The Treaty of Versailles—Wilson's Big Disappointment

At the conclusion of World War I, President Wilson headed the United States' delegation to the peace conference at Versailles. He anticipated that his Fourteen Points, perhaps with some modifications, would serve as the basis for the peace treaty. He faced considerable opposition from more vindictive European leaders, but he did manage to salvage at least part of his peace plan, most notably his cherished League of Nations.

More surprising than opposition from the British and French was the opposition he faced from the U.S. senators who had to approve the Treaty of Versailles. Both Reservationists, who approved U.S. membership in the League of Nations with some modifications in the provisions, and Irreconcilables, who wanted a return to traditional U.S. isolation, voiced strong objections.

Substantive issues, as well as personality conflicts, caused problems. Assume that President Wilson had been able to sit down with leaders of the opposition forces for a face-to-face discussion of the issues. Write a series of questions that might have surfaced in that debate. Remember that perceptive questions can be influential in causing persons to change their positions or behavior. In each case, write two questions each might have wanted to ask the opponents and one question each might have expected to be asked.

President Wilson

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Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, Sr., Republican chairperson of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and spokesperson for the Reservationists

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William Borah, spokesperson for the Irreconcilables

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Henry Cabot Lodge on the League of Nations, August 12, 1919

Mr. President:

The independence of the United States is not only more precious to ourselves but to the world than any single possession. Look at the United States today. We have made mistakes in the past. We have had shortcomings. We shall make mistakes in the future and fall short of our own best hopes. But none the less is there any country today on the face of the earth which can compare with this in ordered liberty, in peace, and in the largest freedom?

I feel that I can say this without being accused of undue boastfulness, for it is the simple fact, and in making this treaty and taking on these obligations all that we do is in a spirit of unselfishness and in a desire for the good of mankind. But it is well to remember that we are dealing with nations every one of which has a direct individual interest to serve, and there is grave danger in an unshared idealism.

Contrast the United States with any country on the face of the earth today and ask yourself whether the situation of the United States is not the best to be found. I will go as far as anyone in world service, but the first step to world service is the maintenance of the United States.

I have always loved one flag and I cannot share that devotion [with] a mongrel banner created for a League.

You may call me selfish if you will, conservative or reactionary, or use any other harsh adjective you see fit to apply, but an American I was born, an American I have remained all my life. I can never be anything else but an American, and I must think of the United States first, and when I think of the United States first in an arrangement like this I am thinking of what is best for the world, for if the United States fails, the best hopes of mankind fail with it.

I have never had but one allegiance - I cannot divide it now. I have loved but one flag, and I cannot share that devotion and give affection to the mongrel banner invented for a league. Internationalism, illustrated by the Bolshevik and by the men to whom all countries are alike provided they can make money out of them, is to me repulsive.

National I must remain, and in that way I like all other Americans can render the amplest service to the world. The United States is the world's best hope, but if you fetter her in the interests and quarrels of other nations, if you tamper her in the intrigues of Europe, you will destroy her power for good and endanger her very existence. Leave her to march freely through the centuries to come as in the years that have gone.

Strong, generous, and confident, she has nobly served mankind. Beware how you trifle with your marvellous inheritance, this great land of ordered liberty, for if we stumble and fall freedom and civilization everywhere will go down in ruin.

We are told that we shall 'break the heart of the world' if we do not take this league just as it stands. I fear that the hearts of the vast majority of mankind would beat on strongly and steadily and without any quickening if the league were to perish altogether. If it should be effectively and beneficently changed the people who would lie awake in sorrow for a single night could be easily gathered in one not very large room but those who would draw a long breath of relief would reach to millions.

We hear much of visions and I trust we shall continue to have visions and dream dreams of a fairer future for the race. But visions are one thing and visionaries are another, and the mechanical appliances of the rhetorician designed to give a picture of a present which does not exist and of a future which no man can predict are as unreal and short-lived as the steam or canvas clouds, the angels suspended on wires and the artificial lights of the stage.
They pass with the moment of effect and are shabby and tawdry in the daylight. Let us at least be real. Washington's entire honesty of mind and his fearless look into the face of all facts are qualities which can never go out of fashion and which we should all do well to imitate.

Ideals have been thrust upon us as an argument for the league until the healthy mind which rejects cant revolts from them. Are ideals confined to this deformed experiment upon a noble purpose, tainted, as it is, with bargains and tied to a peace treaty which might have been disposed of long ago to the great benefit of the world if it had not been compelled to carry this rider on its back? 'Post equitem sedet atra cura.' Horace tells us, but no blacker care ever sat behind any rider than we shall find in this covenant of doubtful and disputed interpretation as it now perches upon the treaty of peace.

No doubt many excellent and patriotic people see a coming fulfilment of noble ideals in the words 'league for peace.' We all respect and share these aspirations and desires, but some of us see no hope, but rather defeat, for them in this murky covenant. For we, too, have our ideals, even if we differ from those who have tried to establish a monopoly of idealism.

Our first ideal is our country, and we see her in the future, as in the past, giving service to all her people and to the world. Our ideal of the future is that she should continue to render that service of her own free will. She has great problems of her own to solve, very grim and perilous problems, and a right solution, if we can attain to it, would largely benefit mankind.

We would have our country strong to resist a peril from the West, as she has flung back the German menace from the East. We would not have our politics distracted and embittered by the dissensions of other lands. We would not have our country's vigour exhausted or her moral force abated, by everlasting meddling and muddling in every quarrel, great and small, which afflicts the world.

Our ideal is to make her ever stronger and better and finer, because in that way alone, as we believe, can she be of the greatest service to the world's peace and to the welfare of mankind.
Woodrow Wilson: Appeal for Support of the League of Nations, September 8, 1919

I never feel more comfortable in facing my fellow citizens than when I can realize that I am not representing a peculiar cause, that I am not speaking for a single group of my fellow citizens, that I am not the representative of a party but the representative of the people of the United States. I went across the water with that happy consciousness, and in all the work that was done on the other side of the sea, where I was associated with distinguished Americans of both political parties, we all of us constantly kept at our heart the feeling that we were expressing the thoughts of America, that we were working for the things that America believed in. I have come here to testify that this treaty contains the things that America believes in.

I brought a copy of the treaty along with me, for I fancy that, in view of the criticisms you have heard of it, you thought it consisted of only four or five clauses.

Only four or five clauses out of this volume are picked out for criticism. Only four or five phrases in it are called to your attention by some of the distinguished orators who oppose its adoption. Why, my fellow citizens, this is one of the great charters of human liberty, and the man who picks flaws in it - or, rather, picks out the flaws that are in it, for there are flaws in it - forgets the magnitude of the thing, forgets the majesty of the thing, forgets that the counsels of more than twenty nations combined and were rendered unanimous in the adoption of this great instrument.

Let me remind you of what everybody admits who has read the document. Everybody admits that it is a complete settlement of the matters which led to this war, and that it contains the complete machinery which provides that they shall stay settled.

You know that one of the greatest difficulties in our own domestic affairs is unsettled land titles. Suppose that somebody were mischievously to tamper with the land records of the state of Nebraska, and that there should be a doubt as to the line of every farm. You know what would happen in six months. All the farmers would be sitting on their fences with shotguns. Litigation would penetrate every community, hot feeling would be generated, contests not only of lawyers but contests of force would ensue. Very well, one of the interesting things that this treaty does is to settle the land titles of Europe, and to settle them in this way, on the principle that every land belongs to the people that live on it.

This is actually the first time in human history that that principle was ever recognized in a similar document, and yet that is the fundamental American principle. The fundamental American principle is the right of the people that live in the country to say what shall be done with that country. We have gone so far in our assertions of popular right that we not only say that the people have a right to have a government that suits them but that they have a right to change it in any respect at any time. Very well, that principle lies at the heart of this treaty.

There are peoples in Europe who never before could say that the land they lived in was their own, and the choice that they were to make of their lives was their own choice. I know there are men in Nebraska who come from that country of tragical history, the now restored Republic of Poland, and I want to call your attention to the fact that Poland is here given her complete restitution; and not only is she given the land that formerly belonged to the Poles, but she is given the lands which are now occupied by Poles but had been permitted to remain under other sovereignties. She is given those lands on a principle that all our hearts approve of.
Take what in Europe they call High Silesia, the mountainous, the upper, portions of the district of Silesia. The very great majority of the people in High Silesia are Poles, but the Germans contested the statement that most of them were Poles. We said: "Very well, then, it is none of our business; we will let them decide. We will put sufficient armed forces into High Silesia to see that nobody tampers with the processes of the election, and then we will hold a referendum there, and those people can belong either to Germany or to Poland, as they prefer, and not as we prefer."

And, wherever there was a doubtful district, we applied the same principle, that the people should decide and not the men sitting around the peace table at Paris. When these referenda are completed the land titles of Europe will be settled, and every country will belong to the people that I've on it to do with what they please. You seldom hear of this aspect of this treaty, my fellow citizens.

You have heard of the council that the newspaper men call the "Big Four." We had a very much bigger name for ourselves than that. We called ourselves the "Supreme Council of the Principal Allied and Associated Powers," but we had no official title, and sometimes there were five of us instead of four. Those five represented, with the exception of Germany, of course, the great fighting nations of the world. They could have done anything with this treaty that they chose to do, because they had the power to do it, and they chose to do what had never been chosen before, to renounce every right of sovereignty in that settlement to which the people concerned did not assent. That is the great settlement which is represented in this volume.

And it contains, among other things, a great charter of liberty for the workingmen of the world. For the first time in history the counsels of mankind are to be drawn together and concerted for the purpose of defending the rights and improving the conditions of working people — men, women, and children — all over the world. Such a thing as that was never dreamed of before, and what you are asked to discuss in discussing the League of Nations is the matter of seeing that this thing is not interfered with. There is no other way to do it than by a universal league of nations, and what is proposed is a universal league of nations.

Only two nations are for the time being left out. One of them is Germany, because we did not think that Germany was ready to come in, because we felt that she ought to go through a period of probation. She says that she made a mistake. We now want her to prove it by not trying it again. She says that she has abolished all the old forms of government by which little secret councils of men, sitting nobody knew exactly where, determined the fortunes of that great nation and, incidentally, tried to determine the fortunes of mankind; but we want her to prove that her constitution is changed and that it is going, to stay changed; and then who can, after those proofs are produced, say "No" to a great people, 60 million strong, if they want to come in on equal terms with the rest of us and do justice in international affairs?

I want to say that I did not find any of my colleagues in Paris disinclined to do justice to Germany. But I hear that this treaty is very hard on Germany. When an individual has committed a criminal act, the punishment is hard, but the punishment is not unjust. This nation permitted itself, through unscrupulous governors to commit a criminal act against mankind, and it is to undergo the punishment, not more than it can endure but up to the point where it can pay it must pay for the wrong that it has done.

But the things prescribed in this treaty will not be fully carried out if any one of the great influences that brought that result about is withheld from its consummation. Every great fighting nation in the world is on the list of those who are to constitute the League of Nations. I say every great nation, because America is going to be included among them, and the only choice my fellow citizens is whether we will go in now or come in later with Germany; whether we will go in as founders of this covenant of freedom or go in as those who are admitted after they have made a mistake and repented.
I wish I could do what is impossible in a great company like this. I wish I could read that Covenant to you, because I do not believe, if you have not read it yourself and have only listened to certain speeches that I have read, that you know anything that is in it. Why, my fellow citizens, the heart of the Covenant is that there shall be no war. To listen to some of the speeches that you may have listened to or read, you would think that the heart of it was that it was an arrangement for war. On the contrary, this is the heart of that treaty.

The bulk of it is concerned with arrangements under which all the members of the League — that means everybody but Germany and dismembered Turkey — agree that they never will go to war without first having done one or other of two things — either submitted the question at issue to arbitration, in which case they agree absolutely to abide by the verdict, or, if they do not care to submit it to arbitration, submitted it to discussion by the council of the League of Nations, in which case they must give six months for the discussion and wait three months after the rendering of the decision, whether they like it or not, before they go to war. They agree to cool off for nine months before they yield to the heat of passion, which might otherwise have hurried them into war.

If they do not do that, it is not war that ensues; it is something that will interest them and engage them very much more than war; it is an absolute boycott of the nation that disregards the Covenant. The boycott is automatic, and just as soon as it applies, then this happens: No goods can be shipped out of that country; no goods can be shipped into it. No telegraphic message may pass either way across its borders. No package of postal matter — no letter — can cross its borders either way. No citizen of any member of the League can have any transactions of any kind with any citizen of that nation. It is the most complete isolation and boycott ever conceived, and there is not a nation in Europe that can live for six months without importing goods out of other countries. After they have thought about the matter for six months, I predict that they will have no stomach for war.

All that you are told about in this Covenant, so far as I can learn, is that there is an Article X. I will repeat Article X to you; I think I can repeat it verbatim, the heart of it at any rate. Every member of the League promises to respect and preserve as against external aggression — not as against internal revolution — the territorial integrity and existing political independence of every other member of the League; and if it is necessary to enforce this promise — I mean, for the nations to act in concert with arms in their hands to enforce it — then the council of the League shall advise what action is necessary. Some gentlemen who doubt the meaning of English words have thought that advice did not mean advice, but I do not know anything else that it does mean, and I have studied English most of my life and speak it with reasonable correctness.

The point is this: The council cannot give that advice without the vote of the United States, unless it is a party to the dispute; but, my fellow citizens, if you are a party to the dispute you are in the scrap anyhow. If you are a party, then the question is not whether you are going to war or not but merely whether you are going to war against the rest of the world or with the rest of the world, and the object of war in that case will be to defend that central thing that I began by speaking about. That is the guarantee of the land titles of the world which have been established by this treaty. Poland, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, Yugoslavia — all those nations which never had a vision of independent liberty until now — have their liberty and independence guaranteed to them.

If we do not guarantee them, then we have this interesting choice: I hear gentlemen say that we went into the recent war because we were forced into it, and their preference now is to wait to be forced in again. They do not pretend that we can keep out; they merely pretend that we ought to keep out until we are ashamed not to go in.
This is the Covenant of the League of Nations that you hear objected to, the only possible guarantee against war. I would consider myself recreant to every mother and father, every wife and sweetheart in this country, if I consented to the ending of this war without a guarantee that there would be no other. You say, “Is it an absolute guarantee?” No; there is no absolute guarantee against human passion; but even if it were only 10 percent of a guarantee, would not you rather have 10 percent guarantee against war than none? If it only creates a presumption that there will not be war, would you not rather have that presumption than live under the certainty that there will be war? For, I tell you, my fellow citizens, I can predict with absolute certainty that within another generation there will be another world war if the nations of the world do not concert the method by which to prevent it.

But I did not come here this morning, I remind myself, so much to expound the treaty as to talk about these interesting things that we hear about that are called "reservations". A reservation is an assent with a big but. We agree — but. Now, I want to call your attention to some of these buts. I will take them, so far as I can remember the order, in the order in which they deal with clauses of the League itself.

In the 1st Article of the Covenant, it is provided that a nation can withdraw from the League on two years' notice, provided, at the time of its withdrawal, that is to say at the expiration of the two years, it has fulfilled all its international obligations and all its obligations under the Covenant. Some of our friends are very uneasy about that. They want to sit close to the door with their hands on the knob, and they want to say, “We are in this thing but we are in it with infinite timidity; we are in it only because you overpersuaded us and wanted us to come in, and we are going to try this thing every now and then and see if it is locked, and just as soon as we see anything we don’t like, we are going to scuttle.”

Now, what is the trouble? What are they afraid of? I want you to put this to every man you know who makes this objection, what is he afraid of? Is he afraid that when the United States withdraws it will not have fulfilled its international obligations? Is he willing to bring that indictment against this beloved country? My fellow citizens, we never did fall to fulfill an international obligation and, God guiding and helping us, we never will. I, for one, am not going to admit in any connection the slightest doubt that, if we ever choose to withdraw, we will then have fulfilled our obligations. If I make reservations, as they are called, about this, what do I do? This Covenant does not set up any tribunal to judge whether we have fulfilled our obligations at that time or not. There is only one thing to restrain us, and that is the opinion of mankind.

Are these gentlemen such poor patriots that they are afraid that the United States will cut a poor figure in the opinion of mankind? And do they think that they can bring this great people to withdraw from that League if at that time their withdrawal would be condemned by the opinion of mankind? We have always been at pains to earn the respect of mankind, and we shall always be at pains to retain it. I for one am too proud as an American to say that any doubt will ever hang around our right to withdraw upon the condition of the fulfillment of our international obligations.

I have already adverted to the difficulties under Article X and will not return to it. That difficulty is merely as I repeated it now, that some gentlemen do not want to go in as partners; they want to go in as late joiners, because they all admit that in a war which imperils the just arrangements of mankind, America, the greatest, richest, freest people in the world, must take sides. We could not live without taking sides. We devoted ourselves to justice and to liberty when we were born, and we are not going to get senile and forget it.
They do not like the way in which the Monroe Doctrine is mentioned. Well, I would not stop on a question of style. The Monroe Doctrine is adopted. It is swallowed, hook, line, and sinker, and, being carefully digested into the central organism of the whole instrument, I do not care what language they use about it. The language is entirely satisfactory so far as I understand the English language. That puzzles me, my fellow citizens. The English language seems to have got some new meaning since I studied it that bothers these gentlemen. I do not know what dictionaries they resort to. I do not know what manuals of conscience they can possibly resort to. The Monroe Doctrine is expressly authenticated in this document, for the first time in history, by all the great nations of the world, and it was put there at our request.

When I came back to this dear country in March, I brought the first draft, the provisional draft, of the Covenant of the League. I submitted it to the Foreign Relations Committee of the Senate of the United States, and I spent an evening discussing it with them. They made a number of suggestions. I carried every one of those suggestions to Paris, and every one of them was adopted. Now, apparently, they want me to go back to Paris and say, "We are much obliged to you, but we do not like the language." I suggested the other night that if they do not like that language there is another language in here. That page is English [[illuminating]]; this page is French [[illuminating]] — the same thing. If the English does not suit them, let them engage the interest of some French scholar and see if they like the French better. It is the same thing. It is done in perfect good faith. Nobody was trying to fool anybody else. This is the genuine work of honest men.

The fourth matter that they are concerned about is domestic questions, so they want to put in a reservation enumerating certain questions as domestic questions which everybody on both sides of the water admits are domestic questions. That seems to me, to say the least, to be a work of supererogation. It does not seem to me necessary to specify what everybody admits, but they are so careful — I believe the word used, to be "meticulous!" — that they want to put in what is clearly implied in the whole instrument.

"Well," you say, "why not?" Well, why not, my fellow citizens? The conference at Paris will still be sitting when the Senate of the United States has acted upon this treaty. Perhaps I ought not to say that so confidently. No man, even in the secrets of Providence, can tell how long it will take the United States Senate to do anything, but I imagine that in the normal course of human fatigue the Senate will have acted upon this treaty before the conference in Paris gets through with the Austrian treaty and the Bulgarian treaty and the Turkish treaty. They will still be there on the job.

Now — every lawyer will follow me in this—if you take a contract and change the words, even though you do not change the sense, you have to get the other parties to accept those words. Is that not true? Therefore, every reservation will have to be taken back to all the signatories of this treaty, and I want you to notice that that includes Germany. We will have to ask Germany's consent to read this treaty the way we understand it. I want to tell you that we did not ask Germany's consent with regard to the meaning of any one of those terms while we were in Paris. We told her what they meant and said, "Sign here." Are there any patriotic Americans who desire the method changed? Do they want me to ask the assembly at Weimar if I may read the treaty the way it means but in words which the United States Senate thinks it ought to have been written in?

You see, reservations come down to this, that they want to change the language of the treaty without changing its meaning and involve all the embarrassments. Because, let me say, there are indications — I am judging not from official dispatches but from the newspapers — that people are not in as good a humor over in Paris now as they were when I was there, and it is going to be more difficult to get agreement from now on than it was then. After dealing with some of those gentlemen, I found that they were as ingenious as any American in attaching unexpected meanings to plain words, and, having gone through the mill on the existing language, I do not want to go through it again on changed language.
I must not turn away from this great subject without adverting to one particular in the
treaty itself, and that is the provision with regard to the transfer of certain German
rights in the province of Shantung, China, to Japan. I have frankly said to my Japanese
colleagues in the conference, and therefore I can without impropriety say it here, that
I was very deeply dissatisfied with that part of the treaty. But, my fellow citizens,
Japan agreed at that very time, and as part of the understanding upon which those
clauses were put into the treaty, that she would relinquish every item of sovereignty
that Germany had enjoyed to China, and that she would retain only what other
nations have elsewhere in China, certain economic concessions with regard to the
railway and the mines, which she was to operate under a corporation and subject to
the laws of China. As I say, I wish she could have done more.

But suppose, as some have suggested, that we dissent from that clause in the
treaty. You cannot sign all of the treaty but one part, my fellow citizens. It is like the
President’s veto. He cannot veto provisions in a bill. He has got either to sign the bill
or veto the bill. We cannot sign the treaty with the Shantung provision out of it; and,
if we could, what sort of service would we be doing to China?

Let us state the facts with brutal frankness. England and France are bound by
solemn treaty, entered into before the conference at Paris, before the end of the war,
to give Japan what she gets in this treaty in the Province of Shantung. They cannot
in honor withdraw from that promise. They cannot consent to a peace treaty which
does not contain those provisions with regard to Shantung. England and France,
therefore, will stand behind Japan; and if we are not signatories to the treaties and
not parties, she will get all that Germany had in Shantung, more than she will get
under the promises which she made to us, and the only way we can get it away
from her is by going to war with Japan and Great Britain and France.

Does that look like a workable proposition? Is that doing China a service? Whereas,
if we do accept this treaty, we are members of the League of Nations, China is a
member of the League, and Japan is a member of the League, and, under that much-
criticized Article X, Japan promises and we guarantee that the territorial integrity and
political independence of China will be respected and preserved. That is the way to
serve China. That is the only possible way in the circumstances to serve China.

Therefore, we cannot rewrite this treaty. We must take it or leave it, and gentlemen,
after all the rest of the world has signed it, will find it very difficult to make any other
kind of treaty. As I took the liberty of saying the other night, it is a case of “put up or
shut up.” The world cannot breathe in the atmosphere of negotiations. The world
cannot deal with nations who say, “We won’t play!” The world cannot have anything to
do with an arrangement in which every nation says, “We will take care of ourselves.”

Source: The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson, Ray S. Baker and William R. Dodd, eds.
William E. Borah, Speech on the League of Nations, November 19, 1919

When the league shall have been formed, we shall be a member of what is known as the council of the league. Our accredited representative will sit in judgment with the accredited representatives of the other members of the league to pass upon the concerns not only of our country but of all Europe and all Asia and the entire world. Our accredited representatives will be members of the assembly. They will sit there to represent the judgment of these 110,000,000 people — more than — just as we are accredited here to represent our constituencies. We can not send our representatives to sit in council with the representatives of the other great nations of the world with mental reservations as to what we shall do in case their judgment shall not be satisfactory to us. If we go to the council or to the assembly with any other purpose than that of complying in good faith and in absolute integrity with all upon which the council or the assembly may pass, we shall soon return to our country with our self-respect forfeited and the public opinion of the world condemnatory.

Why need you gentlemen across the aisle worry about a reservation here or there when we are sitting in the council and in the assembly and bound by every obligation in morals, which the President said was supreme above that of law, to comply with the judgment which our representatives and the other representatives finally form? Shall we go there, Mr. President, to sit in judgment, and in case that judgment works for peace join with our allies, but in case it works for war withdraw our cooperation? How long would we stand as we now stand a great Republic commanding the respect and holding the leadership of the world, if we should adopt any such course?...

We have said, Mr. President, that we would not send our troops abroad without the consent of Congress. Pass by now for a moment the legal proposition. If we create executive functions, the Executive will perform those functions without the authority of Congress. Pass that question by and go to the other question. Our members of the council are there. Our members of the assembly are there. Article 11 is complete, and it authorizes the league, a member of which is our representative, to deal with matters of peace and war, and the league through its council and its assembly deals with the matter, and our accredited representative joins with the others in deciding upon a certain course, which involves a question of sending troops. What will the Congress of the United States do? What right will it have left, except the bare technical right to refuse, which as a moral proposition it will not dare to exercise? Have we not been told day by day for the last nine months that the Senate of the United States, a coordinate part of the treaty-making power, should accept this league as it was written because the wise men sitting at Versailles had so written it, and has not every possible influence and every source of power in public opinion been organized and directed against the Senate to compel it to do that thing? How much stronger will be the moral compulsion upon the Congress of the United States when we ourselves have indorsed the proposition of sending our accredited representatives there to vote for us?

Ah, but you say that there must be unanimous consent, and that there is vast protection in unanimous consent.

I do not wish to speak disparagingly; but has not every division and dismemberment of every nation which has suffered dismemberment taken place by unanimous consent for the last 300 years? Did not Prussia and Austria and Russia by unanimous consent divide Poland? Did not the United States and Great Britain and Japan and Italy and France divide China and give Shantung to Japan? Was that not a unanimous decision? Close the doors upon the diplomats of Europe, let them sit in secret, give them the material to trade on, and there always will be unanimous consent....

Mr. President, if you have enough territory, if you have enough material, if you have enough subject peoples to trade upon and divide, there will be no difficulty about unanimous consent.
Do our Democratic friends ever expect any man to sit as a member of the council or as a member of the Assembly equal in intellectual power and in standing before the world with that of our representative at Versailles? Do you expect a man to sit in the council who will have made more pledges, and I shall assume made them in sincerity, for self-determination and for the rights of small peoples, than had been made by our accredited representative? And yet, what became of it? The unanimous consent was obtained nevertheless.

But take another view of it. We are sending to the council one man. That one man represents 110,000,000 people.

Here, sitting in the Senate, we have two from every State in the Union, and over in the other House we have Representatives in accordance with population, and the responsibility is spread out in accordance with our obligations to our constituency. But now we are transferring to one man the stupendous power of representing the sentiment and convictions of 110,000,000 people in tremendous questions which may involve the peace or may involve the war of the world....

What is the result of all this? We are in the midst of all the affairs of Europe. We have entangled ourselves with all European concerns. We have joined in alliance with all the European nations which have thus far joined the league, and all nations which may be admitted to the league. We are sitting there dabbling in their affairs and intermeddling in their concerns. In other words, Mr. President — and this comes to the question which is fundamental with me — we have forfeited and surrendered, once and for all, the great policy of "no entangling alliances" upon which the strength of this Republic has been founded for 150 years.

My friends of reservations, tell me where is the reservation in these articles which protects us against entangling alliances with Europe?

Those who are differing over reservations, tell me what one of them protects the doctrine laid down by the Father of his Country. That fundamental proposition is surrendered, and we are a part of the European turmoils and conflicts from the time we enter this league....

Lloyd-George is reported to have said just a few days before the conference met at Versailles that Great Britain could give up much, and would be willing to sacrifice much, to have America withdraw from that policy. That was one of the great objects of the entire conference at Versailles, so far as the foreign representatives were concerned. Clemenceau and Lloyd-George and others like them were willing to make any reasonable sacrifice which would draw America away from her isolation and into the internal affairs and concerns of Europe. This league of nations, with or without reservations, whatever else it does or does not do, does surrender and sacrifice that policy; and once having surrendered and become a part of the European concerns, where, my friends, are you going to stop?

You have put in here a reservation upon the Monroe doctrine. I think that, in so far as language could protect the Monroe doctrine, it has been protected. But as a practical proposition, as a working proposition, tell me candidly, as men familiar with the history of your country and of other countries, do you think that you can intermeddle in European affairs; and, secondly, never to permit Europe to [interfere in our affairs].

We can not protect the Monroe doctrine unless we protect the basic principle upon which it rests, and that is the Washington policy. I do not care how earnestly you may endeavor to do so, as a practical working proposition your league will come to the United States....

Mr. President, there is another and even a more commanding reason why I shall record my vote against this treaty. It imperils what I conceive to be the underlying, the very first principles of this Republic. It is in conflict with the right of our people to govern themselves free from all restraint, legal or moral, of foreign powers....
Sir, since the debate opened months ago those of us who have stood against this proposition have been taunted many times with being little Americans. Leave us the word American, keep that in your presumptuous impeachment, and no taunt can disturb us, no gibe discompose our purposes. Call us little Americans if you will, but leave us the consolation and the pride which the term American, however modified, still imparts.... We have sought nothing save the tranquillity of our own people and the honor and independence of our own Republic. No foreign flattery, no possible world glory and power have disturbed our poise or come between us and our devotion to the traditions which have made us a people or the policies which have made us a Nation, unselfish and commanding. If we have erred we have erred out of too much love for those things which from childhood you and we together have been taught to revere — yes, to defend even at the cost of limb and life. If we have erred it is because we have placed too high an estimate upon the wisdom of Washington and Jefferson, too exalted an opinion upon the patriotism of the sainted Lincoln....

Senators, even in an hour so big with expectancy we should not close our eyes to the fact that democracy is something more, vastly more, than a mere form of government by which society is restrained into free and orderly life. It is a moral entity, a spiritual force, as well. And these are things which live only and alone in the atmosphere of liberty. The foundation upon which democracy rests is faith in the moral instincts of the people. Its ballot boxes, the franchise, its laws, and constitutions are but the outward manifestations of the deeper and more essential thing — a continuing trust in the moral purposes of the average man and woman. When this is lost or forfeited your outward forms, however democratic in terms, are a mockery. Force may find expression through institutions democratic in structure equal with the simple and more direct processes of a single supreme ruler. These distinguishing virtues of a real republic you can not commingle with the discordant and destructive forces of the Old World and still preserve them. You can not yoke a government whose fundamental maxim is that of liberty to a government whose first law is that of force and hope to preserve the former. These things are in eternal war, and one must ultimately destroy the other. You may still keep for a time the outward form, you may still delude yourself, as others have done in the past, with appearances and symbols, but when you shall have committed this Republic to a scheme of world control based upon force, upon the combined military force of the four great nations of the world, you will have soon destroyed the atmosphere of freedom, of confidence in the self-governing capacity of the masses, in which alone a democracy may thrive. We may become one of the four dictators of the world, but we shall no longer be master of our own spirit. And what shall it profit us as a Nation if we shall go forth to the domination of the earth and share with others the glory of world control and lose that fine sense of confidence in the people, the soul of democracy?

Look upon the scene as it is now presented. Behold the task we are to assume, and then contemplate the method by which we are to deal with this task. Is the method such as to address itself to a Government "conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal"? When this league, this combination, is formed four great powers representing the dominant people will rule one-half of the inhabitants of the globe as subject peoples — rule by force, and we shall be a party to the rule of force. There is no other way by which you can keep people in subjection. You must either give them independence, recognize their rights as nations to live their own life and to set up their own form of government, or you must deny them these things by force. That is the scheme, the method proposed by the league. It proposes no other. We will in time become inured to its inhuman precepts and its soulless methods strange as this doctrine now seems to a free people. If we stay with our contract, we will come in time to declare with our associates that force — force, the creed of the Prussian military oligarchy — is after all the true foundation upon which must rest all stable governments. Korea, despoiled and bleeding at every pore; India, sweltering in ignorance and burdened with inhuman taxes after more than one hundred years of dominant rule; Egypt, trapped and robbed of her birthright;
Ireland, with 700 years of sacrifice for independence — this is the task, this is the atmosphere, and this is the creed in and under which we are to keep alive our belief in the moral purposes and self-governing capacity of the people, a belief without which the Republic must disintegrate and die. The maxim of liberty will soon give way to the rule of blood and iron. We have been pleading here for our Constitution. Conform this league, it has been said, to the technical terms of our charter, and all will be well. But I declare to you that we must go further and conform to those sentiments and passions for justice and freedom which are essential to the existence of democracy....

Sir, we are told that this treaty means peace. Even so, I would not pay the price. Would you purchase peace at the cost of any part of our independence? We could have had peace in 1776 — the price was high, but we could have had it. James Otis, Sam Adams, Hancock, and Warren were surrounded by those who urged peace and British rule. All through that long and trying struggle, particularly when the clouds of adversity lowered upon the cause, there was a cry of peace — let us have peace. We could have had peace in 1860. Lincoln was counseled by men of great influence and accredited wisdom to let our brothers — and, thank Heaven, they are brothers — depart in peace. But the tender, loving Lincoln, bending under the fearful weight of impending civil war, an apostle of peace, refused to pay the price, and a reunited country will praise his name forevermore — bless it because he refused peace at the price of national honor and national integrity. Peace upon any other basis than national independence, peace purchased at the cost of any part of our national integrity, is fit only for slaves, and even when purchased at such a price it is a delusion, for it can not last.

But your treaty does not mean peace — far, very far, from it. If we are to judge the future by the past it means war. Is there any guaranty of peace other than the guaranty which comes of the control of the war-making power by the people? Yet what great rule of democracy does the treaty leave unassailed? The people in whose keeping alone you can safely lodge the power of peace or war nowhere, at no time and in no place, have any voice in this scheme for world peace. Autocracy which has bathed the world in blood for centuries reigns supreme. Democracy is everywhere excluded. This, you say, means peace.

Can you hope for peace when love of country is disregarded in your scheme, when the spirit of nationality is rejected, even scoffed at? Yet what law of that moving and mysterious force does your treaty not deny? With a ruthlessness unparalleled your treaty in a dozen instances runs counter to the divine law of nationality. Peoples who speak the same language, kneel at the same ancestral tombs, moved by the same traditions, animated by a common hope, are torn asunder, broken in pieces, divided, and parcelled out to antagonistic nations. And this you call justice. This, you cry, means peace. Peoples who have dreamed of independence, struggled and been patient, sacrificed and been hopeful, peoples who were told that through this peace conference they should realize the aspirations of centuries, have again had their hopes dashed to earth. One of the most striking and commanding figures in this war, soldier and statesmen, turned away from the peace table at Versailles declaring to the world, "The promise of the new life, the victory of the great humane ideals for which the peoples have shed their blood and their treasure without stint, the fulfillment of their aspirations toward a new international order and a fairer and better world, are not written into the treaty." No, your treaty means injustice. It means slavery. It means war. And to all this you ask this Republic to become a party. You ask it to abandon the creed under which it has grown to power and accept the creed of autocracy, the creed of repression and force.