

WILSON ANSWERS SENATE QUERIES

Sees No Reasonable Objection to Reservations Concerning League of Nations

CONFERENCE AT WHITE HOUSE

President Asserts United States Surrenders No Powers and May Withdraw At Will.

Washington, D. C., Aug. 21.—President Wilson and the members of the Foreign Relations committee of the senate met at the White House Tuesday to discuss the peace treaty.

The president opened the discussion by impressing on the senators the urgency of prompt ratification of the treaty without amendments and without reservations that would require re-submission of the treaty to the other signatories, especially Germany.

The president said that the interest of every class of people, the farmers, industrial workers and employers demanded prompt ratification to the end that stable conditions of industry, agriculture and employment be reestablished. The president's address, which was in effect an address to the country, follows:

"I hope that this conference will serve to expedite your consideration of the treaty of peace. I beg that you will pardon and indulge me if I again urge that practically the whole task of bringing the country back to normal conditions of life and industry waits upon the decision of the senate with regard to the terms of the peace.

"I venture thus again to urge my advice that the action of the senate with regard to the treaty be taken at the earliest practicable moment because the problems with which we are faced in the readjustment of our national life are of the most pressing and critical character, will require for their proper solution the most intimate and disinterested cooperation of all parties and all interests, and cannot be postponed without manifest peril to our people and to all the national advantages we hold most dear.

"The copper mines of Montana, Arizona, and Alaska, for example, are being kept open and in operation only at a great cost and loss, in part upon borrowed money; the zinc mines of Missouri, Tennessee and Wisconsin are being operated at about one half their capacity; the lead of Idaho, Illinois and Missouri reaches only a portion of its former market. There is an immediate need for cotton belting and also for lubricating oil, which cannot be met, all because the channels of trade are barred by war when there is no war. The same is true of raw cotton, of which the central empires alone formerly purchased nearly four million bales, and these are only examples. There is hardly a single raw material, a single important foodstuff or a single class of manufactured goods which is not in the same case. Our full normal profitable production waits on peace.

"Our military plans, of course, wait upon it. We cannot intelligently or wisely decide how large a naval or military force we shall maintain or what our policy with regard to military training is to be, until we have peace, not only, but also until we know how peace is to be sustained, whether by the arms of single nations or by the concert of all the great people, and there is more than that difficulty involved. The vast surplus properties of the army include, not food and clothing merely, whose sale will affect normal production, but great manufacturing establishments also, which should be restored to their former uses, great stores of machine tools and all sorts of merchandise which must lie idle until peace and military policy are definitely determined.

"The nations that ratify the treaty, such as Great Britain, Belgium and France, will be in a position to lay their plans for controlling the markets of Central Europe, without competition from us, if we do not presently act. We have no consular agents, no trade representatives there to look after our interests.

"There are large areas of Europe, whose future will be uncertain and questionable until their people know the final settlements of peace and the forces which are to administer and sustain it. Without determinate markets, our production cannot proceed with intelligence or confidence, there can be no easy or normal industrial credits because there can be no confidence or permanent revival of business. There can be no stabilization of wages because there can be no settled condition of employment.

"Every element of normal life amongst us depends upon and awaits the ratification of the treaty of peace, and we cannot afford to lose a single summer's day by not doing all that we can to mitigate the winter's suffering, which, unless we find means to prevent it, may prove disastrous to a large portion of the world, and may, at its worst, bring upon Europe conditions even more terrible than those brought by the war itself.

"Nothing, I am led to believe, stands in the way of the ratification of the treaty except doubts with regard to the meaning and implication of certain articles of the covenant of the League of Nations; and I must frankly say that I am unable to understand why such doubts should be entertained. You will recall that when I had the pleasure of a conference with your committee and with the committee of the house of representatives on foreign affairs at the White House in March

last, the questions now frequently asked about the league of nations were all canvassed, with a view to their immediate clarification. The covenant of the league was then in its first draft and subject to revision, it was pointed out that no express recognition was given to the Monroe doctrine, that it was not expressly provided that the league should have no authority to act or to express a judgment on matters of domestic policy, that the right to withdraw from the league was not expressly recognized, and that the constitutional rights of the congress to determine all questions of peace and war was not sufficiently safeguarded. On my return to Paris all these matters were taken up again by the commission on the league of nations and every suggestion of the United States was accepted.

"The view of the United States with regard to the questions I have mentioned had, in fact, already been accepted by the commission and there was supposed to be nothing inconsistent with them in the draft of the covenant first adopted, the draft, which was the subject of our discussion in March, but no objection was made to anything explicitly in the text that all had supposed to be implicit in it.

"The Monroe doctrine is expressly mentioned as an understanding which is in no way to be impaired or interfered with by anything contained in the covenant and the expression 'regional understanding like the Monroe doctrine' was used, not because anyone of the conference thought there was any comparable agreement anywhere else in existence or in contemplation, but only because it was thought best to avoid the appearance of dealing in such a document with policy of a single nation.

"With regard to domestic questions, Article XVI of the covenant expressly provides that, if in case of any dispute arising between members of the league the matter involved is claimed by one of the parties and is found by the council to arise out of a matter which by international law is solely within the domestic jurisdiction of that party, the council shall so report and shall make no recommendation as to its settlement. The United States was by no means the only government interested in the explicit adoption of this provision and there is no doubt in the mind of any authoritative student of international law that such matters as immigration, tariffs and naturalization are incontestably domestic questions with which no international body could deal.

"The right of any state to withdraw had been taken for granted, but no objection was made to making it explicit. Indeed, so soon as the views expressed at the White House conference were laid before the commission, it was at once conceded that it was best not to leave the answer to so important a question to inference. No proposal was made to set up an tribunal to pass judgment with the question whether a withdrawing nation has in fact fulfilled all its international obligations and all its obligations under the covenant. It was recognized that question must be left to be resolved by the conscience of the nation proposing to withdraw; and I must say that it did not seem to me worth while to propose that the article be made more explicit because I know that the United States would never itself propose to withdraw from the league if its conscience was not entirely clear as to the fulfillment of all its international obligations. It has never failed to fulfill them and never will.

"Article X is in no respect of doubtful meaning when read in the light of the covenant as a whole. The council of the league can only advise upon the means by which the obligations of that great article are to be given effect to. Unless the United States is a party to the policy or pe-

tion in question, her own affirmative vote in the council is necessary before any advice can be given for a unanimous vote of the council is required. If she is a party, the trouble is here anyhow, and the unanimous vote of the council is only advice in any case. Each government is free to reject it if it pleases. Nothing could have been made more clear to the conference than the right of our congress under our constitution to exercise its independent judgment in all matters of peace and war. No attempt was made to question or limit that right. The United States will, indeed, undertake under Article X to respect and preserve as against external aggression the territorial integrity and existing political independence of all members of the league, and that engagement constitutes a very grave and solemn obligation. But it is moral, not a legal obligation, and leaves our congress absolutely free to put its own interpretation upon it in all cases that call for action.

"Article X seems to me to constitute the very backbone of the whole covenant, without it the league would be hardly more than an influential debating society.

"It has several times been suggested, in public debate and in private conference, that interpretations of the sense in which the United States accepts the engagements of the covenant should be embodied in the instrument of ratification. There can be no reasonable objection to show interpretations accompanying the act of ratification provided they do not form a part of the formal ratification itself. But if such interpretations should constitute a part of the formal resolution of ratification, long delays would be the inevitable consequence inasmuch as all the many governments concerned would have to accept, in effect, the language of the senate as the language of the treaty before ratification would be complete. The assent of the German assembly at Weimar would have to be obtained, among the rest, and I must frankly say that I could only with the greatest reluctance, approach that assembly for permission to ratify the treaty as we understand it and as those who framed it quite certainly understood it. If the United States were to qualify the document in any way, moreover, I am confident from what I know of the many conferences and debates which accompanied the formulation of the treaty, that our example would immediately be followed in many quarters, in some instances with very serious reservations, and that the meaning and operative force of the treaty would presently be clouded from one end of its clauses to the other."

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