

WOODROW WILSON AND A THIRD NOMINATION

BY KURT WIMER*

DESPITE the great interest of historians and political scientists in the presidency of Woodrow Wilson, despite the plethora of articles and books about the leader of the United States during and after the first World War, there remain some important areas of his presidential years which are neglected—which need study and research in the voluminous historical record. One of those periods, and perhaps the most important, is the era of Wilson's illness, especially the crucial months in the middle of the year 1920 when the Covenant of the League of Nations had failed, and Wilson's leadership had suffered abject defeat.

Many students have believed that Wilson in those sad months was without "plan or leadership."¹ They surmise that with the imminence of the Democratic national convention and a new struggle with the reviving Republican party the President waited idly in the White House. It is perhaps not surprising that historians, not expecting to find constructive leadership from an ailing President, have failed to discover any Wilsonian patterns of preconvention strategy. But, in truth, there was a plan. Wilson's plan was to commit the Democratic party, with himself as its presidential candidate, to a genuine League of Nations in such a fashion that the people could vote on it in November.²

Handicapped by illness, attacked by relentless enemies and supported by reluctant followers, he pursued his lonesome course. At

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¹John A. Garraty, *Woodrow Wilson, A Great Life in Brief* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), 188.

²Wilson told Grayson: "The referendum can be determined there [at the convention] preparatory to going before the people." Cary T. Grayson, *Woodrow Wilson, An Intimate Memoir* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), 115.

the national convention he was successful in committing the party to the platform he desired. His main objective fell short of realization when his name failed to be placed in nomination at San Francisco. Wilson, two weeks before his death, was still of the opinion that he could have been elected for a third term. He told Raymond B. Fosdick that by not running he made the biggest mistake of his life.³ Wilson apparently did not realize to what extent his friends had weighed the possibility of his candidacy in San Francisco. His preconvention policies seem to have been more successful than he knew.

In the spring of 1920 President Wilson pursued daring policies despite opposition from many of his fellow Democrats. His leadership of the party was at stake when in March, 1920, the Treaty of Versailles approached a final vote in the Senate. The President asked that the Democrats support his stand against the Lodge reservations. Many Democratic senators nevertheless were inclined to vote for the treaty with the Lodge reservations. There was danger that the treaty would pass the Senate and go to the President against his wishes.⁴ Alarmed, Wilson reportedly contemplated the formation of a new party if Democratic leaders failed to back him.⁵ A crisis was narrowly avoided when on March 19 a majority of Democratic senators—and it was a bare majority—voted against the treaty with Lodge reservations in accordance with Wilson's wishes.⁶ Wilson had retained leadership of the party which he knew he would need if his policies were ultimately to prevail.

After this second defeat of the treaty in the Senate, William Jennings Bryan challenged the President's policies. Opposed to Wilson's stand on the treaty since the adverse vote of November, 1919, the Great Commoner now intensified his campaign for concessions. Expressing regret over the "unnecessary stress" on Article X, he labeled the treaty controversy "a disgrace to this

³ Woodrow Wilson to Raymond B. Fosdick, January 20, 1924, according to letter of Fosdick to Baker of June 23, 1926. Fosdick File, Ray Stannard Baker Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴ Hitchcock to Wilson, February 24, 1920. Tumulty Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵ *New York Times*, March 2, 1920. For Wilson's earlier belief in "a fresh division of parties" see Wilson Papers, Ac. 9712, Library of Congress.

⁶ *Ibid.*, March 20, 1920. Twenty-three Democrats voted against the treaty with the Lodge reservations while twenty-one voted for it.

nation."⁷ During the following month he campaigned against Senator Gilbert M. Hitchcock in the Nebraska primaries. Coming out ahead of the Senator in the April primaries⁸ his position in the party was strengthened. Assured of membership in the important Committee on Resolutions of the forthcoming national convention he was determined to oppose Wilson's policies on the League. He told Senator Henry F. Ashurst that there would be "no endorsement of the League of Nations"⁹ in the Democratic platform.

Wilson accepted Bryan's challenge. In a presidential message read at the Kansas state convention on April 22, the President considered it "the duty" of Democrats to raise the League issue "with the voters of the country."¹⁰ In accord with his wishes the convention endorsed the League of Nations and left the delegates to the national convention uninstructed as to a presidential candidate. Similar endorsements of the League were adopted by many Democratic state conventions. In May, President Wilson issued his clearest appeal. In a telegram to G. E. Hamaker of Portland, Oregon, he declared:

I think it imperative that the party should endorse and support the Versailles Treaty and condemn the Lodge reservations as utterly inconsistent with the nation's honor and destructive of the world leadership. . . . The League of Nations is the hope of the world. . . . We cannot in honor whittle it down or weaken it as the Republican leaders of the Senate have proposed to do. . . . The Democratic party has now a great opportunity to which it must measure up. The honor of the nation is in its hands.¹¹

⁷ Speech of William Jennings Bryan, *New York Times*, March 20, 1920.

⁸ Bryan received ten convention delegates to Hitchcock's six. *Ibid.*, April 24, 1920. The result was not a clear verdict since Republicans were permitted to vote in Democratic primaries.

⁹ Bryan to Ashurst, May 25, 1920. (Italics in the original.) Diary of Henry Fulton Ashurst in his possession, Washington, D. C. For Bryan's earlier position see his letter to Ashurst of March 6, 1920. *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Letter of President Wilson to Jouett Shouse, April 22, 1920. *Congressional Record*, Vol. 59, 5101. For the origin of this letter see correspondence between Wilson and Jouett Shouse of April 10 and 12. Wilson Papers, series II.

¹¹ Letter of President Wilson of May 9, 1920. Woodrow Wilson Collection, papers collected by Charles L. Swem, Firestone Library, Princeton University. For its preparation see Tumulty to Wilson, May 8th. Wilson Papers, Ac. 9712.

Wilson's position was accepted by most Democratic leaders as defining the attitude of the party on the treaty. Senator Oscar Underwood, the newly chosen minority leader, backed the President's stand, and Senator Hitchcock predicted that the national convention would adopt Wilson's "line of procedure."¹² Bryan, by contrast, intensified his attacks on Wilson and his policies. He questioned whether the President was sufficiently well informed to have "a sound judgment."¹³ Hoping for settlement with Republicans through concessions, he urged that the League be taken out of the campaign. The issue was thus squarely joined. Bryan wanted accommodation over the League and its elimination from the campaign, while Wilson, skeptical of a settlement, wanted the League as the chief issue of the campaign. On May 31, Wilson encouraged the Democratic national chairman, Homer S. Cummings, to induce Bryan to bolt the convention for the sake of the reputation of the Democratic party and its political future.¹⁴

Opposition to Wilson's leadership also emanated from certain urban leaders who largely controlled their state delegations. The New York delegation is a case in point. At the primaries in New York on April 6, organization candidates made a clean sweep. Since the leaders of Tammany Hall owed no loyalty to President Wilson there was danger that the New York delegation might oppose his designs. The situation was aggravated when Wilson appointed a federal judge against the wishes of the state organization. It was no great surprise, therefore, when a conference of Democratic delegates at Albany refused to endorse the League.¹⁵ Wilson had to reckon with a number of unfriendly delegates at San Francisco who were to a great extent controlled by city bosses.

Senators who had voted for the treaty with the Lodge reservations were also opposed to Wilson's convention plans. They were

¹² *New York Times*, May 11, 1920.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Memorandum of Homer S. Cummings regarding his talk with Wilson on May 31, 1920. Cummings File, Ray Stannard Baker Papers.

¹⁵ *New York Times*, May 8, 1920. There was much resentment over Wilson's appointment of Frank Cooper as Associate Judge of the United States District Court of New York. Wilson Papers, File VI. The adoption of the unit rule strengthened the position of the leaders. Governor Alfred E. Smith lacked enthusiasm for the League. Selig Adler, *Isolationist Impulse* (New York: Abelard and Schulman, 1957), Chapter 4.

in a difficult position, having voted for reservations against which the party was to be committed. To straighten out their records they wanted the President to resubmit the treaty. Senator Carter Glass, a close administration supporter, championed their course. To be sure, the Senator from Virginia had no illusion about passage of the treaty in the Senate. He expected the treaty to be "promptly rejected with the Taft or any other reservations,"¹⁶ but believed a renewed rejection would find only five Democrats voting against it. The Democrats would again be united behind the President. When at a cabinet meeting such a policy was recommended for tactical reasons, Wilson replied: "I will not play for position. This is no time for tactics. It is time to stand square."¹⁷ He would not resubmit the treaty.

In May, 1920, Democratic senators received another opportunity to indicate solidarity with the President regarding his plan for peace. After the defeat of the treaty, attempts were made in Congress to end the war by joint resolution. These efforts found expression in the Knox Resolution which was resolutely opposed by the President. In a statement inspired by the White House, Homer Cummings, the Democratic national chairman, declared:

There is but one clear path of duty. It is likewise the path of honor and peace. . . . The path lies straight before us and consists simply in . . . the treaty of peace. . . . There are no substitutes for the requirements of plain duty and American honor.¹⁸

The Knox Resolution passed both houses of Congress, then controlled by the G.O.P., but Democrats opposed it with few exceptions. On May 27, 1920, President Wilson vetoed it, pointing to its failure to secure for the United States the objectives for which she went to war.¹⁹ It seemed clear that, despite opposition, the President had solidified his leadership of the Democratic party

¹⁶ For the views of Senator Glass see letter of R. W. Woolley to Colonel House of May 14, 1920. Robert W. Woolley File, R. S. Baker Papers.

¹⁷ Josephus Daniels Diary, April 20, 1920. Josephus Daniels Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁸ *New York Times*, May 3, 1920.

¹⁹ 66th Congress, 2nd Sess., *House Document No. 799*. The Knox Resolution passed the Senate on May 15, 43:38 and the House on May 21, 228:139. It failed passage over Wilson's veto in the House, 220:152. *Congressional Record*, Vol. 59, Pt. 8, 7447, 7805-7809.

as the convention approached. Shortly after the opening meeting, Chairman Cummings wired Wilson from San Francisco: "The Conyention got under way in fine shape. There was a tremendous demonstration when your picture was revealed. . . . There can be no doubt that Convention is with you and for the League of Nations overwhelmingly."²⁰

To prepare a referendum on the League of Nations at the convention meant securing a suitable platform plank. This involved favorable consideration by the Committee on Resolutions. On May 17, Wilson's secretary, Joseph F. Tumulty, suggested to the President that he prepare a "Model Democratic Platform on the League of Nations."²¹ He also submitted for Wilson's examination a draft plank which Senator Glass had drawn up for the Virginia state convention. Wilson liked this plank and endorsed it.²² He also wanted Glass to become chairman of the Committee on Resolutions and so notified Cummings at their conference on May 31. The Virginia Senator accepted the part suggested for him by Wilson,²³ and without difficulty secured the chairmanship of the Committee on Resolutions at San Francisco.

Wilson was anxious that in their platform the Democrats should adopt straightforward commitments. He considered the League of Nations' issue too "deep" to permit "political skulduggery," and requested that the Democratic platform contain no "ambiguity or evasion" on that issue. He asked for a "positive and definite"²⁴ commitment in favor of the treaty without the Lodge reservations. When Republicans called vaguely for some association of nations and approved the voting records of their senators,²⁵ Wilson found

²⁰ Code telegram of Homer S. Cummings to President Wilson, June 28, 1920. Cummings File, R. S. Baker Papers.

²¹ Joseph P. Tumulty to President Wilson, May 17, 1920. Tumulty Papers.

²² Wilson to Glass, May 28, 1920. Wilson Papers. The crucial section of the Glass formula read: "We advocate the immediate ratification of the treaty without reservations which would impair its essential integrity." The plank was adopted by the Virginia Convention on May 19, 1920. *New York Times*, May 20, 1920.

²³ Diary of Carter Glass, June 12 and 19, 1920. Glass Papers, Alderman Library, University of Virginia. See also letter of President Wilson to Senator Glass, June 14, 1920. Wilson Papers.

²⁴ *New York World*, June 18, 1920.

²⁵ The applicable section of the Republican platform is reprinted in Henry Cabot Lodge, *The Senate and the League of Nations* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), 210. Lodge then wrote: "Thus was the issue squarely made." *Ibid.*

conditions well suited for a solemn referendum on the League. In mid-June in an interview with Louis Seibold he stated:

I am extremely confident that the Democratic convention at San Francisco will welcome the acceptance by the Republican Party of my invitation to make the League of Nations the issue of the campaign. . . . No one will welcome a referendum on that issue more than I.²⁶

Cummings congratulated Wilson from San Francisco and expressed confidence that the platform would meet the standard set by the President.

In San Francisco the Committee on Resolutions deliberated on the platform from Monday, June 28, to Friday, July 2. Opposition in the main came from two quarters. Some wanted an escape clause so that senators who had voted for the Lodge reservations could justify their records. More far-reaching opposition to the Wilsonian program came from William Jennings Bryan who favored speedy ratification of the treaty even with the Lodge reservations. Administration supporters in committee defeated Bryan's attempts to commit the party to ratification of the treaty with whatever reservations were necessary for passage in the Senate. They were not alarmed by Bryan's threat to bring the issue before the convention. Neither did this prospect disturb President Wilson. The President was perturbed, however, when word reached him that his representatives had agreed to an addition to the Glass formula, sponsored by Senator David I. Walsh. According to the new clause the Democrats would not oppose reservations which would make more clear or specific the obligations of the United States to the associated nations. Wilson acquiesced with misgivings.²⁷ He nevertheless was pleased and gratified with the Democratic plank and sent a public telegram to Cummings expressing appreciation of the platform which he hailed as "a declaration of conquering purpose which nothing could defeat."²⁸

²⁶ *New York World*, June 18, 1920. Wilson's interviews with Seibold took place on June 15 and 16. Tumulty Papers.

²⁷ Code telegram, Wilson to Cummings, July 2, 1920. Cummings File, R. S. Baker Papers.

²⁸ Telegram of President Wilson to Homer S. Cummings of July 2, 1920. Tumulty Papers.

The President at last triumphed in regard to the League plank. Bryan on July 2 contested before the convention several sections of the Wilson-inspired platform, including the plank on the League of Nations. He again appealed for ratification of the treaty "with such reservations as a majority of the senators may agree upon" and implored his fellow Democrats not to make the treaty a campaign issue. Denying that he was "an enemy of Woodrow Wilson," he exclaimed: "shame on the man, Democrat or Republican, who talks of making a partisan question of this great issue, with the world afire."²⁹ Wilson was reassured when Bryan's challenge failed. Still, in a sense he agreed that the treaty was not to be merely a partisan question. Only a few weeks before the convention he had told Dr. Grayson that the League was "bigger than any party."³⁰ At the convention, as mentioned, he wanted the Democratic party to frame the dominant issue in such fashion as to give Americans—Democrats and Republicans—the opportunity to vote on the League of Nations in a referendum. In this attempt he was remarkably successful.

It was one thing to frame the League as the chief issue at the convention, but it was another to make it dominate the campaign. Wilson tried to focus the election of 1920 on his great cause through the presidential candidate. The President's writings reveal that he had long been aware of the difficulties of concentrating presidential elections on a single issue. According to his daughter Eleanor, he was apprehensive in 1920 that "if the League issue was voted on during the coming presidential elections, it would be just one of many 'planks' in the party platform."³¹ To avoid such a situation he probed for other solutions including a far-fetched scheme of letting the people decide through a separate election.³² When this procedure did not prove feasible, he reluctantly turned to the idea of a referendum on the treaty in the presidential election of 1920. He knew, and so did friend and foe, that his prominent identification with the League issue made him the

²⁹ *New York Times*, July 5, 1920.

³⁰ Grayson, *op. cit.*, 117.

³¹ Letter of Mrs. Eleanor Wilson McAdoo to author, April 8, 1958.

³² Kurt Wimer, "Woodrow Wilson's Plan for a Vote of Confidence," *Pennsylvania History*, XXVIII (1961), No. 3, 279-293.

"logical candidate."³³ In any event, the more the campaign could concentrate on him, the more closely would the election approximate a referendum on the treaty.

Wilson's possible candidacy was not favorably received by Democrats. While his readiness to head the Democratic ticket was widely surmised from his call for a "solemn referendum" on January 8, 1920, criticism of both a referendum and his candidacy stimulated renewed compromise efforts. The President did not believe an accommodation possible. According to Mrs. Wilson, he had not made up his mind in January but thought conditions might make it necessary for him to run.³⁴ On February 7, Senator Glass told Democrats at a senatorial caucus that "Wilson was going to make the treaty the issue of the campaign" and that the President "possessed enough leadership to bring the question before the people."³⁵ Yet the President made no public statement. His silence caused much speculation, especially after March 19 when prospects for compromise vanished with the second Senate rejection of the treaty. Democrats generally considered his renomination undesirable. Demands for his open disavowal of third-term intentions were so pronounced that such a request by Democratic Representative Benjamin I. Humphreys brought members of the House of Representatives to their feet in prolonged cheering. Claude Kitchin, the Democratic floor leader, expressed himself as "in complete agreement with the view expressed by Mr. Humphreys in opposition to a third term."³⁶ Wilson's advisers, too, opposed another nomination. Tumulty suggested to Wilson that a "statement of withdrawal" was indicated and Bernard Baruch has written recently: "For a while he [Wilson] . . . entertained the

³³ Identical words were used by A. Mitchell Palmer, *The Diary of Edward M. House* (Yale University Library, New Haven, Conn.), January 31, 1920 (hereinafter cited as *House Diary*) and by William E. Borah, *New York Times*, January 9, 1920.

³⁴ A. Mitchell Palmer to Colonel Edward M. House reporting a conversation between Mrs. Wilson and Vance McCormick, *House Diary*, January 31, 1920. The conversation is also reported in *Daniels Diary*, February 20, 1920, *Daniels Papers*.

³⁵ Ashurst *Diary*, February 7, 1920. Glass had seen the President on the previous day. Glass to Wilson, February 9, 1920. *Glass Papers*. For an outline of Wilson's policies between January 8 and March 19, 1920, see Kurt Wimer, *American Philosophical Society Year Book, 1961* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, forthcoming), Social Science Section.

³⁶ *New York Times*, March 26, 1920. Kitchin was a lifelong isolationist. Adler, *op. cit.*, Chapter 12.

idea of seeking vindication by running for re-election. None of us from whom he sought encouragement gave it to him."³⁷

Wilson considered his policies with a view to attaining his goals. Aware of opposition to a third nomination and deeply disappointed by it, he told Grayson: "No group of men has given me any assurances that it wanted me to be a candidate for renomination. In fact, everyone seems to be opposed to my running." He nevertheless refused to withdraw, because such a course would "turn over" leadership of the party to Bryan, and diminish prospects for making the League the dominant issue of the convention. Further, he envisaged that by the time the Democrats would get together at San Francisco, the convention

may come to a deadlock as to candidates, and there may be practically a universal demand for the selection of someone to lead them out of the wilderness. The members of the Convention may feel that I am the logical one to lead—perhaps the only one to champion this cause. In such circumstances I would feel obligated to accept the nomination even if I thought it would cost me my life.³⁸

Late in March when Wilson made this statement he was open to an alternate course. He told Grayson that he would only "make the fight" if it is "absolutely necessary" and "if there is no one else to do it."³⁹

The President evaluated leading Democratic candidates who might wage an effective campaign for his great cause. The most promising "administration candidate" was his son-in-law, William Gibbs McAdoo. This family relationship was important because Wilson did not consider it "good public policy to take members of the same family in succession for president."⁴⁰ Apparently in

³⁷ Bernard M. Baruch, *The Public Years* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), 145. For Tumulty's advice see Tumulty to Wilson, March 23, 1920. Tumulty Papers. Professor John M. Blum has questioned whether Wilson received Tumulty's letter of March 23 addressed to Mrs. Wilson. John M. Blum, *Joe Tumulty and the Wilson Era* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1951), 242. Yet Wilson referred to Tumulty's letter two days later. Grayson, *op. cit.*, 116.

³⁸ Wilson to Grayson. Quoted in Grayson, *op. cit.*, 116-117.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁴⁰ Wilson to House, House Diary, May 19, 1918.

an effort to please the White House, McAdoo did not enter the Democratic primaries. But he also failed to commit himself strongly to Wilson's idea of a League of Nations so that in March, 1920, his agreement with the President could only be surmised.⁴¹ There was also evidence that Wilson did not think highly of McAdoo's presidential qualifications. When McAdoo in June issued a statement that he would not permit his name to be presented to the convention, Wilson's only regret was that the statement did not include a categorical refusal to accept the nomination.⁴²

The only other "administration candidate" was Wilson's Attorney General, A. Mitchell Palmer. Palmer openly announced his candidacy on March 1. Initially, he fully supported the administration and stated that the League "will be the issue upon which they [the presidential candidates] will have to face the nation."⁴³ After the disappointing outcome of the Michigan primaries in early April, Palmer became increasingly ambiguous in his stand on the League. On April 6 he told a Georgia audience that he would not object to substantial reservations, and two weeks later he stated at a cabinet meeting, in Wilson's presence, that the League should not be the only major issue of the campaign.⁴⁴ Wilson, aware of opposition to Palmer's candidacy by important segments of the population, considered his campaign "futile."⁴⁵

So it was with other possible Democratic candidates. The leading candidate not connected with the Wilson administration was Governor James M. Cox of Ohio. While the Governor favored Wilson's stand on the League, he declared in March: "The question of the League has resolved itself into a purely technical dis-

⁴¹ *New York Times*, March 22, 1920. McAdoo described his "awkward" position in a letter to Dr. Grayson of February 14, 1920. McAdoo Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴² Wilson to Glass, Glass Diary, June 19, 1920. Glass Papers. For Wilson's opinion of McAdoo's presidential qualifications see Wilson to Burleson, quoted in Josephus Daniels, *The Wilson Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1946), II, 553.

⁴³ *New York Times*, March 3, 1920.

⁴⁴ Daniels Diary, April 20, 1920. Daniels Papers. For Palmer's views on reservations, see *Atlantic Constitution*, April 7, 1920. Clipping in Palmer scrapbook, Monroe County Historical Society, Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania.

⁴⁵ Wilson to Glass, Glass Diary, June 19, 1920. Glass Papers. Palmer's role in the campaign is discussed and evaluated in Stanley Coben's forthcoming book *A. Mitchell Palmer, A Political Portrait* (New York: Columbia University Press), Chapter 13.

cussion and the public is sick and tired of it."⁴⁶ Furthermore, Cox looked for support from Wilson's opponents as well as friends and was the favorite candidate of the political leaders of the big cities. Wilson considered the candidacy of Cox "a joke."⁴⁷ To be sure, the President had preferences of his own: Newton D. Baker, David F. Houston, or Carter Glass, but he questioned whether they would be good candidates. On May 2 he told Grayson that he would be at a loss whom to choose for president if he had the power to select.⁴⁸ He thus indicated that he considered no other Democrat qualified to make the crusade for the League which circumstances required.

Wilson's decision to become personally available for another term was made after searching deliberation. He had to convince himself that his health permitted him to carry out the duties of the presidential office. Perturbed lest the public interest suffer, he considered resigning and turning over the office to the Vice President. Twice in April, 1920, he mentioned this possibility to Dr. Grayson who, after reviewing Wilson's daily routine, convinced him "that he had the strength to administer the office capably."⁴⁹ While Grayson was thinking merely in terms of the remainder of Wilson's term, the President was evaluating whether his health permitted him to continue his fight for the League until ratification of the treaty had been accomplished. On April 20 he told his cabinet: "I cannot stand retreat from conscientious duty. I may not talk as well but I can still use the English language and if the people do not see the issue clear, I will put it so plain they must see it."⁵⁰ It appeared therefore that Wilson in late April had made up his mind to accept a third nomination if the convention saw fit to select him. There was one adjustment he was willing to make: he was ready to resign after the treaty had been ratified.⁵¹

⁴⁶ *New York Times*, March 26, 1920. For the views of Cox on the League see *New York Times*, May 19, 1920, and *Sunday Times*, May 23, 1920, section 7, 2.

⁴⁷ Wilson to Glass, Glass Diary, June 19, 1920, Glass Papers.

⁴⁸ Grayson, *op. cit.*, 117.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 113-114.

⁵⁰ Daniels Diary, April 20, 1920. Daniels Papers. Wilson apparently was aware that he would have to rely on the written word in the campaign.

⁵¹ Grayson to Glass, June 16, 1920. Glass Diary, Glass Papers. See also Arthur Walworth, *Woodrow Wilson* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1958), II, 400, quoting Grayson's conversation with Robert Woolley, June 13, 1920, and Robert W. Woolley Papers, Library of Congress.

The conclusion seems inescapable that Wilson thought of a third term as a corollary to the completion of his life's work—the entrance of the United States into the League of Nations. In the words of Homer Cummings: "It was . . . one additional sacrifice . . . asked of him for a great cause."⁵²

Wilson's task of convincing his fellow Democrats that his illness did not preclude renomination was a difficult one. In January, 1920, newspapers reported that he considered himself well enough to run again, and on February 19 it was announced that he had recovered sufficiently to go to work at his study every morning at 9:30 A.M.⁵³ Early in March he began to take automobile rides. Their subsequent interruption caused speculation about a "set-back"—promptly denied by Grayson. Later the President's physician revealed that rejection of the treaty by the Senate was the only occasion when he found Wilson "temporarily beaten in spirit."⁵⁴ After deciding to be available for a convention draft, Wilson tried to impress the country that he was equal to the presidency. On April 26 it was announced that the President was strong enough to attend to his full duties, and before the end of the month he took long motor rides two days in succession, without his physician.⁵⁵ Beginning in mid-April he presided over well-

⁵² Cummings File, R. S. Baker Papers. Some scholars have perceived Wilson's third-term manifestations, but have attributed them chiefly to Wilson's ambitions. Charles W. Stein in his comprehensive volume *The Third Term Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943) speculates on p. 263 that Wilson "from the middle of 1918 determined upon a course that would necessitate a third term." Wesley M. Bagby in his stimulating study "Woodrow Wilson, a Third Term, and the Solemn Referendum," *The American Historical Review*, LX (1955), No. 3, holds that after the onset of his illness Wilson "pursued a policy of making the League the issue of the 1920 campaign," p. 575. These hypotheses are contradicted by Wilson's plan in December, 1919, to eliminate the League issue through separate elections between the President and Senate. See Kurt Wimer, "Woodrow Wilson's Plan for a Vote of Confidence," *Pennsylvania History*, XXVIII (1961), No. 3. There is other evidence indicating that Wilson planned to retire after his second term. In Paris Mrs. Wilson so informed Henry White. White to Lodge, June 12, 1919. Box 231, Root Papers, Library of Congress. See also House Diary, January 31, 1920. By considering the stalemate over the League of Nations the center of Wilson's third-term calculations, difficulties in evaluation tend to disappear.

⁵³ *New York Times*, February 20, 1920.

⁵⁴ Grayson, *op. cit.*, 106. For Grayson's denial of Wilson's setback see *New York Times*, April 9 and 11, 1920.

⁵⁵ *New York Times*, April 27 and 30, 1920.



PRESIDENT AND MRS. WILSON

This picture of Woodrow Wilson working at his desk, with his wife at his side, was taken in June, 1920. Two weeks later it was prominently displayed at the Democratic Convention at San Francisco.

Harris and Ewing

advertised cabinet meetings on a fairly regular basis. That Wilson did not want his illness stressed at San Francisco became clear in his interview with Homer Cummings on May 31. Wilson's only criticism of a draft of Cummings' keynote address was the latter's reference to the President as having been at the point of death. He did not want attention drawn to his affliction.

As the Democratic convention approached, White House sources stressed Wilson's progressive recovery. On June 18, Louis Seibold after a four-hour interview with the President wrote of Wilson's "mental vigor" and "saving sense of humor." Seibold

pointedly referred to the President's "fullest realization of his own duty to America . . . now that his complete restoration to health seems assured."⁵⁶ The picture of a convalescent Wilson was stressed in other ways. Photographs of the President working at his desk with Mrs. Wilson at his side were prominently displayed at San Francisco. On the eve of that gathering Wilson made an extended tour of Washington, conspicuously exhibiting his recovery.⁵⁷ Nevertheless the impression that Wilson's illness made him politically unavailable proved difficult to overcome. While talk of "Wilson again" persisted, and while the *Literary Digest* poll reported him second only to McAdoo as a popular choice for the nomination, delegates—to the extent they were aware of Wilson's availability—seemed hesitant to consider him seriously as the 1920 Democratic standard bearer.⁵⁸

Three Democratic leaders with whom Wilson had interviews prior to their departure for San Francisco, played key parts in Wilson's strategy regarding a convention draft. They were the chairman of the Democratic national committee, Cummings, Senator Glass, and Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby. On May 31, Wilson told the Democratic national chairman that he considered him his representative in San Francisco and arranged to communicate with him by secret code. He also told Cummings that persons who wished to co-operate with the administration would stay in close touch with him at San Francisco. When the subject of candidates came up, Wilson suggested that Cummings withhold judgment until he could evaluate the situation on the floor of the convention.⁵⁹ Before the President's interview with Glass on June 19, Dr. Grayson had become alarmed about Wilson's receptivity to a third term. Fearful lest the President might not survive another campaign, his physician determined to prevent his renomination. He put his case before Senator Glass, imploring him three

⁵⁶ *New York World*, June 18, 1920.

⁵⁷ *New York Times*, June 28, 1920.

⁵⁸ Governor David L. Lawrence of Pennsylvania who attended the 1920 convention was unaware of Wilson's availability as a candidate. Governor Lawrence to author in interview of April 8, 1960. Herbert Hoover expressed similar views in a letter to the author of October 17, 1958. For Wilson's popular rating as a candidate see *Literary Digest*, LXV, June 12, 1920. *New York Times*, June 20, 1920.

⁵⁹ Wilson to Cummings, May 31, 1920. Cummings File, R. S. Baker Papers.

times before the latter's interview with Wilson, to prevent the President's candidacy in the interest of his life. When during his interview with Wilson, Glass expressed regret that the President's physical condition did not permit him to make a personal fight for the League, Wilson remained silent. The latter did not refrain, however, from commenting adversely on the qualifications of other leading candidates. At San Francisco, Glass labeled reports of President Wilson's third-term plans as "absurd."⁶⁰ A few days later Secretary of State Colby gave a different kind of an interview at San Francisco. Colby, who had seen Wilson most recently, speculated on June 30 about the possibility of renominating Wilson by acclamation following suspension of the rules of the convention.⁶¹

Colby's suggestion for drafting Wilson was communicated to the President. On the first day of the balloting, Colby sent a telegram to Wilson advising him that existing candidates could not command enough votes to secure the nomination. In these circumstances Colby intended, at an opportune time, to move for suspension of the rules to nominate Wilson—unless Wilson objected.⁶² That same night Wilson was in touch with Colby by telephone, suggesting that a council of close friends be convened the following morning for the purpose of executing Colby's plan.

Wilson's friends met on the mornings of July 3 and 4 to discuss Wilson's telephone message. Secretary of the Navy, Josephus Daniels attended both conferences and reported the frustration of the group. It was felt that the proposed plan could not "be realized

⁶⁰ *New York Times*, June 24, 1920. An account of Wilson's interview with Glass is found in the Glass Diary, June 19, 1920. Glass Papers. For the President's comments on other candidates see notes 42, 45 and 47 above. Glass recorded three appeals from Dr. Grayson on June 10, 16, and 19. Glass Diary. Grayson's preference for the Democratic nomination was John W. Davis. Diary of Chandler P. Anderson, July 3, 1920. Library of Congress.

⁶¹ Colby to *New York Times*' reporter. *New York Times*, July 1, 1920. Since no record seems available of the interview between Wilson and Colby of June 21, 1920, there is speculation whether Wilson communicated to Colby a possible way of resolving a "deadlock." Colby earlier indicated his willingness and eagerness to execute Wilson's strategy regarding the treaty. Colby to Wilson, April 24, 1920, and Wilson to Colby, April 25, Wilson Papers. Wilson arranged for Colby to be a delegate from the District of Columbia without the latter taking any initiative. Colby to Wilson, June 19, 1920. *Ibid.*

⁶² Code telegram, Colby to Wilson, July 2, 1920. Cummings File, R. S. Baker Papers.

and ought not be realized . . . in view of the conditions here [San Francisco] and there [Washington].”⁶³ All but Colby⁶⁴ held Wilson too ill for consideration as a candidate and agreed with Glass that the suggested course would ruin Wilson and the party. With heavy hearts Burleson and Cummings sent telegrams to Wilson on July 3 dashing his expectation for a convention draft. Whereas Burleson predicted the nomination of McAdoo, Cummings gave Cox the edge, adding that no “static condition” existed.⁶⁵ Wilson’s representatives at San Francisco thus minimized the premise on which Wilson’s course had been based—a deadlock. If the President entertained any further hope for a third nomination, it was doomed on the following day when Colby notified him—in behalf of the group—that the course he had suggested would not be followed since his friends were convinced that a motion to suspend the rules, which required a two-thirds majority, could be blocked by Wilson’s opponents. Asked by Colby to abide by the judgment of his friends in San Francisco, the President acquiesced⁶⁶—apparently to his later regret.

Wilson still was in a position to influence the nomination of the Democratic candidate, since twenty-two more ballots were to be cast before the deadlock was broken on July 6. Tumulty on July

⁶³ Letter of Daniels to Mrs. Daniels, July 4, 1920. Papers of Josephus Daniels, container 262, Library of Congress. For a fuller account of the meetings see Daniels, *op. cit.*, II, 555-557. The names of those present are given in the code telegram of Colby to Wilson, July 4, 1920. Cummings File, R. S. Baker Papers.

⁶⁴ Colby later recalled that he was very close to nominating Wilson. He held it likely that the convention would have “gone wild” and would have selected Woodrow Wilson as the Democratic candidate. Colby to R. S. Baker, June 19, 1930, Colby File, R. S. Baker Papers. In Bryan’s estimation the largest and most influential group at the convention “was made up of idolators—office holding and non office holding—whose chief object was to glorify the President and obey all his commandments.” Quoted in James Kerney, *The Political Education of Woodrow Wilson* (New York: The Century Co., 1926), 458.

⁶⁵ Code telegram, Cummings to Wilson, July 3, 1920. Cummings File, R. S. Baker Papers, Code telegram Burleson to Wilson, July 3. *Ibid.* Wilson subsequently composed, but never sent, a letter to Burleson (draft letter to Burleson of July 4, 1920, Woodrow Wilson Collection, Library of Princeton, papers collected by Charles L. Swem) reminiscent of the letter of inquiry he sent to Robert Lansing on February 7, prior to requesting the latter’s resignation. Lansing Papers, Library of Congress.

⁶⁶ Code telegrams, Colby to Wilson, July 4, 1920, and Wilson to Colby, July 5. Cummings File, R. S. Baker Papers.

5 urged him to act before it was too late, and even submitted names that could be put across with presidential endorsement.⁶⁷ Wilson refused to endorse any candidate.

The policies of Woodrow Wilson at the convention were remarkably consistent. He pursued his aim of preparing a referendum on the League, but otherwise left the convention "free and open."⁶⁸ In his view a referendum at the election depended on two conditions which the Democratic convention was to establish. First, the League of Nations had to be made the chief issue. In this Wilson was notably successful, with the help of his representatives at San Francisco. Furthermore, to focus the election on the League and sustain interest in it during the campaign, Wilson held that *he* must be chosen as Democratic standard bearer. His readiness to accept the nomination appears in a surviving document in his own handwriting entitled "The Solemn Referendum and Accounting of our Government" in which he raised the specific question whether his "services as President" were desired "for another four years."⁶⁹ This attempt failed, partly because Wilson's friends kept the President's name from being brought before the convention. They feared that a successful renomination would have amounted to signing their candidate's "death warrant,"⁷⁰ while an adverse vote would have resulted in humiliation for the President, a setback for the party, and a blow to the campaign on behalf of the League of Nations.

The question remains: did Wilson's convention strategy promise to bring about the participation of the United States in the League of Nations? Assuming his renomination and reelection, there would have remained the problem of translating the decision of the people into a favorable disposition on the part of the new

⁶⁷ Tumulty to Mrs. Wilson, July 5, 1920. Tumulty Papers. Tumulty believed that Governor Cox, William G. McAdoo, or Homer S. Cummings could have been "put across" with Wilson's encouragement.

⁶⁸ Wilson to Cummings, May 31, 1920. Cummings File, R. S. Baker Papers. Note Wilson's statement in 1913: "It is intolerable that any president should be permitted to determine who should succeed him." Letter of Woodrow Wilson to A. Mitchell Palmer, February 5, 1913. Palmer File, Wilson Papers.

⁶⁹ This document is filed under the date of October 3, 1920 (Wilson Papers) but was clearly composed prior to July 4, 1920. It is possible that Wilson drafted it after receiving Colby's telegram of July 2, 1920.

⁷⁰ Memorandum of Homer S. Cummings of January 18, 1929. Cummings File, R. S. Baker Papers.

Senate to advise and consent to the treaty on a basis acceptable to him. The constitution prescribes a two-thirds vote for passage of a treaty in the Senate, and even a successful "referendum" in the autumn election could obviously not have assured such a majority.⁷¹ Still, had Wilson run and won in 1920 he presumably would have carried with him a Democratic majority in the Senate. Since, according to a Senate rule of 1868, amendments and reservations are added by majority vote,⁷² the treaty could have been brought to vote in a form which might have made its passage possible. It appears that the President considered compromise possible if he could deal in good faith with co-operative Senate leaders of his own party.

Whether Wilson could have been re-elected is questionable. Certain of the backing of the people, he himself was confident. There seems to be a consensus, however, that in 1920 Wilson's popularity was at a low ebb. Newton D. Baker, perhaps the staunchest advocate of Wilson's policies, compared him to Abraham Lincoln who in 1864 suffered "the same sort of unpopularity."⁷³ Baker doubted if Wilson could make enough of a comeback to win. It is certain, nonetheless, that his candidacy would have turned the election into that "solemn referendum" on the League of Nations which he so ardently desired.

⁷¹ Even if the Democrats had won all senatorial contests in 1920, they would have remained short of a two-thirds majority in the Senate.

⁷² The Lodge reservations were added by a majority vote both in November, 1919, and March, 1920. Senator Glass blames a bare Republican majority in the Senate for the defeat of the treaty. *New York Times*, April 4, 1920, VII, 1:1.

⁷³ Newton D. Baker to D. C. Westenhaver, July 14, 1920. Newton D. Baker Papers, Library of Congress.