



*Nebraska History* posts materials online for your personal use. Please remember that the contents of *Nebraska History* are copyrighted by the Nebraska State Historical Society (except for materials credited to other institutions). The NSHS retains its copyrights even to materials it posts on the web.

For permission to re-use materials or for photo ordering information, please see:

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/magazine/permission.htm>

Nebraska State Historical Society members receive four issues of *Nebraska History* and four issues of *Nebraska History News* annually. For membership information, see:

<http://nebraskahistory.org/admin/members/index.htm>

## Article Title: Senator Hitchcock and the League of Nations

Full Citation: Kurt Wimer, "Senator Hitchcock and the League of Nations," *Nebraska History* 44 (1963): 189-204 (1963): 189-204.

URL of article: <http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/NH1963HitchLeague.pdf>

Date: 9/11/2013

Article Summary: During the fight over the League of Nations in 1919-1920, Senator Gilbert M Hitchcock of Nebraska mediated between an ailing president and a rebellious senate. He also made a major effort to get the covenant through the senate, making strenuous efforts to influence Wilson and the senate to compromise.

### Cataloging Information:

Names: Woodrow Wilson, Gilbert M Hitchcock, Frank L Polk, Cary T Grayson, Oscar Underwood, Albert Fall, Joseph P Tumulty, F M Simmons, William H Taft, Carter Glass, Henry Cabot Lodge

Keywords: League of Nations; Committee on Foreign Relations; Article X

Photographs / Images: Senator Gilbert M Hitchcock (From a painting by J Laurie Wallace)

## SENATOR HITCHCOCK AND THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

BY KURT WIMER

**I**N THE tragic fight over the League of Nations in 1919-20 Senator Gilbert M. Hitchcock of Nebraska occupied a strategic position. The delicate diplomatic problems of the administration leader in the Senate—his need to mediate between an ailing President and a rebellious Senate—are well known. But Hitchcock also made a major effort to get the Covenant through the Senate. Careful examination of evidence now available reveals that he made numerous and strenuous efforts to influence Wilson and the Senate to compromise. At a crucial time he displayed considerable independence, and followed presidential leadership only because other courses seemed less promising. The final loss of the Covenant in the Senate should not diminish the historic stature of the Senator from Nebraska, or obscure the efforts he made for the cause in which he believed.

*The author, Head of the Department of Social Studies at State College, East Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, has written extensively on the Peace Treaty after World War I.*

At the end of World War I Senator Hitchcock advocated a league of nations as part of the postwar settlement. In forthright and convincing speeches he appealed to the Senate and the people for support of the project sponsored by President Woodrow Wilson. Convinced that the well-being of America and mankind was at stake, the Senator wanted the United States to lead the nations of the world into a brighter future. He believed that the world was to enter into a new era when "brute force was to be supplanted by moral force," a new international order in which nations would "dwell together in peace just as members of civilized society do everywhere."<sup>1</sup> The Senator was satisfied that the League enjoyed wide public support, especially among people who considered the problem deeply. He told his colleagues in the Senate:

Everywhere it is the women speaking for the League of Nations; everywhere it is the churches speaking for the League of Nations; everywhere it is the business organizations like the Chamber of Commerce speaking for the League of Nations; everywhere it is the labor organizations speaking for the League of Nations; and the bar associations. All of the high-class and intellectual and vital organizations of the country, wherever they speak, speak for the League of Nations and for the ratification of the treaty.<sup>2</sup>

President Wilson was encouraged by Hitchcock's support of the League. Prior to the struggle over the Treaty, relations between the two men were strained. The Senator had failed to back important administration policies and the President had tried to prevent Hitchcock from becoming chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations. In 1919 their common goal of securing United States participation in the League brought them into "close and confidential relations."<sup>3</sup> Cooperation of course, did not neces-

---

<sup>1</sup> Speech of Hitchcock, December 10, 1919. Hitchcock Papers, Library of Congress. Due to illness of minority leader T. S. Martin, Hitchcock was the active leader of the Democrats in the Senate. Literature on Hitchcock is sparse. See Richard W. Leopold, "The Mississippi Valley and American Foreign Policy, 1890-1941: An Assessment and an Appeal," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, March, 1951, p. 639, n. 47.

<sup>2</sup> 66th Congress, 1st Session, *Congressional Record*, p. 6481.

<sup>3</sup> Speech of Hitchcock at Wilson Foundation banquet, December 28, 1924. Hitchcock Papers. See also his speech before the Nebraska Historical Society, January 13, 1925. *Ibid.*

sarily involve identity of views. Hitchcock, keenly aware of realities in the Senate, brought his own views to Wilson's attention. The President considered these recommendations and frequently adjusted his policies. To be sure, when judgments differed Wilson counted on Hitchcock to carry out administration policies.

Throughout the struggle over the League of Nations, the leader of administration forces in the Senate tried to accommodate the views of enough senators to make possible ratification of the Treaty. Securing a two-thirds majority for the Covenant was difficult in a Senate dominated by the Republicans. Hitchcock knew that opposition to the treaty under leadership of majority leader Henry Cabot Lodge could prevent ratification. He further believed that Wilson "faced a carefully organized conspiracy to defeat the Treaty and humiliate him."<sup>4</sup> In these circumstances Hitchcock favored accommodation. To him, United States membership in the League was all-important. If its achievement necessitated concessions he was reluctantly ready to comply.

Hitchcock's influence was apparent during negotiation of the Treaty in Paris. Soon after publication of the draft Covenant of the League of Nations in February 1919, the Senator suggested amendments to make it acceptable to the Senate.<sup>5</sup> The President agreed to revise the Covenant but despite pressure from Hitchcock and others did not modify Article X. Considering Article X "the kingpin of the whole structure" Wilson sent word to Hitchcock that "if the Senate rejected Article X it would have to reject the whole treaty."<sup>6</sup> According to the State Department's Counselor,

---

<sup>4</sup> Address of Senator Hitchcock at Wilson Foundation banquet. December 28, 1924. *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> For Hitchcock's suggested amendments and his comments, see Hitchcock to Wilson, March 4, 1919. *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Polk to Hitchcock, May 28, 1919. Polk Papers, Yale University Library. Wilson suggested that attacks on Article X be met by "a frontal attack" and urged that Hitchcock "take a most militant and aggressive course." Wilson to Robert Lansing, May 24, 1919. Woodrow Wilson Collection, Manuscripts collected by Charles L. Swem, Princeton University. (Hereinafter cited as Swem Papers.)

Frank L. Polk, Hitchcock "came around" to the President's position on that crucial Article and was prepared "to make a hard fight" for it.<sup>7</sup>

Recognizing that some reservations could not be avoided, the President wanted reservations adopted in a separate resolution passed in the Senate by two-thirds majority.<sup>8</sup> Although Hitchcock had contemplated reservations by majority vote he accepted the President's plan, and after conferring with the President on July 18 he declared:

The treaty will be ratified without the dotting of an 'i' or the crossing of a 't.' Therefore the only question remaining to be settled is the form and phraseology of the resolution of ratification. It is in this resolution if at all that the reservations must be expressed. . . . The Senate's real issue lies simply in this one question—the wording of the resolution. That wording must have a two-thirds vote to pass.<sup>9</sup>

But Hitchcock did not think this course practical. He knew the Republicans had power to add reservations by majority vote, and were likely to exercise their prerogative. In July and August 1919 he repeatedly told the President that over a third of the Democrats would vote against the Treaty "if the Republicans at the last minute were able to muster enough votes to adopt reservations."<sup>10</sup>

Hitchcock ardently desired conciliation. Under influence of the Senator and others Wilson in July 1919 invited wavering senators to confer at the White House. These conferences were to remove misunderstandings about the League. The President believed he had won over some senators—Hitchcock was skeptical. He remarked later that Wilson "could not be induced to resort to ordinary methods

<sup>7</sup> Polk to Lansing, June 4, 1919. Wilson Papers. See also notation of Polk after reading letter of May 28, 1919 to Hitchcock. Polk Papers.

<sup>8</sup> Wilson to press, July 10, 1919. Wilson Papers. For the president's strategy after his return see Kurt Wimer, "Woodrow Wilson Tries Conciliation: An Effort That Failed," *The Historian*, August 1963.

<sup>9</sup> Hitchcock to press. *New York Times*, July 19, 1919. For his earlier stand on passage of reservations, see *New York Times*, June 23 and July 11, 1919.

<sup>10</sup> *New York Times*, July 30, 1919. See also *New York Times* of August 16 and 27, 1919.

to placate opposition and win support."<sup>11</sup> Early in August, Wilson's "clarifying councils" ceased. When his conference with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee failed to produce results, the President proceeded with a speaking tour, against advice of Hitchcock.

All did not seem lost. Hitchcock knew Wilson would make some concessions. Opposed to amendments, the President was ready to accept reservations provided they were "legitimate interpretations . . . not nullifying in character."<sup>12</sup> This disclosure Wilson made to Hitchcock before he left on the trip. He also handed the Senator four interpretative reservations which Hitchcock could use as his own. Wilson had typed out these reservations, and did not want their authorship known lest opponents raise demands. The same calculation caused the President to intervene in negotiations between Democrats and the Republican mild reservationists. Hitchcock told the press on August 16: "In the opinion of the President, no compromise issue is now before the friends of the treaty and the League. This is not even the time to think of a compromise, much less to discuss it or negotiate it. The time for reservations to the treaty is still far off. There may have to be a compromise in the end, but at present that bridge is not being crossed."<sup>13</sup> While on his tour the President wanted "the fight" to be made on the Treaty as submitted. Hitchcock cooperated. On September 11 he introduced the minority report in the Senate which urged speedy ratification of the Treaty "without amendments and without reservations,"<sup>14</sup> even though—as mentioned—he knew that compromise still was possible.

---

<sup>11</sup> Address at the Wilson Foundation Banquet, December 28, 1924. Hitchcock Papers. For Wilson's evaluation of his conferences with senators see telegram of Sir William Wiseman to Lord Curzon, July 18, 1919. *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939*, Woodward and Butler (eds.), 1952, 1st series, V, 984.

<sup>12</sup> Hitchcock to Nebraska Historical Society, January 13, 1925. Hitchcock Papers.

<sup>13</sup> *New York Times*, August 16, 1919. Aside from Hitchcock, Wilson was informed of Democratic sentiment for compromise by Senator Key Pittman. Pittman to Wilson, August 15, 1919. Wilson Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>14</sup> 66th Congress, 1st Session, *Congressional Record*, p. 5213.

Despite unfavorable developments in the Senate, Hitchcock constantly cautioned Wilson against extremism. After submission of the report of the Foreign Relations Committee the President received discouraging news. Mild reservationists, reportedly backed by some Democrats, assented to a draft reservation to Article X. Wilson considered the compromise draft a "rejection of the Covenant."<sup>15</sup> He was also taken aback by reports that wavering Democrats considered amendments. Hitchcock was not discouraged. On September 24 he advised Wilson that amendments would be beaten. He also apprised him that the agreement regarding Article X between the mild reservationists and Lodge was not necessarily "final." Believing that the question of reservations would "probably still be open" at the end of the trip, Hitchcock advised "against discussing reservations."<sup>16</sup> He wanted to keep Wilson from an irrevocable stand, convinced that the President would have to make further concessions if the Treaty was to be ratified.

After the premature end of the President's trip because of Wilson's physical collapse, the administration leader in the Senate adopted policies that might be described as watchful waiting. Wilson's illness frustrated Hitchcock's plan to acquaint the President with the necessity of yielding further on reservations. In mid-October 1919, he sent word to Wilson through Dr. Cary T. Grayson that while all amendments would be defeated the Treaty could not be ratified without "vital reservations."<sup>17</sup> Wilson failed to authorize basic concessions. Hitchcock knew independent action would not lead to ratification. It not only

---

<sup>15</sup> Telegram of Joseph P. Tumulty to Rudolph Forster for Hitchcock, September 19, 1919. Hitchcock Papers. For attitudes of wavering Democrats see telegram Guy Mason to Tumulty, September 22, 1919, Wilson Papers and telegram Forster to Tumulty, September 24, 1919, Wilson Papers.

<sup>16</sup> Telegram Hitchcock to Tumulty, September 24, 1919. Hitchcock Papers. Toward the end of the trip most wavering Democrats rallied behind Wilson. Contrast the telegram of Henry F. Ashurst to Wilson of September 25, 1919 with his earlier telegram of September 18, 1919. Ashurst Diary, Washington, D. C. Senator Ashurst told the author that he desired to stay in line with the Democratic leadership. Interview, November 14, 1961.

<sup>17</sup> Ashurst Diary, October 2, 1919.

would impair relations with President Wilson and followers, but would endanger his precarious status as Democratic spokesman in the Senate. He continued to mark time. In the circumstances there seemed little choice but to hope for the President's rapid improvement.

As the crucial Senate vote approached in November 1919, Hitchcock continued the campaign for moderation. He knew that Lodge could count on a majority to incorporate his program of reservations in the ratifying resolution. Prospect of Wilson's acceptance was slim. Still, Hitchcock was determined to delay the crucial Senate vote until he could ascertain the President's maximum concession. The Senator preferred ratification "in any form"<sup>18</sup> to having no Treaty. In two interviews he told the ailing President shortly before the vote that compromise was indicated. Wilson objected to reservations which would cause recommitment of the Treaty to other nations. He wanted loyal Democrats to vote down the Lodge resolution of ratification as "a nullification of the treaty."<sup>19</sup> The President did not rule out ratification on the basis of the "Hitchcock reservations" even though they deviated somewhat from the "suggestions" he had handed to Hitchcock. The latter doubted if the Treaty with these reservations could come to a vote in the Republican-controlled Senate, but hoped against hope that after defeat of the Lodge resolution of ratification the door might "open for a possible compromise agreement on a resolution which will make ratification possible." In absence of a promising alternative he sponsored this course speculating "at least the democratic sena-

---

<sup>18</sup> Stephen Bonsal, *Unfinished Business* (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1944), p. 277. For Hitchcock's strategy of delay see James G. McDonald to Thomas W. Lamont, November 4, 1919. Lamont Papers, Baker Library, Harvard University, School of Business.

<sup>19</sup> Wilson to Hitchcock during interview of November 17, 1919. Quoted in Cary T. Grayson, *Woodrow Wilson, An Intimate Memoir* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), p. 103.

tors will have made a record in support of the treaty by bringing forward a real resolution of ratification."<sup>20</sup>

Hitchcock's apprehension proved correct. On November 19 the Treaty with the Lodge reservations, or without any reservations, failed. The Treaty with the Hitchcock reservations did not come to formal vote.<sup>21</sup>

Why, then, was Hitchcock an agent of Wilsonian strategy when he gave it such little chance of success? Wilson had told him two days before the vote that he would pigeon-hole the Treaty if it came to him with the Lodge reservations. Taking the President's threat seriously, Hitchcock faced having the Treaty killed by the Senate or by the President. Since the latter course could easily have had serious consequences for President and party, without leading to treaty ratification, he preferred the former. For the same reason he cooperated with Wilson to keep Democratic senators in line with the presidential course. He even drafted the letter which Wilson, with some alteration, returned on November 18, to be read before the Democratic caucus.<sup>22</sup> This letter caused a good deal of comment because of its uncompromising and militant tone. That Hitchcock drafted it indicates its deliberateness. In absence of an outright statement indicating presidential interment of an unsatisfactory Treaty—and such a statement would have been unwise—a strongly worded letter to the Democratic caucus was necessary to convince Democratic senators that the President would not go through with ratification of such a Treaty. The letter had the desired effect. Forty-two Democrats voted against the Lodge resolution of ratification. With help of Senator Hitchcock the Democrats, with few exceptions, remained loyal to the President.

---

<sup>20</sup> Draft letter of Senator Hitchcock of November 17, 1919 submitted to President Wilson for approval as his message to the Democratic caucus. Wilson sharpened Hitchcock's draft and eliminated the section quoted above. Edith Bolling Wilson Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>21</sup> For the result of the vote of November 19 and Hitchcock's interpretation of it, see *New York Times*, November 21, 1919.

<sup>22</sup> *Loc. cit.*

Hitchcock's attempts to exercise moderating influence on Wilson prior to the vote show that on every possible occasion he acquainted the President tactfully but candidly with the situation in the Senate. That the President did not respond was no reflection on Hitchcock.<sup>23</sup> The Democratic leader asserted himself concerning the "Hitchcock reservations." Aside from adding one reservation to those the President had given him he tentatively incorporated them in the resolution of ratification. The Senator, one month after the vote, was still in doubt if Wilson "approved or disapproved" the reservations as introduced.<sup>24</sup> The importance of this move is not often noted because the Treaty with Hitchcock reservations failed to come to a vote.

After the vote Hitchcock and Wilson both believed that they could break the "deadlock" with the help of public opinion. But whereas Wilson thought the people would exert pressure to force opposition senators to yield, Hitchcock believed that the people expected and even demanded concessions from both sides. He declared that "heretofore the overwhelming sentiment and pressure of this country has been in favor of ratification. From now on I believe that the sentiment of this country will be for compromise."<sup>25</sup>

The Democratic leader resolved again to bring his convictions to President Wilson's attention and to do so as candidly as possible to convince him of the need for concessions. On the day following the Senate vote, he and Senator Oscar Underwood, his rival for the Democratic leader-

---

<sup>23</sup> For an account of Hitchcock's interview with Wilson of November 7, see *New York Times*, November 8, 1919; for that of November 17, see Grayson, *op. cit.*, pp. 102-105. See also speech of Hitchcock to Nebraska Historical Society, January 13, 1925 (p. 21). Hitchcock Papers. Mrs. Gilbert M. Hitchcock told the author of the Senator's vain attempts to influence Wilson to compromise. Interview with Mrs. Gilbert M. Hitchcock of May 8, 1962.

<sup>24</sup> Hitchcock to press. *New York Times*, December 19, 1919. For the draft resolution incorporating the Hitchcock reservations see 66th Congress, 1st Session, *Senate Joint Resolution, No. 32*.

<sup>25</sup> *New York Times*, November 21, 1919.

ship,<sup>26</sup> called at the White House to impress the President with the wide and urgent demand for compromise among Democrats. Unfortunately the two Democratic senators failed to see Wilson. They subsequently wrote letters giving their estimate of the possibilities of compromise. Hitchcock pointed out that eighty-one senators had voted for the Treaty in some form. He predicted that "a settlement of the treaty by Christmas is reasonably possible . . . providing we can make such concessions as will be substantial."<sup>27</sup> He hoped to discuss the need for adjustment with Wilson in an interview set for November 29. When the President cancelled this interview at the last minute, Hitchcock continued to press for a personal meeting.<sup>28</sup> As luck would have it, he saw Wilson a few days later in circumstances he did not desire. To get a first-hand report of the President's condition, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee appointed him and Republican Senator Albert Fall to meet the President—ostensibly on Mexican matters. The visit convinced even Senator Fall of the soundness of Wilson's mind, but it gave Hitchcock only a limited opportunity to reach the President. He learned that Wilson had no plan for compromise and was willing to let responsibility lie with Republican leaders. Dismayed, Hitchcock hoped "public opinion would gradually work up such a demand for ratification that it would be brought about without the President having to take an active hand in the efforts at adjustment."<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Senator Martin died on November 14, 1919. *New York Times*, November 15, 1919.

<sup>27</sup> Senator Hitchcock to President Wilson, November 24. Wilson Papers. See also his letter of November 22. *Ibid.* Senator Underwood's curious letter even suggested temporary passage of the Treaty without the League of Nations. Underwood to Wilson, November 21, 1919. *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Tumulty to Mrs. Wilson, December 1, 1919. Tumulty Papers, Library of Congress. The opinion of Wilson's doctors was given as reason for sudden cancellation of the meeting. Letter signed by Charles D. Mauer, November 29, 1919. Papers of Robert Lansing, Library of Congress.

<sup>29</sup> *New York Times*, December 6, 1919. Wilson was reportedly displeased with some of Hitchcock's statements to the press. Diary of Edward M. House, Yale University Library, December 11, 1919.

The President was difficult to persuade. Hitchcock inquired through Wilson's secretary, Joseph P. Tumulty, whether the President would be amenable to an adjustment with the mild reservationists. He reiterated the need for such a course to avoid splitting the Democratic party. Still the President considered it "a serious mistake . . . for our side to *propose* anything."<sup>30</sup> Wilson was contemplating giving the people opportunity to vote on the Treaty in a separate election; but it is not certain whether Hitchcock learned of this plan.<sup>31</sup> On January 5, 1920 the Senator advised Wilson that "Our policy should be . . . concessions. . . . We could send the Treaty to the President with reservations that he might accept even if not entirely satisfactory." He added: "Public opinion is strongly for compromise as well as for ratification."<sup>32</sup> There was no indication that Wilson heeded his advice.

After the Democratic caucus retained Hitchcock as administration leader on January 15, 1920, he proceeded to test a compromise with Republican leaders. Starting that day, the Democratic leader and four other Democrats met with majority leader Lodge and three Republicans in what came to be known as the Bipartisan Conference. While these conferences were against Wilson's wishes, Hitchcock kept the President informed of their progress.<sup>33</sup> His letters show that at first he did not commit himself to every proposal of his fellow Democrats, but on January 22 all were

---

<sup>30</sup> Mrs. Wilson to Hitchcock, December 19, 1919, Wilson Papers, in answer to memorandum of J. P. Tumulty to Mrs. Wilson, December 18, 1919. Wilson Papers. (Italics in the original.) Wilson's directions were in line with his earlier "instructions" to Hitchcock. Stephen Bonsal, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

<sup>31</sup> There was an interview between Tumulty and Hitchcock on December 31 after Tumulty had talked to Wilson. The subject of discussion was not revealed. *New York Times*, January 1, 1920. For Wilson's thought of separate elections see my "Woodrow Wilson's Plan for a Vote of Confidence," *Pennsylvania History*, July 1961.

<sup>32</sup> Hitchcock to Wilson, January 5, 1920. Wilson Papers.

<sup>33</sup> See Hitchcock to Tumulty, January 16 and 17, 1920. Wilson Papers. Hitchcock's departure from the President's instructions may have been facilitated by the latter's refusal to use his influence in favor of Hitchcock's selection as minority leader. See Hitchcock to Mrs. Wilson and Mrs. Wilson to Hitchcock, January 13. Wilson Papers.

"seriously considering"<sup>34</sup> a draft reservation to Article X introduced by Democratic Senator F. M. Simmons. Hitchcock passed this bipartisan draft on to Wilson, but Lodge turned it down shortly afterwards. Lodge also refused to accept the reservation to Article X proposed by ex-President William H. Taft, which the Democratic senators offered "as our proposition of a compromise."<sup>35</sup> Lack of agreement, particularly on Article X, brought the conference to an end on January 30. Hitchcock, who without Wilson's consent had made concessions, had failed to get a commitment for an accommodation on key sections of the Covenant.

In hope that public opinion might yet force a compromise the Democratic leader called for renewed debate in the Senate. This move, which had solid Democratic backing, was also made "entirely independently from the White House."<sup>36</sup> For the President, prospect of another consideration of the Treaty meant further pressure for compromise. Reluctant to pursue a course he believed futile, he nevertheless sent a conciliatory letter to Hitchcock in early February. In this letter, which embodied his maximum concessions, Wilson accepted the "Hitchcock reservations."<sup>37</sup> He made some other conciliatory gestures but considered the Simmons draft of Article X very unfortunate. Shortly afterward he rejected the Taft reservation to Article X, and sent word to Democratic senators that he would pigeonhole

---

<sup>34</sup> Hitchcock to Wilson, January 22, 1920. *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Statement of Hitchcock of January 31, 1920. 66th Congress, 2nd Session, *Senate Document* 193, p. 15. Under the influence of irreconcilables Lodge did not agree to any modification of Article X. Diary of Chandler P. Anderson, December 16, 1920. Library of Congress.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* For Hitchcock's change of policy regarding a new consideration of the Treaty see *New York Times*, December 1 and 23, 1919 and January 28, 29, 1920.

<sup>37</sup> The letter is dated January 26, 1920 but was still in Wilson's possession on February 5. Diary of Ray Stannard Baker, Baker Papers, Library of Congress. It was read before the Democratic caucus on February 7 (Ashurst Diary) and was published on the following day.

the Treaty with the Lodge reservations if it reached him in that form.<sup>38</sup>

Thus on the eve of renewed consideration of the Treaty, President Wilson and Senator Lodge had rejected a compromise draft to Article X drawn up by former President Taft which was widely accepted by Democrats and Republicans. Senator Hitchcock predicted gloomily: "We may come out at the same hole we went in."<sup>39</sup>

The policy of Hitchcock during renewed consideration of the Treaty was to retain support of President Wilson's stand by as many Democratic senators as possible. The task was not easy. In spite of the presidential message, many Democratic senators believed Wilson would not withdraw the Treaty if they attached relatively mild reservations. They were ready to cooperate with Lodge to tone down reservations to pass the Treaty. Towards the end of February 1920 this tendency among Democrats became so general that Hitchcock sent a letter to Wilson advising of the "probability . . . that enough will surrender to send the treaty to you unless something can be done to regain some of them." Hitchcock suggested a Presidential statement or message which would make Democratic senators "understand that sending the treaty from the Senate to the White House does not mean ratification."<sup>40</sup> Wilson sent a strong letter to Hitchcock on March 8, to convince Democrats of futility of passage of a mild version of the Lodge resolution of ratification.

At last the denouement came. Some Democratic sena-

---

<sup>38</sup> Carter Glass to Democratic caucus, February 7, 1920. Ashurst Diary. Glass had an interview with Wilson on February 6, 1920. Glass Papers, Box 8, Alderman Library, University of Virginia. The same source gives Wilson's attitude towards the Taft reservation.

<sup>39</sup> *New York Times*, February 18, 1920.

<sup>40</sup> Hitchcock to Wilson, February 24, 1920. Tumulty Papers. Senators Robinson and Glass also considered the situation in the Senate "critical" and urged a presidential statement. Tumulty to Wilson, February 27, 1920. *Ibid.*

tors had continued to work for an accommodation,<sup>41</sup> and to forestall passage of the Treaty with last-minute compromise reservations, Hitchcock showed these senators Wilson's adverse comment to a compromise draft on Article X.<sup>42</sup> A majority of Democrats—albeit a bare majority—then defeated the Treaty with the Lodge reservations on March 19, 1920, in accord with the wishes of the President.<sup>43</sup> The senators returned the Treaty to the White House on the following day.

During reconsideration of the Treaty Hitchcock did not base his policies on any intrinsic merit of the President's course, but on belief that an alternate course might have poor results. He told a group of Wilson's friends that "while he favored the treaty and Covenant in their original form . . . there were many reasons why the [Lodge] reservations should be accepted." He added that he "was willing to carry on the struggle to the end if it were necessary."<sup>44</sup> Having tested both sides, he ruled out the likelihood of compromise on fundamental sections. Softening of some reservations seemed possible, but such policy would have increased the temptation for Democratic senators to vote for a version of the Treaty which Wilson said he would not accept. Such a development might have initiated a chain of events with unforeseeable consequences—an open split in the Democratic party or even formation of a new party by Wilson. In early March 1920 rumors had it that Wilson was considering a "breakaway" unless a majority of Demo-

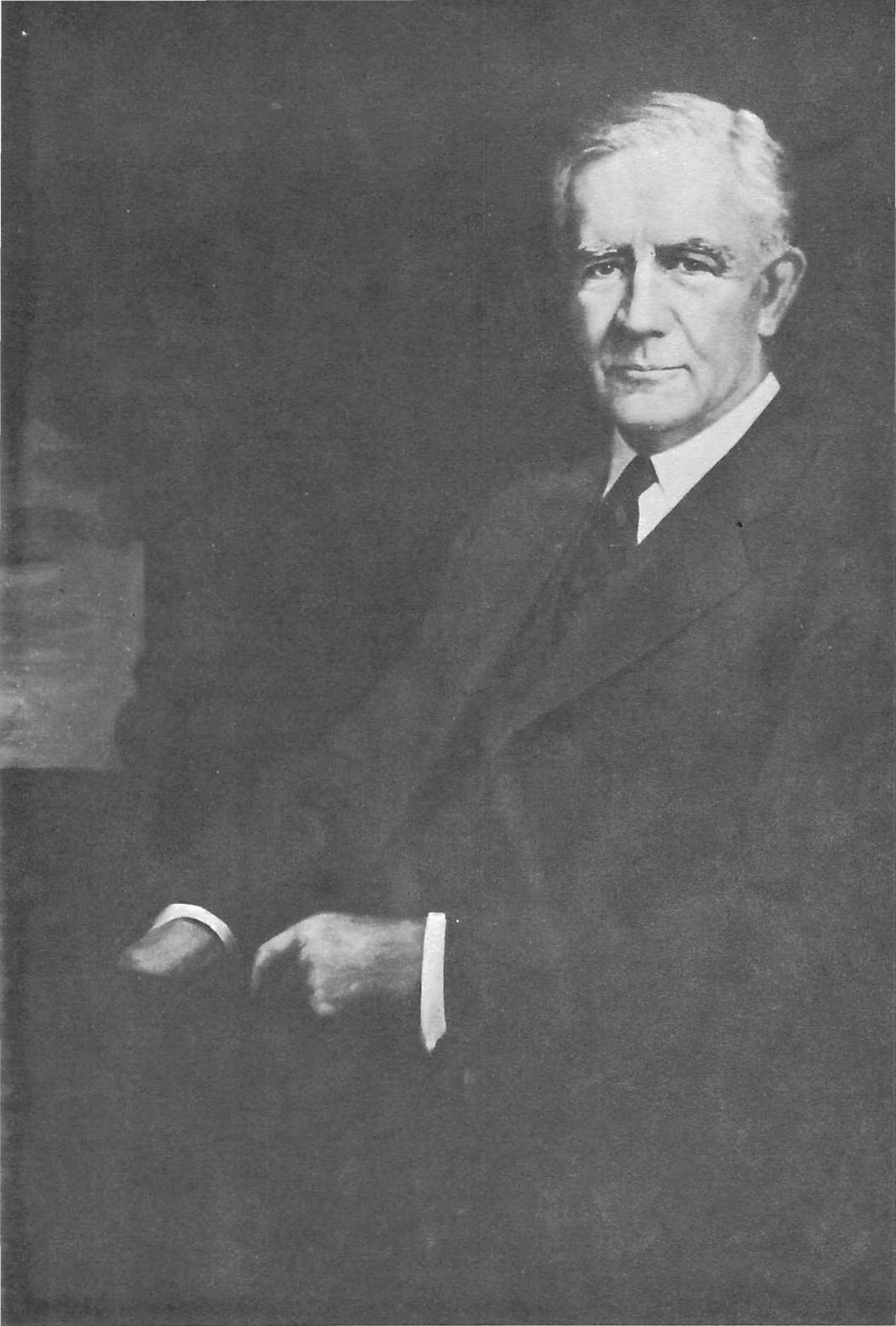
---

<sup>41</sup> Senator Simmons wanted to visit Wilson. Hitchcock to Wilson, undated (c. March 5), Wilson Papers. A notation on this letter reveals Wilson's disinclination. *Ibid.* The letter of Wilson to Hitchcock of March 8 is in the Swem Papers.

<sup>42</sup> Wilson's comments on a letter of Hitchcock to Wilson, undated (c. March 13). Hitchcock Papers. For Hitchcock's display of the letter see *New York Times*, March 14, 15, and 16, 1920.

<sup>43</sup> 66th Congress, 2nd Session, *Congressional Record*, p. 4599.

<sup>44</sup> Edward N. Hurley, *The Bridge to France* (Philadelphia: J. P. Lippincott Co., 1927), p. 326. The meeting was held at Chevy Chase, February 29, 1920.



Senator Gilbert M. Hitchcock.  
(From a painting by J. Laurie Wallace)

crats supported his course. Hitchcock made strenuous efforts to avoid this possibility.<sup>45</sup>

Years after the dust of the League fight had settled, Senator Hitchcock speculated: "I have often wondered . . . whether I made a mistake in the final vote."<sup>46</sup> With passage of time the Senator may have forgotten something he knew while dealing with the situation—namely "that President Wilson would never deposit notice of ratification based upon the Lodge reservations."<sup>47</sup> Unless prepared to face even greater hazards Hitchcock should have taken comfort in the words Wilson wrote to him: "Certainly you have nothing to reproach yourself with in connection with the defeat of the treaty. . . . You did everything that it was possible to do to secure its passage."<sup>48</sup>

The dilemma of Hitchcock was that of all sensible men when confronting extremists—does one stand in the middle when, after the most unrelenting of efforts, two immovable objects are about to collide? If the man of sense gets out of the way he appears as a weakling; and of course if he allows himself to go down in the confrontation he benefits no one, least of all himself. Hitchcock as leader of the administration forces in the Senate derived his power both from Wilson and from the semblance of a united party in the Senate, and when he had done his best for common sense he had no other reasonable course except to get out of the way and—as he did—put the blame for catastrophe on his antagonists, the Republicans led by Senator Lodge.

---

<sup>45</sup> Hitchcock to Wilson, March 20, 1920. Wilson Papers. Rumor of a "breakaway" by Wilson is discussed in *New York Times*, March 2, 1920. For Hitchcock's subsequent relations with Wilson see Kurt Wimer, "Woodrow Wilson and a Third Nomination," *Pennsylvania History*, April, 1962.

<sup>46</sup> Hitchcock before the Nebraska Historical Society, January 13, 1925. Hitchcock Papers. See also Hitchcock's comment in Nicholas Murray Butler, *Across the Busy Years* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939), II, 201.

<sup>47</sup> Hitchcock to press, December 18, 1919. *New York Times*, December 19, 1919. Note also Dr. Grayson's comment: "President Wilson never made empty threats." Grayson, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

<sup>48</sup> Wilson to Hitchcock, March 23, 1920. Hitchcock Papers.

Was Hitchcock, then, a party leader comparable to Lodge? It has been argued that the irreconcilables—Senators Borah, Johnson, et al.—forced the reluctant Lodge into his anti-Treaty maneuvers. Hitchcock, so it might seem, was forced into an equally extreme position by Wilson. But Hitchcock, one must conclude, had the force of reason, and the hope of the future, on his side. He did not act out of mere narrow partisanship. The Senator from Nebraska emerged from the League fight as an individual of purpose and principle. It is indeed a pity that his historical reputation, unlike that of Lodge, has since then gone into eclipse.