

A STUDY OF WAR ATTITUDES

S. L. REED

Oklahoma A. and M. College

In view of our deep concern for the territorial integrity of Czechoslovakia and the mass publicity of the newspaper and the radio of Hitler's ultimatum during these critical days, it seemed that this war situation would provide a good opportunity for the study of war attitudes under circumstances similar to those that in the past appeared to drift inevitably to war. Public opinion was crystallizing and one would presume that positive militaristic attitudes were developing. According to Elmer Barnes in *Harpers Magazine*, "American feeling was at this more overwhelming against Hitler than it ever was against Imperial Germany until after our declaration of war in 1917." There is, of course, no way to determine the validity of this comparison, but considering the general historical background as a result of our participation in the World War, our sympathetic interest in Czechoslovakia, and the more pronounced publicity of the critical events during these days, there seems to be no good reason for discounting this statement.

Of course, the war fever in America during the last few days of September had not reached the hysteria stage, particularly among college students in the middle west; yet there was a great deal of discussion about war, and many were sure we could not only not stay out of it, but would not want to do so.

An attempt was made between September 24th and 28th to measure this attitude, just before there was a definite hope for a peaceable settlement of the issues at stake. Two standardized attitude scales* were given to 203 students at Oklahoma A. and M. College. This group was fairly representative. The group contained about the same number of men and women, and the undergraduate classes were approximately equal. The freshman group was slightly larger than the other class groups. Only seven graduate students were included.

The most significant finding of the study was the pronounced pacifistic attitude of the group as a whole. The means or arithmetic averages of the scores of the two attitude scales were practically the same, 7 and 7.3 or a combined mean of 7.15. This indicates that the scale value of the two attitude scales, in general, agree and that the reliability of the combined score is fairly high. As interpreted by the norms of the attitude scales, the scores between 7 and 7.9 indicate a strongly pacifistic attitude. In view of the extensive publicity and propaganda engendered by the ultimatum, a more militaristic attitude would naturally have been expected. And yet we regard ourselves as a peace-loving nation. We have generally favored a policy of isolation with reference to European affairs. Furthermore, we have learned that the last war did not particularly settle anything for good. The last twenty years have been years of gradual disillusionment. This disillusionment has come about because of secret treaties, war debts and present European diplomacy.

These factors together with the possibility that these attitude scales were, after all, taken rather academically and may consequently only reveal social expectancy, are no doubt sufficient to explain this strongly pacifistic attitude of the group, in spite of an acute international situation highly

*Thurstone: Attitude Toward War, No. 34 A and No. 2 B

provocative for war. If instead of such general statements as, "the benefits of war rarely pay for its losses even for the victor" and "the misery and suffering of war are not worth its benefits," more personal and particularized statements had been used, the result might have been different. As it was, specific emotional attitudes did not transfer to these general statements.

To determine to what extent these war attitudes had changed after the war crisis had disappeared, two other but equivalent scales* were given to the same group two months later. At this time the European situation was again rather academic to the average college student. The rather surprising result, however, was that the war attitude had scarcely changed at all. The means of these two scale scores were 7.2 and 7.5 or a combined mean of 7.35 as compared with a combined mean of 7.15 obtained during the war crisis. This difference of .2 is too small to be statistically significant.

Another significant finding was the uniformity of this highly pacifistic attitude within the group. The standard deviations of the scores of the two scales were .5 and .6 and the standard error was .04 and .05. These errors are so small as to be almost negligible. In scale 2A, 85 or nearly half of the scores fell between 7 and 7.5 and in scale 34B, 110 fell between 7.3 and 7.8. So close were the individual scores to the general average that the correlation between the two attitude scales was only .31. While the two scores apparently measured the same thing, nevertheless the small accidental variations of the two scores of any given individual, to some extent, probably cancelled each other and lowered the correlation. This small dispersion would indicate that this group of students have, to a high degree, the same attitude, likely a conventional attitude, in spite of the fact that such factors as sex, nationality of ancestry, vocational preparation, religion and economic status might conceivably operate differentially in times of war situations.

But a study of the operation of these factors indicated no significant differences. Men were slightly more militaristic than women, but the difference (7.20 and 7.28) could be explained in terms of errors of sampling. The factors of religion and nationality of ancestry might have had some influence, but unfortunately the small numbers of the groups represented made differences unreliable. It is however interesting to note that the Society of Friends (Quakers) represented the highest pacifistic attitude while those who did not indicate religious preference represented the most militaristic attitude. From the standpoint of nationality of ancestry, a small group of Scandinavians were the most pacifistic, while a student from Czech ancestry was the most militaristic. But on the other hand, those who did not indicate nationality, either because they did not know or did not take the trouble to write it down ranked second in point of militarism.

To summarize: The three most significant findings in this study are: (1) the strongly pacifistic attitude of the college group as a whole; (2) the close uniformity with which this attitude is held by the student individually; (3) and the relative permanency of these attitudes.

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