

President Wilson Shattering Precedents and Delighting American People

President Woodrow Wilson set aside the precedents of more than a century and on Tuesday, April 8th, he appeared in the house of representatives and delivered his first message in person to the senate and house in joint session. There was general comment among congressmen when it was announced that this course would be adopted. Many approved and some criticised. Senator John Sharp Williams, of Mississippi, democrat, made a speech in the senate criticising the proposed plan. He delivered the speech in connection with a resolution providing for a joint session with the two houses in order that the president might deliver the address in person. Mr. Wilson was the first president to appear officially before either branch of congress since John Adams in the first few years of the last century. One hundred years ago, in 1812, an effort was made to revive the custom, but President Madison declined to do so.

It is significant that while a great many of the members of congress criticised the method it met with general approval among the people and congressmen who criticised the plan in the beginning are now commending it.

On the day following the delivery of the message President Wilson went to the capitol building and held an hour and a half conference on tariff matters with democratic members of the senate finance committee. The following Associated Press dispatches tell the story of the proceedings:

Washington, April 8.—President Wilson today bridged the gap that for over a century has separated the pilots of public business, the executive and legislative branches of the government. Not as a cog in a machine, not as an impersonal political entity, nor as a mere department of government, but as the human president, he went to congress to speak about the tariff.

Standing before the senate and house of representatives in joint session, as no other president had done for more than 112 years, President Wilson stated simply and tersely what he thought should be done for the welfare of the country and asked his legislative colleagues, man to man, to aid in keeping the pledges of their party.

With a sweep of decision that shattered precedent the president brushed aside all imaginary boundaries between congress and the executive office and rescued himself, as he expressed it, from that "isolated island of jealous authority" which the presidency had come to be regarded.

Congress, somewhat startled the other day when it heard that the president had determined to deliver his message on the tariff by word of mouth, had prepared for a ceremony of unusual importance, and such it was; yet when President Wilson arrived in the midst of the great assemblage, riding through throngs of cheering people in the streets, and later looking up into galleries crowded with privileged ticket-holders, he seemed after all what he said he was, "a human being trying to co-operate with other human beings in a common service."

When the much-heralded incident was over congress seemed pleased and the president was delighted. He expressed himself to friends as impressed with the dignity of the occasion and some of his confidants later declared that he left the capitol greatly relieved to think that, after all, his precedent smashing had not been such a cataclysmic thing as some older heads had predicted.

The president's visit to the capitol was brief, lasting about a quarter of an hour. Leaving a cabinet meeting at the White House, he started on his mission at 12:45 o'clock. No one except a secret service man, accompanied. He rode in a White House automobile and five minutes later was driven through the crowds assembled about the house wing of the capitol.

At 12:54 he reached Speaker Clark's room, just off the house chamber, where a joint committee of senators and representatives welcomed him. They were Senators Kern, Bacon and Gallinger and Representatives Underwood, Palmer and Mann. The president spoke to each for a moment and was informed that the senate and house awaited him. He said he was ready and the committee immediately started for the door of the house chamber, the president on Senator Bacon's right.

At two minutes before 1 o'clock the president entered the chamber. Members of the house and senate rose as Speaker Clark brought down the gavel. From the packed floor and galleries

distinguished guests looked on at the scene. Ambassadors from many lands were in the audience, members of the cabinet were there and all the people who possibly could get in were present to witness the proceeding.

Distinguished public men who have received the thanks of congress and were therefore entitled to be on the floor of the house availed themselves of the right, conspicuous among them Admiral Dewey, who for the first time took advantage of the privilege extended him by congress when he returned triumphant from Manila bay in 1898. He called on Speaker Clark and was cheered as he entered the chamber.

Three-fourths of the privileged thousand in the galleries were women.

A moving picture machine was installed to preserve a record of the historic event for the government archives.

Secretaries Lane, McAdoo, Daniels and Garrison took seats in the executive gallery of the house for themselves and families to hear the president read his message. Secretary Bryan said he had another engagement for the same hour and could not go.

President Wilson, escorted by Senator Bacon, bowed acknowledgement to the applause and mounted the speaker's stand to the journal clerk's desk, directly in front of the speaker. With a smile, as he began to speak, the president told his hearers why he had come.

"I am very glad, indeed," he said, "to have this opportunity to address the two houses directly and to verify for myself the impression that the president of the United States is a person, not a mere department of the government haling congress from some isolated island of jealous power and sending a message, not speaking naturally and with his own voice; that he is a human being trying to co-operate with other human beings in a common service. After this pleasant experience I shall feel quite normal in all our dealings with one another."

The president spoke in an ordinary tone of voice, as though he were talking to a senator in his office. The crowded chamber was hushed after the momentary thrills of conversation upon his entrance had ebbed. Every eye was fixed upon him as he spoke, and it was instantly apparent that he had aroused the keenest interest.

As the president proceeded with his preliminary statement the interest was tense, and when he declared, "I shall feel quite normal in all our dealings with one another," the house and senate applauded. Then the gallery joined in. Mrs. Wilson and the president's daughters and other relatives joined from the executive gallery.

Ambassador Bryce of England looked on with evident interest. So did Ambassador Jusserand of France, and the representatives from other nations. Where a few moments before the event had seemed unusual, almost unreal, it now appeared perfectly adjusted to conditions and not at all dramatic.

The applause subsiding, the president began to read his brief message on the tariff. He spoke slowly and forcefully and in less than eight minutes he was done. No interruption occurred and he left the stand immediately, while the congress applauded.

In the speaker's room again President Wilson chatted for a few moments with the members of the committee, and accompanied by Secretary Tumulty left the capitol at 1:10 o'clock. At 1:18, half an hour after he had left the cabinet meeting, he was at luncheon in the White House, preparing for the business of the afternoon.

Two motives influenced Mr. Wilson to decide to read in person his first communication to congress—the perfunctory way in which presidential messages usually were received, accompanied as they have been by the drone of a clerk's voice and empty seats, and Mr. Wilson's desire that every member should hear his appeal for a thorough revision of the tariff, the sole purpose for which congress was called into extraordinary session.

WHEN THE PRESIDENT READ HIS MESSAGE

Washington correspondence to the Cleveland Press, April 8th: History was made on Capitol hill today.

The president of the United States, discarding the ancient traditions which have enveloped his office for more than a century, made what was characterized by his hearers as the most remarkable speech ever heard in this country by a legislative body. And in doing so he insisted that the time was here when the chief

executive must be considered from the personal side and not as an institution.

It was a new procedure. Staid senators and representatives, strong for the traditions of the dim and misty past, were jarred from an affected nonchalance and tiredness to a realization of immediate duty to a nation. None there was who was not impressed that the new order is immediate, and that the mysteries with which government has heretofore been surrounded had surrendered to the latest idea of publicity.

His ringing tones reverberated throughout the chamber of the house of representatives, when President Wilson took a new stand, an unique position, a departure from precedent, but one which with his very opening words he justified as few men ever have.

"The president of the United States is a person," declared this new head of the government, in office only 36 days, "and not a mere department of the government hailing congress from some isolated island of jealous power, sending messages, not speaking naturally and with his own voice—he is a human being trying to co-operate with other human beings in a common service."

It is as though President Wilson was answering the arguments made in the upper branch only last night.

There was no way to doubt his sincerity. A president's message had taken on human characteristic. A man had risen who was willing to take the chance of being misunderstood in order to be in position to explain where he stood on a great public question. And, watching the faces of the members of congress, it was plain that all appreciated that they were dealing with an executive who believed that his cause was just.

President Wilson was plainly impressed with his position. He was plainly inclined to nervousness. But his frame gave the impression of latent force, fully convincing his hearers that he appreciated his message was not alone to the men he was addressing, but to the nation at large.

As the president made the points in his speech, the effect on the various senators was plain. The low tariff senators and representatives smiled and nodded approval. But the protectionists were plainly not pleased. Senator Lodge sat bolt upright in his seat and twirled his fingers. His face was hard set, and there was not a single syllable of the entire speech which was not carefully followed by him.

His face was even more pallid than usual. The deep lines which have appeared there since he assumed his present duties seemed even more emphasized in the bright light which streamed down on him from the highly decorated glass skylights in the roof.

President Wilson read his message from manuscript. It had been typewritten on very small letter paper so as to be inconspicuous as possible, but he made no effort to conceal his notes.

President Wilson's voice was a trifle husky at the opening, but the attention given him was remarkable. Not a person stirred in the chamber proper or in the galleries. From the open doorways the murmur from the crowds filtered through as the subdued music of an orchestra, but it in no way interfered with the audience in the chamber hearing and realizing the effect of every word that was uttered.

THE FACTS OF OUR DAY

The democratic purpose with respect to the tariff question is well described in the following extracts from President Wilson's first message to congress:

"While the whole face and method of our industrial and commercial life were being changed beyond recognition the tariff schedules have remained what they were before the change began."

"For a long time we have sought, in our tariff schedules, to give each group of manufacturers or producers what they themselves thought that they needed in order to maintain a practically exclusive market as against the rest of the world."

"We have built up a set of privileges and exemptions from competition, behind which it was easy by any, even the crudest, forms of combination to organize monopoly."

"Nothing is normal, nothing is obliged to stand the tests of efficiency and economy, in our world of big business."

"We must abolish everything that bears even