F
or the first six months of 1932, I spent my days almost without interruption in the lobbies of the Disarma-
ment Conference. During all that time hardly a week went by without some rumour to the persistent ri-
ther that the Conference would soon adjourn. The rumour was always ingeniously connected with some actual development in Conference matters. It was always passed on with mys-
terious hints that its authors (who could never be traced) had secret information on which they could rely. The conclusion always was that "now was not the right time for the Disarmament." Governments were agreed that in three months' time, in six months' time, next year, perhaps something might be done. But for the moment progress could not be hoped for, and the right plan, therefore, was for the Conference to disperse." And it always happened that if things were going well, if really serious proposals for Disarmament began to be discussed, the rumour was passed around with more than ordinary assurance and conviction.

He Whom Rumour Profeth!

Hearing these rumours in the lobbies, knowing as I did that they were without foundation, that the Govern-
ments were not proposing nor even discussing prolonged adjournments, I was driven to the conclusion that they were deliberately manufactured by people who desired, for whatever reason, that the Conference should fail. I have no definite evidence to support my view, and by the nature of the case, until some second "Shearer" turns King's evidence and reveals the facts, I can have none. But I believed then, and I believe to-day, that paid agents of armament firms were endeavouring by the dissemination of false news to demoralise the Conference and to undermine the belief of delegates, press and public that it would succeed.

Indeed, I know people in responsible positions who go much further. They believe that the conquest of the Manchurian provinces of China was determined by the Japanese militarist leaders after consultation with the armament manufacturers of Europe; and that the date of their invasion was so arranged as to present the Disarmament Conference with the League of Nations' Covenant in ruins when it met. I should not myself care to take responsibility for that assertion. But there are certain facts which make it impossible to dismiss it as absurd. The common hostility of the Japanese militarists and the armament interests to the Disarmament Conference show increasing since the Conference began; the immense orders for munitions placed by Japan with the European firms; the ease with which these orders were financed; the spontaneous enthusiasm for the Japanese cause displayed by the Armament Press, even in countries where that same press had most vociferously demanded that the Covenant should be "given teeth"; the vociferous demands by that Press that since the League had "failed" in Manchuria, the attempt at Disarmament must be abandoned—there are at least some prima facie grounds for thinking that what to most people seems a fantastic proposition may be true.

Hounding Aristide Briand

And if it were true, why should surprise us? Aristide Briand was perhaps the greatest political genius of the twentieth century. He had a national position and an international authority which no other statesman has ever achieved. For long years he was master of a Chamber the majority of whose members were far to his Right. While he was at the height of his power, one of the most enlightened newspapers of France came under the control of an armaments magnate. From that day onwards till his death, the journal in question bitterly and unremit-

It led the general onslaught of the vested interests on the Franco-Italian Naval Agreement negotiated by Monsieur Briand and Mr. Henderson in 1930. It exploited against him the proposal for an Austro-German Customs Union launched a few days later. It violently attacked his candidature for the Presidency of France. It clamor-
ously backed Japan when Japan violated the Covenant of the League. With all the other purchased pens whom it controlled and led, it lost no opportunity to embitter international misunderstandings, to sow the seeds of discord, to create suspicion when settlements or agree-

The Armament firms, of course, are not alone in their opposition to the policies of disarmament and peace. There are other powerful vested interests who support them. But no one who has studied them, and first hand doubts for one moment that the influence of armament manufacturers is great. It is direct and indirect. Much of it comes from the very nature of their trade. The armaments industry is the only industry that prospers by playing one government off against another. In consequence it is the only industry whose market has no limits of expansion. Its clients, governments, not only control the whole remuneration of their orders but are always ready, in the interests of "defence," to pledge the resources of generations still unborn. And there is no "satety point" beyond which they will not buy. On the contrary, every sale the armaments firms can make to one government creates a new demand among the governments of its neighbours. Instead of supply satisfying demand, it creates demand. And finally the armaments industry is the only industry which has grown during a period of deepening economic depression and collapse. The graver the crisis, the more general the failure and disruption of law and order, of democratic liberty and free and stable institutions, the more the governments seek salvation in armed force.

Bought News

With these immense inducements to increase their trade, armament firms have systematically exploited, and are still exploiting, the weakness and instability of mankind. They have not scrupled to use a weapon which bears the light of day. They have purchased powerful organs of the Press. They have bribed the staff of papers they did not own. They have used their Press to create distrust and suspicion, to falsify the truth, to foment ill-feeling, and to support chauvinist policies of every kind. They have extended their activities to Parliaments and Cabinets—sometimes to bribe and sometimes to deceive. They have bribed Ministers to place large orders with them, and then have used those orders to encourage panics and counterorders in other lands. They have formed national and international rings and combines to centralise their supplies of raw materials, to exchange their patents, and to raise the prices of their products. They have armed countries which they have known may easily become in wartime the enemies of their own. They have sent paid agents, like Mr. Shearer, with great sums of money at their disposal, to seek by false propaganda to defeat the efforts of inter-
national conferences for disarmament and peace. They—or their directors—have founded, supported and financed patriotic societies, whose avowed purpose is the increase of the armaments which their Governments maintain.

I have no space to recite the proved historical examples upon which these statements rest. They can be found in the Official Records of the United States Congress, of the German Reichstag, and of other Parliaments; in the
un-contradicted writings of Mr. G. H. Perris, of Herr Lehmann-Russbuhl, of Mr. Charles Beard, of Mr. Fenner Brockway; in such shorter and recent studies as the "Secret International" and "Patriotism Ltd."; and in innumerable French and other periodicals and pamphlets. These records and writings show that the epoch of the so-called "Armament Scandals" is not yet over. In recent years there have been new cases in Roumania, in Sweden, and in other lands. But I will mention only two stories of an earlier time, and of a more tragic significance, because they date from the years that immediately preceded the outbreak of the War.

How Machine Guns and Battleships are Sold

The first story is the most famous of its kind. It is German. The facts were revealed and established by Liebknecht in the Reichstag a year before the war began.

In 1907 a certain von Gontard, the Director of a German armament firm, instructed his Paris agent to bribe certain French journals to publish articles praising the French Army's new machine guns and explaining that the French Staff planned greatly to increase the numbers of these weapons with which the French infantry divisions were equipped. The articles duly appeared in the Figaro, the Matin, and the Echo de Paris. Shortly afterwards a German Deputy, Schmidt, a friend and colleague of von Gontard, attacked the German Government in the Reichstag for allowing itself to be outdistanced by the French in machine-guns. He quoted the articles, for which von Gontard's bribes had paid, and he demanded that the Government vote a new appropriation for the purpose of catching up. The vote was granted; and von Gontard's firm received its order. Von Gontard is still alive; he survived the war. A little while ago he secured the imprisonment for treason of Bullerjahn, one of his foremen, a Socialist, who had revealed that von Gontard was still making machine-guns, in violation of the Disarmament provisions of the Treaty of Versailles.

The second story is British.

In 1909 a certain Mulliner, the Manager of the Coventry Ordnance Works, succeeded in convincing first the Admiralty, and then the Cabinet (by whom he was received), that the German Government were accelerating the construction of their "Dreadnought" programme. He asserted that Germany would have 17 Dreadnoughts, perhaps even 25, by 1912, instead of the 9 she had announced. The German Govern-