EDISON'S PLAN FOR PREPAREDNESS

The Inventor Tells How We Could Be Made Invincible in War Without Overburdening OurSELVES with Taxation.


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THOMAS A. EDISON has been con-

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sidered a citizen of the United States for many years, but we may some time be involved in a great war in Europe. If so, the first time tells us the world how this man can do his part in preparing for the coming conflict. The great inventor is no more a citizen than a citizen.

He believes that we should be invincible. In the following pages we will see how he thinks we may accomplish this without overburdening ourselves with taxation. To reduce our standard of living and to spend more money for military.

His plan for rendering us invulnerable to attack, while at the same time serving us from high taxation, includes the establishment of new West Points and naval arsenals for the training of officers and a vast system of military and naval education for the rank and file. He would establish vast reserves of energy and materials and he would construct a fleet of engines, battleships and other naval vessels;—this is his most extraordinary planetary--to be kept in drydock, systematically in storage, and fully up to date, until needed.

We discussed the matter while we sat in the great library of his labora-

George.

“Several things already have been proved by the way,” said Mr. Edison. “One, of course, is that war itself is inefficient. We know that. Another is that an ‘efficiency’ whichUSHM tells the individual is an inefficient one.

“As a lay student of the situation it seems to me that the comparatively untrained Englishman has had an ad-

vantage from the start just because he has been untrained. This is a strik-

ing thing, with a big lesson in it for the English soldier, I believe, may be, regarded, upon the whole, as the physical and moral degradation of the English soldier. Too much military training not only avails nothing but may even prove to be his handicap.

“Germany was ready for war after the old idea of readiness, but her army never got to Paris. She was overruled. She was so untrained that she was swamped. Her trigger-fingers became jammy. It was a lack of discipline, due to over-

readiness, which plunged Europe into war.

“Another thing which has been proved is that no engine of destruction or de-

struction can be so effective that the enemy of desperate men cannot devise something which will offset it. Ger-

many’s new field guns, the secret of which had been so carefully kept, were the sensation of the first weeks of the war, yet France matched them before she was too late.

“In the unavoidable interpretation which one must place upon these facts in another reassurance for Americans. We are as clever at mechani-

ism, whether they be things of war or those of peace, as any people of the world. We gave the world the incandescent lamp, and we gave the world the phonograph. Our Wright brothers per-

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means of moving troops, although, of course, the railroads must remain for many years the chief means by which heavy artillery and supplies will be moved.

"The motor car is more flexible than the railroad, and our roads are reaching such a stage of betterment that automobiles could be generally utilized for moving men.

"Of course, in case of war, troops would be needed on the coasts. Less than 5 per cent. of our country would need defense. All our war would be done there.

"The greater part of the transportation to the Eastern coast could be most efficiently done by automobiles.

"I do not believe we would lack transport if we organized an emergency system by means of which our vast number of privately owned motor cars could be commandeered in case war came. It would be easy to commandeer 200,000 automobiles, and 1,000,000 men could be moved 100 miles in a night by using all the parallel common roads.

"I am the last man who would be willing to suggest paralysis in expenditure upon coast and harbor defense. We should have more guns than we have now at all our harbors and they should be better guns, of longer range than any ship can carry.

"That ought not to be a difficult problem to work out, when it is considered that the harbor defense guns would be mounted upon solid foundations, while ships' guns must be mounted upon platforms of a limited carrying capacity.

"I advocate not only the construction of an enormous number of submarines, as I have suggested, to be held in readiness for operations, not to be kept in commission, but our manufacture at once of a vast supply of harbor defense mines and the construction of many vessels properly equipped to plant them hurriedly in case of an emergency.

"In trench fighting, with our unlimited supply of the most intelligent and independently thinking individual fighters in the world, we would be invincible. In case we were attacked we could set our theatre of defense to suit ourselves, planning (these figures are wholly tentative) fifty lines of trenches.

"The first line, or even the first two or three lines, would be dug as practically all those in this European war have been dug, by individual soldiers with picks and shovels, but lines to the rear of them could be dug (and this is one of the emergencies for which we should prepare) by trenching machines. We have developed this line of machinery to a state of very high perfection and to adapt the existing machinery to the purposes of military trenching would be a very simple matter.

"With fifty or more lines of trenches thus quickly, perfectly, and very cheaply prepared we could easily defeat, even destroy, any attacking force which the enemy might land from his ships.

"He probably would be able to take some of our first lines of trenches, but it is inconceivable that he could have any men left with which to fight after he had reached, for instance, (to select a numeral at random,) our twenty-fifth line.

"If the veritable worthlessness of great standing armies and the wicked waste of their maintenance may be considered the most important lesson which the European war so far has held for us, the value of the simple, inexpensive trench is next in importance to us.

"Europe has been conducting a vast and terribly costly experiment for our benefit. She has shown us that in thirty days we can organize a more effective army than the Germans have been able to put into the field if we follow, with the rank and file, the plan of preparation which I have suggested, giving the men the rudiments of training and then returning them to industry.

"She has shown us that we need trained officers. We should immensely increase facilities for training them, even to the establishment of many schools as efficient as West Point.

"But these men, too, should be returned to civil life, after they have had their training, with annual periods of additional study to keep them up to date. They should not be taken permanently from productive and thrust into unproductive effort. They should be kept alive, alert, abreast of everything worth while; we should make splendid all around citizens of them, fit for unusual usefulness in civil as well as in military effort.

"I think we never should let up on training men for the navy. We should have the greatest number of trained naval sailors that any nation ever has had, but we should not let them eat their heads off after they have got their training.

"We should greatly increase our number of competent naval officers, but we should not make the work of most of them a life career. Like the officers we train for military service, our naval officers should be developed to the top notch of efficiency and then sent back to private life upon part salaries and required to keep up with new developments and be ready for a call if one should come.

"I believe that we should have a navy larger than our present fleet, probably much larger, but I do not believe that the additional ships should be kept in commission.

"I should not in the least object to the payment of my share of the tax which would be necessary for the construction of a dozen dreadnoughts or, for that matter, of two dozen dreadnoughts, but I should strenuously object to the payment of a tax for the support of all of them, manned and in commission during days of peace.

"After each ship is built it should be launched and tested, and then, like the arms and ammunition, it should be stored till the day of need came. Enough vessels of the most approved type should be kept in commission to be used as training ships and enough men should be trained so that we would have no difficulty in finding competent crews for all our vessels. Create a great surplus of trained men, then send them back to industry, with payment of a small annual retainer.

"I believe that in addition to this the Government should maintain a great research laboratory, jointly under military and naval and civilian control. In this could be developed the continually increasing possibilities of great guns, the minutiæ of new explosives, all the technique of military and naval progression, without any vast expense.

"When the time came, if it ever did, we could take advantage of the knowl-