

President's Annual Address to Congress

In his annual message to a joint session opening the short term of the "reconstruction congress" on Monday, December 2, President Wilson outlined this and other measures as his policies of readjustment.

The President's speech follows:

Gentlemen of the Congress: The year that has elapsed since I last stood before you to fulfill my constitutional duty to give the congress from time to time information on the state of union, has been so crowded with great events, great processes and great results that I cannot hope to give you an adequate picture of its transactions or of the far-reaching changes which have been wrought in the life of our nation and of the world. You have yourselves witnessed these things as I have. It is too soon to assess them; and we who stand in the midst of them and are part of them are less qualified than men of another generation will be to say what they mean, or even what they have been. But some great outstanding facts are unmistakable and constitute, in a sense, part of the public business with which it is our duty to deal. To state them is to set the stage for the legislative and executive action which must grow out of them and which we have yet to shape and determine.

A year ago we had sent 145,918 men overseas. Since then we have sent 1,950,513, an average of 162,542 each month, the number in fact, rising, in May last to 245,951, in June to 278,760, in July to 307,182 and continuing to reach similar figures in August and September — in August 289,570 and in September 257,438. No such movement of troops ever before took place, across three thousand miles of sea, followed by adequate equipment and supplies and carried safely through extraordinary dangers of attack — dangers which were alike strange and infinitely difficult to guard against. In all this movement only seven hundred and fifty-eight men were lost by enemy attack — six hundred and thirty of whom were upon a single English transport which was sunk near the Orkney Islands.

I need not tell you what lay back of this great movement of men and material. It is not invidious to say that back of it lay a supporting organization of the industries of the country and of all its productive activities more complete, more thorough in method and effective in result, more spirited and unanimous in purpose and effort than any other great belligerent had been able to effect. We profited greatly by the experience of the nations which had already been engaged for nearly three years in the exigent and exacting business, their every resource and every executive proficiency taxed to the utmost. We were their pupils. But we learned quickly and acted with a promptness and a readiness that justify our great pride that we were able to serve the world with unparalleled energy and quick accomplishment.

THE WORTH OF ALL

But it is not the physical scale and executive efficiency of preparation, supply, equipment and despatch that I would dwell upon, but the mettle and quality of the officers and men we sent over and of the sailors who kept the seas, and the spirit of the nation that stood behind them. No soldiers or sailors ever proved themselves more quickly ready for the test of battle or acquitted themselves with more splendid courage and achievement when put to the test. Those of us who played some part in directing the great processes by which the war was pushed irresistibly forward to the final triumph, may now forget all that and delight our thoughts with the story of what our men did. Their officers understood the grim and exacting task they had undertaken and performed it with an audacity, efficiency and unhesitating courage that touch the story of convoy and battle with imperishable distinction at every turn, whether the enterprise were great or small — from their great chiefs, Pershing and Sims, down to the youngest lieutenant; and their men were worthy of them — such men as hardly need to be commanded, and go to their terrible adventure blithely and with the quick intelligence of those who know just what it is they would accomplish. I am proud to be the fellow countryman of men of such stuff and valor. Those of us who stayed at home did our duty; the war could not have been won

- WILSON'S READJUSTMENT PROGRAM
- Passage of woman's suffrage.
- Use of existing government agencies to effect reconstruction.
- Immediate resumption of development of public works to provide employment for returning soldiers.
- Ratification of the Columbian treaty to improve pan-American relations.
- Immediate determination of taxes for 1918, 1919 and 1920 and lifting as much of tax burden from business as government needs will permit.
- Priority of distribution of American raw materials to war stricken nations.
- Complete consummation of the three year naval program.
- Leaves determination of railroad's future to congress but recommends against return to pre-war conditions of railroad control unmodified.
- Urges railroad control question be studied by congress immediately to quickly remove doubt of their future.
- Reclamation of arid, swamp and over-land.

or the gallant men who fought it given their opportunity to win it otherwise; but for many a long day we shall think ourselves "accurs'd we were not there and hold our manhood cheap while any speaks that fought" with these at St. Mihiel or Thierry. The memory of those days of triumphant battle will go with these fortunate men to their graves; and each will have his favorite memory.

"Old men forget; yet all shall be forgot, but he'll remember with advantages what feats he did that day."

What we all thank God for with deepest gratitude is that our men went in force into the line of battle just at the critical moment when the whole fate of the world seemed to hang in the balance and threw their fresh strength into the ranks of freedom in time to turn the whole tide and sweep of the fateful struggle — turn it once for all, so that henceforth it was back, back, back for the enemies, always back, never again forward!

After that it was only a scant four months before the commanders of the central empires knew themselves beaten; and now their very empires are in liquidation!

SPIRIT IN COOPERATION

And throughout it all how fine the spirit of the nation was; what unity of purpose, what untiring zeal!

What elevation of purpose ran through all its splendid display of strength, its untiring accomplishment. I have said that those of us who stayed at home to do the work of organization and supply will always wish that he had been with men whom we sustained by our labor; but we can never be ashamed. It has been an inspiring thing to be here in the midst of fine men who had turned aside from every private interest of their own and devoted the whole of their trained capacity to the tasks that supplied the sinews of the whole great undertaking!

The patriotism, the unselfishness, the thorough-going devotion and distinguished capacity that marked their toilsome labors of the day after day, month after month, have made them fit mates and comrades of the men in the trenches and on the sea. And not the men here in Washington only. They have but directed the vast achievement. Throughout innumerable factories, upon innumerable farms, in the depths of coal mines and iron mines and copper mines, wherever the stuffs of industry were to be obtained and prepared, in the shipyards, on the railways, at the docks, on the sea, in every labor that was needed to sustain the battle lines, men have vied with each other to do their part and do it well. They can look any man at arms in the face and say: "We also strove to win and gave the best that was in us to make our fleets and armies sure of their triumph!"

And what shall we say of the women — of their instant intelligence, quickening every task that they touched; their capacity for organization and co-operation which gave their action discipline and enhanced the effectiveness of everything they attempted; their attitude at tasks to which they had never before set their hands; their utter self-sacrifice alike in which they did and in what they gave? Their contribution to the great result is beyond appraisal. They have added a new luster to the annals of the American womanhood.

The least tribute we can pay them is to make them the equals of men in political rights as they have proved themselves equals in every field of practical work they have entered, whether for themselves or for their country. These great days of completed achievement would be sadly marred were we to omit that act of justice. Besides, the immense practical services they have rendered, the women of the country have been the moving spirits in the systematic economies by which our people have voluntarily assisted to supply the suffering peoples of the world and the armies upon every front with food and everything else that we had that might serve the common cause. The details of such a story can never be fully written, but we carry them at our hearts and thank God that we can say that we are the kinsmen of such.

And, now we are sure of the great triumphs for which every sacrifice was made. It has come, come in its completeness, and with the pride and inspiration of these days of achievement quick within us we turn to the tasks of peace again — a peace secure against the violence of irresponsible monarchs and ambitious military coteries and made ready for a new order, for new foundations of justice and fair dealing.

INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE SOUGHT

We are about to give order and organization to this peace not only for ourselves, but for the other peoples of the world as well, so far as they will suffer us to serve them. It is international justice that we seek, not domestic safety merely. Our thoughts have dwelt of late upon Europe, upon Asia, upon the Near and Far East, very little upon the acts of peace and accommodation that wait to be performed at our own doors. While we are adjusting our relations with the rest of the world, is it not of capital importance that we should clear away all grounds of misunderstanding with our immediate neighbors and give proof of the friendship we really feel? I hope that the members of the senate will permit me to speak once more of the unratified treaty of friendship and adjustment with the republic of Columbia. I very earnestly urge upon them an early and favorable action upon that vital matter. I believe that they will feel, with me, that the stage of affairs is now set for such action as will be not only just but generous and in the spirit of the new age upon which we have so happily entered.

So far as our domestic affairs are concerned the problems of our return to peace is a problem of economic and industrial readjustment. That problem is less serious for us than it may turn out to be for the nations which have suffered the disarrangements and the losses of war longer than we. Our people, moreover, do not wait to be coached and led. They know their own business, are quick and resourceful at every readjustment, definite in purpose and self-reliant in action.

Any leading strings we might seek to put them in would speedily become hopelessly tangled because they would pay no attention to them and go their own way. All that we can do as their legislative and executive servants is to mediate the process of change here, there and elsewhere as we may. I have heard much counsel as to the plans that should be formed and personally conducted to a happy consummation, but from no quarter have I seen any general scheme of "reconstruction" emerge which I thought it likely we could force our spirited business men and self-reliant laborers to accept with due pliancy and obedience.

PRESENT AGENCIES COMPETENT

While the war lasted, we set up many agencies by which to direct the industries of the country in the services it was necessary for them