Grand Hotel, began the following month and in March it produced an appeal to the government of the neutral nations, urging them to take the initiative in offering mediation to the warring powers. As a result of this appeal, bills to implement the peace initiative were introduced in the parliaments of Sweden, Switzerland, Norway and The Netherlands. Sadly, no positive action was taken by the governments of those countries.

Then in April 1916, the Conference issued its Appeal to the Governments, Parliaments and Peoples of the Belligerent Nations. Once again, this stated again the case for stopping the war, but it also put forward a set of principles which the Conference hoped would form the basis for a lasting peace. These included the right of self-determination by peoples, guarantees of economic freedom, thus making pointless, wars for commercial gain, freedom of the seas, parliamentary control of foreign policy, an international organization to promote co-operation between nations and

the peaceful settlement of all disputes. Further, the Conference proposed a programme of world disarmament and a world congress to deal with all these questions. The Appeal concluded the first part of the Conference's work. On 20th April, the number of delegates was reduced to two and its site was moved from Stockholm to The Hague.

Back in the United States, Ford energetically continued his campaign against American preparedness and his opposition to the war. He maintained a keen interest in the Conference's work, and continued to see Louis Lochner on the latter's trips back to America, encouraging him to carry on the process of mediation in Europe.

At the official level, on 18th December 1916, President Wilson sent to all the belligerents identical notes suggesting that they state the terms on which they were prepared to consider peace. The Germans expressed a willingness to confer, but the Allies, and especially Britain's new prime minister David Lloyd George, rejected any suggestion of peace without victory, demanding the Germans' expulsion from the Allied territory they occupied, especially Belgium and northern France.

The Germans were now determined to win the war by knocking out their principal opponent, Great Britain. This they hoped to do with the introduction of unrestricted submarine warfare which would starve the British into submission. In the event its introduction also brought, on 4th February 1917, America's severing of diplomatic relations with Germany. Three days later, Ford gave instructions that all activity for peace being done in his name, both in America and in Europe, should cease forthwith.

Two months later on 6th April 1917, after the repeated sinkings by U-boats of unarmed American merchant vessels, Congress declared war on Germany. In his speech four days

before calling for a declaration of war, President Wilson famously declared to ringing cheers, “The world must be safe for democracy.” Later that night he said to his secretary, “My message today was a message of our death for our young men. How strange it seems to applaud that!”

Wilson led an initially reluctant America to victory. Coming to Europe in December 1918, he was hailed and feted by ordinary people everywhere as the peacemaker who would forge a better world, and one without war. Defeated in his attempt to make America a keystone of his brainchild the League of Nations, he died a sick and embittered man in 1924. Henry Ford outlived him by 23 years. After the war, Ford conducted an idiosyncratic and hateful campaign against the Jews and their supposed malign influence on international affairs in his paper the “Deaborn Independent”. This won him the admiration of Adolf Hitler, who received certain financial backing from Ford. Loathing Roosevelt and the New Deal, Ford foolishly accepted Germany’s highest decoration from the Nazis in 1938, and even more foolishly was photographed being invested with it. He died in 1947, the Peace Ship episode all but forgotten.

Of the other characters in its story, Colonel House continued to be Wilson’s *eminence grise* until discarded in 1919 for supposedly letting down the President over the Treaty of Versailles. He continued to be a power in the Democratic Party, much consulted by Franklin D. Roosevelt, until his death in 1938. William Jennings Bryan died in 1925. His most famous post-war appearance was at the Dayton “Monkey Trial” where he famously clashed with Clarence Darrow over Darwin’s Theory of Evolution. In 1933, William C Bullitt became FDR’s first ambassador to the Soviet Union, before moving on to the plum posting of the Paris Embassy. After the Fall of France, Bullitt returned to the United States where he had hopes of becoming Roosevelt’s *eminence grise*. These hopes were soon dashed

and like Wilson, whom he had assisted at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, died a lonely and embittered man. Rosika Schwimmer, as one might expect had a colourful post- Ford career. At one stage she served as Hungary's minister to Switzerland, but was sacked after spending state funds on a fur coat, a luxury apartment and a chauffeur driven limousine. Praised by Albert Einstein as "a saving angel" because of her work for refugees fleeing Nazi persecution she died in New York in 1948. Louis Lochner became a newsman and headed the Berlin Associated Press bureau in the 1930s and 1940s until Pearl Harbor. Other correspondents in Berlin, notably William L Shirer, thought that Lochner was a shade too friendly with the Nazis in order to get a good story. On the other hand, Dr Goebbels wrote after Lochner's repatriation in May 1942:

" I have never though much of Lochner. We made too much fuss of him."

Lochner and his German-born wife returned to Germany after the war and he died there in 1975 aged 87. His autobiography was entitled, appropriately enough, "Always the Unexpected".

So, in conclusion what are we are to make of Henry Ford and his peace ship? Ford himself, when told that the total cost to him had been \$465,000, remarked rather cynically, "Well, we got a million dollars worth of advertising out of it and a hell of a lot of experience." But he later said quite sincerely, " I wanted to see peace. I at least tried to bring it about. Most men did not even try."

But perhaps the last word, and a prophetic one, should go to William C Bullitt who witnessed both Ford and Wilson in their attempts to bring an end to war. On 4th December 1918, the 27 year old Bullitt, now State Department specialist, was about to sail on the SS "George Washington"

with President Wilson and the other members of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace. In his cabin that night, Bullitt made the following entry in his diary:

“ Three years ago today exactly I sailed from New York with another gentleman who planned to bring eternal peace to the world. I am sure that the Ford Party was a wonderful experience than this will ever be; and tonight I wonder if Wilson will be much more successful than Ford.”

Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen.