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THE INTIMATE PAPERS OF COLONEL HOUSE

(Continued from page four)

The enemies of Lloyd George and the friends of Robertson and Haig believe that George wants to rid himself of these generals and supersede them with Wilson. The claim that Wilson is not a great general but he is a politician and one that will be to George's liking. (Ed. Note: House is merely reporting opinion. His own judgement of Sir Henry Wilson was, that of all the British officers he was best suited to serve as military representative on the council, both because of his ability and because of his cordial personal relations with the French.

House's letter to the President does not do justice to the point of view of Sir Henry Wilson, whose diaries indecate that both his and Mr. Lloyd George's plans were not based upon a desire to oust Sir William Robertson, but upon the conviction that only through an organization superior to the Chiefs of Staff could the war be won. How far this view should be regarded as correct is a matter upon which opinions differ and will probably continue to differ.)

The French want a 'Generalissimo' but they want him to be a Frenchman. This too, would meet with so much opposition in England that it is not to be thought of. Any Government that proposed it would be overthrown.

I have had long conference with Bliss and Pershing on the subject, and I think they see the danger as I do. I am trying to suggest something else which will give unity of control by uniting all involved rather than creating dissension.

I have just had a conference alone with Clemenceau. Later without my saying a word upon the subject, he practically repeated the opinion that I have expressed to you above concerning the Supreme War Council. He is earnestly in favor of unity of plan and action, but he thinks as I do that the plan of Lloyd George is not workable, and for reasons somewhat similar to those I have given.

He has nothing in mind and says that he dares not formulate a plan because it might be looked upon with suspicion. He wants us to take the initiative and he promises that we can count upon him to back to a finish any reasonable suggestion that we make. . . .

He has put his time at my disposal and asks me to come at my pleasure unannounced and says the door will always be open.

Affectionately yours,
E. M. House

THE AMERICAN PLAN

General Bliss seems to have agreed with Mr. Lloyd George that the Rapallo plan was sound in so far as it left general supervision of the conduct of the war to the political leaders and was 'in accord with the military principal that war is but a continuation of political policy in a new form'. But like General Pershing he was convinced that in a given theater of operations, such as the Western Front, unity of military control was essential to success and, in default of a generalissimo, that it could be achieved only through a purely military council with executive powers. The plan which he drafted with House and which they presented to the French thus eliminated the political members of the Supreme War Council and gave to the military members executive rather than merely advisory powers.

Memorandum of Unity of Control
Paris, November 25, 1917

'1. Unity of control in the conduct of military operations in a given theatre is essential to success.

'2. To ensure real efficiency, this unity of control must be effected through a purely military council, it being assumed that one or more of the principal Allied nations may be unwilling to place their military forces under a single Commander-in-Chief.

'3. It is believed that the Supreme War Council should be composed of the Commander-in-Chief of the principal national forces in the field on the front over which the unity of control is necessary, together with the Chiefs of Staff of those same national forces or officers designated by these Chiefs of Staff and representing them.

'4. To ensure the prompt execution of the will of this Supreme War Council there must be one man to carry this will into effect. This man must be President of the Supreme War Council, chosen by the other members and having power to execute their will.'

We may ask whether, if this plan had been put into effect and if General Foch had been chosen as executive officer, the military disasters of 1918 might not have been avoided or lessened. It is interesting, at any rate, to note that the functions which General Foch was given in April 1918, of 'coordinating the action of the Allied armies on the Western Front,' were almost exactly those which Bliss and House outlined in November for the President of the Supreme War Council.

A decade later General Bliss, writing at Washington on June 14, 1928 made the following comments on the memorandum which he and House presented to the French:

'This was one of those "groping" memoranda, written when we were trying to feel our way through a very hazy matter, and doubtless would not have been written a little later.

'The American Mission landed in England on November 7, 1917—the day on which at Rapallo Messrs. Lloyd George, Painleve and Orlando created the Supreme War Council. No one fully understood it, not even its creators. Military men, and most others who thought at all about it, believed that it would be sort of Aulic Council, making and directing military plans—in short, another step to disaster. Moreover, the French believed that it was a British scheme to get control of the French Armies, and the British thought the same about the French.... Painleve's government fell; Lloyd George said that his government was saved only by the adhesion, at the last moment of the British crisis, of President Wilson to the Agreement of Rapallo. I was influenced by the general military opinion. In my report to the President on December 17, 1917, I strongly urged that he make his adhesion to the Supreme War Council contingent on the appointment of an Allied Commander in chief—I believing that with such an Allied commander the Supreme War Council would practically cease to operate. I did not then realize (and I don't think that any one else did) that the S. W. C. would not interefere in matters of military control but would only harmonize Allied government policies, which military commanders in the field could not do. None of us realised what the real functions of the S. W. C. were to be until the first important meeting in January. Until that time (at any rate, at the time of the attached memorandum) I was trying to find a way by which its possibilities for harm could be minimized. This appears in Par. 2 of the attached memorandum. My general idea in it was that unless the Allies could agree on a single commander in cheif, the only thing was to compose the Council of the National commanders; let them agree on every operation in which two or more nations were to be expected to give mutual assistance, and then let one of them have power to execute their will. This was a way of "beating the devil around the stump;" for, evidently this man would, for all practical purposes of the particular campaign, be a commander in chief.'

The Americans understood, of course that their proposal would encounter strong opposition. The British military leaders would naturally object to the executive powers of the President of th Supreme War Council, who would become practically Commander-in-Chief of the Allied armies. The proposals also called for the inclusion in the Council of the Chiefs of Staff, to which Mr. Lloyd George was irrevocably opposed. None the less it seemed worth while to put the scheme forward, especially since the contribution of the United States to Allied man-power was likely to be more important than any one had imagined. Both the British and French made it plain that without such contribution the military danger in the approaching spring would be serious. In London, General Bliss had discussed the matter with Sir William Robertson, and thus reported his conversation to Colonel House:

'I showed him,' said Bliss, 'that by the month of May next, including troops now in France, we could, with facilities now at our disposal transport not more than 525,000 men, including non-combatant forces; that without additional tonnage we could not supply even that number of men —— He expressed grave apprehension at this statement.

'He told me that he doubted whether Italy could be held in the war during the coming winter; and that should she remain in it would require the presence of considerable troops from the English and French forces on the Western Front..... He said that the French man-power was going down.... He added that the Russian situation was such that the probability had to be faced at any moment for the withdrawal of perhaps thirty or forty German divisions from that front and transferring them to the Western Front. ... The general impression left on my mind by this statement of the case was that a military crisis is to be apprehended if we cannot have in France next year by the end of spring a very much larger force than now seems possible.' (Ed. Note: 'The British military men.' wrote General Bliss on June 14, 1928, "insisted that the issue of the war would be determined in 1918 and that if America could not at least double the [illegible] she hoped to make by the end of May, 1918, the Allied cause was lost.")

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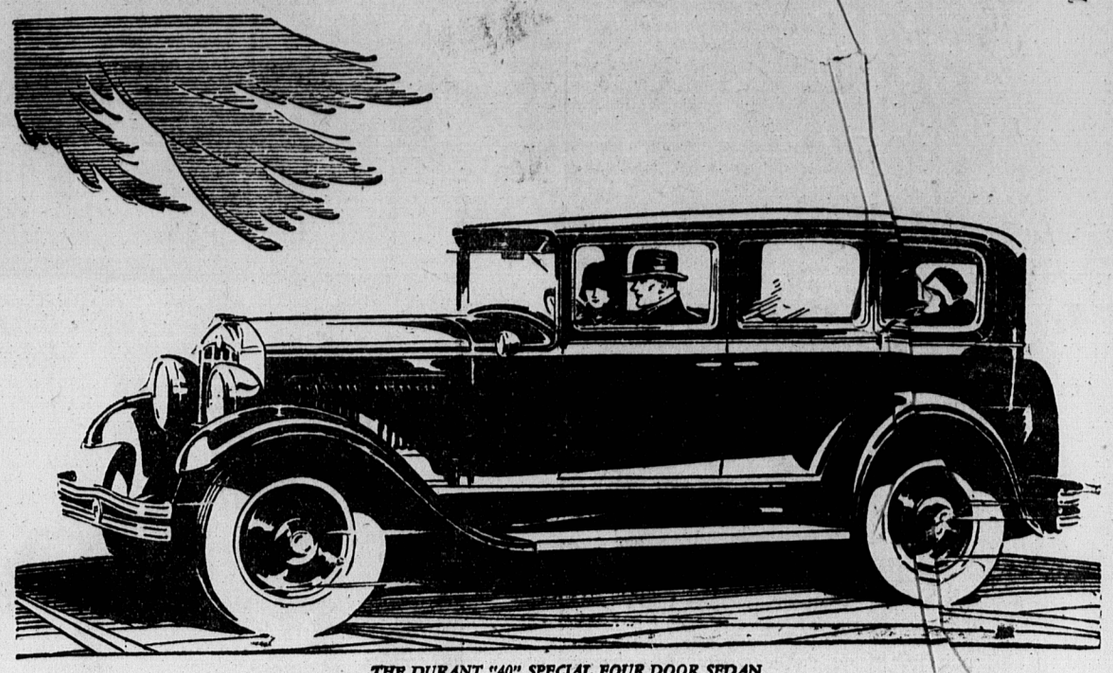

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