TODAY and TOMORROW

By WALTER LIPPMAN

The Administration Replies Again

The second set of replies addressed to Great Britain and France does great credit to the Administration. Our government is no longer in a position to declare, as it did in the President’s statement and the first notes, that it is powerless to negotiate. The President has very wisely acted upon the assurances given him by the President-elect and has assumed that the President’s power to negotiate has not been and cannot be impaired. Gone, too, is the dangerous disposition to discriminate among the debtors.

The vital parts of both notes are in identical words. Above all, these latest notes, while maintaining the official American case, are inspired by the conviction that the important thing now is not to debate the historical record but to find out how “the problems which arise from the existence of these obligations . . . have become so knotted and stubborn that nothing could have been done about them in the next few months.”

These notes constitute a pledge, to which Governor Roosevelt is already committed, that the United States will not proceed without asking authority from the Congress to debate the abstract question of payment or revision. But now it is again possible to proceed with what is after all the essential thing: the restoration of conditions under which the trade of the world can be revived.

In a somewhat roundabout way the cooperation between the Hoover and the Roosevelt Administrations has actually been achieved. For the central principle of these new notes is the principle of Governor Roosevelt’s statement after the White House conference. By following Mr. Roosevelt’s advice that the President has power to negotiate without asking authority from Congress, Mr. Hoover has been able to make useful replies to Britain and France without compelling Congress to debate the abstract question of payment or revision. This is a return to sound constitutional practice and it has made possible a sound diplomatic policy. A bad corner has been turned in the advance towards a settlement.

In Justice to Mr. Messersmith

I HAVE received the following telegram from Secretary Stimson:

“Concerning your criticism of George S. Messersmith, American Consul General in Berlin in connection with the granting of the passport of Professor Albert Einstein, I am now informed that Mr. Messersmith was absent from Berlin on official business at the time, but Professor Einstein was received by the officer in charge and with the utmost courtesy and consideration given the examination required by the law and regulations, after which a visa was granted. Doubtless you will wish to correct your statement concerning Mr. Messersmith who has been so unjustly attacked.”

(Signed) “HENRY L. STIMSON, Secretary of State.”

I am, of course, glad to withdraw my criticisms of Mr. Messersmith, since it now appears that the news stories from Berlin incorrectly placed upon him responsibility for the affair.

The further implication of Mr. Stimson’s telegram is that nobody should be blamed. This seems to me unsatisfactory. Somebody is responsible, and Mr. Messersmith’s absence from Berlin does not exonerate the officials in Washington and in Berlin who administered the law in a manner which was locking in intelligence and common sense. The odium should be transferred from the innocent shoulders of Mr. Messersmith to the anonymous bureaucrats who did actually provoke this ludicrous incident.