He Came To Consult With The People: Montana And Woodrow Wilson's 1919 Treaty Of Versailles Ratification Tour

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HE CAME TO CONSULT WITH THE PEOPLE: MONTANA AND WOODROW WILSON'S 1919 TREATY OF VERSAILLES RATIFICATION TOUR

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Date
At the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month, 1918, the fighting that had raged across Europe, destroying millions of lives and devastating a continent, ceased with the signing of an armistice. Life continued for the troops in their trenches and transports, the people on the home front in their workplaces and parlors, and the statesmen in their offices and meeting places, but the world had changed instantly around them. The physical fighting was over, but the diplomats and politicians were mobilizing. They were deployed to the peace conference, where fighting was carried out with words and pens, secret meetings, and friendly discussions over brandy and cigars.

While most countries sent ministers, ambassadors, diplomats, and advisors, Woodrow Wilson, President of the United States, felt there was no one who could represent America more skillfully or with more dedication than he could. He chose his own advisors and assistants, and without regard to the wishes of the Senate or historical precedent, the president traveled to Europe to personally negotiate the Treaty of Versailles. Wilson arrived in Paris ready and willing to promote his progressive and idealistic views, and most importantly, his Fourteen Points and the drive to include his League of Nations in the treaty.

While Wilson was adamant about the need for the League of Nations and other items contained in the Fourteen Points, other leaders were not convinced that such ideas were reasonable or even advisable. French Premier Georges Clemenceau captured the feelings of Wilson's opposition when he wryly stated, "God gave us the Ten Commandments, and we broke them. Wilson gives us the Fourteen points. We shall see."
The Treaty of Versailles negotiations created a number of good results. Wilson’s League of Nations was incorporated into the main body of the treaty. The first 26 articles of the Treaty of Versailles consisted of the charter for the League of Nations, and other articles contained items that dealt with the League. A number of new countries were created all across Europe, and many articles attempted to solve a variety of economic and transportation problems.

The document was by no means perfect; secret agreements and political maneuvering created the mandate system, under which the victors took control of significant portions of former colonies and areas of influence of the Central Powers. The imperialism of the mandate system violated Wilson’s Fourteen Points. Japan’s acquisition of China’s Shantung Province was a particularly unjust example of this questionably legitimate gain. The other Allies demanded a specific clause requiring that Germany take full and formal responsibility for the war with a “war guilt clause,” as well as demanding that Germany pay exorbitant reparations. The creation of new nations out of old Central Powers lands and the rhetoric of self-determination did not extend to any of the regions under Allied control, which created a certain bitterness among those hoping for the autonomy promised within the Fourteen Points.

When the peace talks ended, Wilson returned to the United States with his personally-negotiated Treaty of Versailles. He had accomplished the most important of his goals: the Treaty of Versailles contained the charter for the League of Nations, the most important of his Fourteen Points. The public, and
particularly the United States Senate, however, had a number of fairly significant reservations about the treaty and its various components.

When Wilson returned, he was facing a hostile congress; the Republicans had taken control of the senate. A personal enemy of Wilson, Henry Cabot Lodge, was the head of the powerful Foreign Relations Committee, and he used his position to stack the committee with a number of influential senators, mostly from the Irreconcilable faction. Having so many senators on the committee that would not support passage of the treaty in any form was a significant obstacle for Wilson and his loyal Democrats. Indeed, many of the Democrats and sympathetic Republicans had reservations about a number of issues as well.

For the Senate, the primary issue was Article X of the League of Nations Charter. As an article that deals expressly with military issues, it was a point of contention among senators, since it was the congressional power to declare war that would potentially be infringed upon. Article X, in its entirety, states, "The Members of the League undertake to respect and preserve as against external aggression the territorial integrity and existing political independence of all Members of the League. In case of any such aggression or in case of any threat or danger of such aggression the Council shall advise upon the means by which this obligation shall be fulfilled."2

The contents of Article X were the primary source of treaty opposition. The Senators (and the public) were concerned that this article would force the United States to send troops abroad to become involved in foreign conflicts, depriving America of its sovereignty. Many were concerned that it could create an
autonomous international police force, which, as Thomas Bailey suggests, was
worrisome because "a superstate with a superarmy and a superstaff might even
be tempted to knock the superdaylights out of the United States." Also, the article
seemed to suggest that if an area were to rebel against it's colonial ruler, the US
could be required to help quell the uprising; as a nation that broke from Great
Britain with a violent revolution to gain its own independence, that was an
unacceptable possibility.  

The voting structure of the League of Nations also engendered a
significant amount of controversy. Each of the Commonwealth nations of Great
Britain was granted a vote, as were some of its territories, giving Great Britain six
votes, while the United States would only possess one. The unfairness of the six
votes to one was a problem for most Americans, but the additional question of
race made the issue particularly abhorrent to certain groups. James Reed, a
senator from Missouri, described the situation in his own uniquely racist way:
"Think of submitting questions involving the very life of the United States to a
tribunal on which a nigger from Liberia, a nigger from Honduras, a nigger from
India... each have votes equal to that of the great United States." Of all of the
issues the public focused on, the League voting structure was a popular source
for scathing editorials and political cartoons.

Each of the problems Americans saw in the Treaty of Versailles, and
particularly the League of Nations, affected specific groups within the American
population. For the German-Americans, the problems were painfully clear. That
Germany was forced to assume full responsibility for the war was of great
concern; it angered and insulted German immigrants. The reparations payments were also insulting, but engendered animosity because they were intended to place such a burden on the German economy that it would not be able to recover for years. Thirty-three billion dollars, along with other economic penalties, was an outrageous amount, and many German-Americans were not willing to accept such an offensive demand.6

Irish-Americans joined the German-Americans in loudly protesting certain parts of the treaty and the League. The wording of Article X made it clear that regional uprisings were considered a threat and that the League could require its members to send troops to put down rebellions. Given that the Easter Rising had taken place only three years previously, in 1916, the Irish-Americans felt that Wilson’s rhetorical commitment to self-determination was no more than empty words. Many other Americans joined in the protest of the issue; they saw the hypocrisy of agreeing to put down regional uprisings when the United States was created through colonial rebellion. Wilson won no friends among the Irish and German immigrants, referring to them in his speeches as “hyphenated Americans”.7

The general population was concerned about many of the same issues as the senators: most Americans, so soon after their involvement in the Great War, did not want to be required to send sons to fight abroad; their resistance created yet another faction that opposed the provisions of Article X. After the war, a rising isolationist sentiment among the general population also fed resistance to the imperialistic tendencies of the treaty; Japan’s acquisition of the Shantung
region gave Americans an example of a land-hungry colonial state on which to focus their discontent. Of course, partisanship was an issue; the Republicans simply didn’t want the Democrats to have a successful peace treaty to promote in the 1920 campaigns.⁸

Despite the attention given to the treaty by the print media and the people, there were a number of other issues clamoring for attention in the public consciousness. There were labor strikes across the country, and the people were struggling under an unusually high cost of living even without losing their wages due to the massive strikes. The national finances were in questionable shape, both the war and the changes from peacetime production to wartime production and back had left the economy in disarray. Wilson had recently signed Prohibition into law, and violence and bootlegging, were already on the rise.

The public’s divided attention created a problem for Wilson. With the opposition he and his treaty faced in the Senate, he could not afford to risk losing popular support due to other issues. He hoped to regain broad approval for the treaty, and his solution was to take his case directly to the American people. In order to garner the support necessary to force members of congress to vote for his plan, Wilson planned to embark on a journey that would take him over eight thousand miles, and more than a dozen states.⁹ His proposed route included two stops in Montana: Billings and Helena. Newspaper coverage of Wilson’s speaking tour provides insight into Montana’s political landscape and the importance of print media and public opinion on the fight for ratification of the Treaty of Versailles.
Wilson and his advisors planned a grand speaking tour to promote ratification of the Treaty of Versailles (see Figure 1). Leaving from Washington, DC, the president boarded a train that would travel to the west coast and back. The president, his wife, and advisors would all live on the train for the duration of the tour. The president's Special consisted of the presidential party's private cars, a car for the secretaries and secret service, another for the reporters, and dining and baggage cars. Although the train was as comfortable as space and practicality allowed, it was far from ideal for the aging president. Over the course of the trip, it would be in nearly constant motion, except for planned appearances and necessary stops for maintenance and supplies; the grueling pace, less than ideal living conditions, and magnitude of the undertaking combined to form a uniquely demanding environment. The stress of the trip was a major concern; Wilson was 63 years old and already in questionable health. Wilson's doctor had advised against the undertaking, but the determined president ignored his warnings in favor of rallying support for his treaty. Despite his poor health and his normal duties as chief executive, Wilson began his journey west.
As he made his first addresses, the opposition senators in Washington were carefully considering their options. The president’s speaking tour was not allowed to go unchallenged by his opponents in the Senate. Hiram Johnson, an outspoken isolationist senator from California, followed Wilson’s tour route, speaking in towns a few days after the president had passed through (see Figure 2). Johnson was joined by other senators at various stops on his tour, including William Borah (R-Idaho), Joseph McCormick (R-Illinois), James Reed (D-Missouri), James Wadsworth Jr. (R-New York), and Miles Poindexter (R-Washington). The anti-treaty tour had a broad appeal; both Democratic and Republican senators from all over the country had joined together to respond to Wilson’s pro-ratification message, and they drew very large crowds. The senators outlined a long list of problems with the treaty, including the promise of the Shantung province of China to Japan, the voting structure that gave Britain
six votes to one US vote, and the provision that could require the US to send troops abroad. The senators trailed behind the president, when their duties allowed, presenting the other side of the issue to the people.

Figure 2. On A Cold Trail, from the *Livingston Enterprise*.¹⁵

Henry Cabot Lodge was the senator who led the opposition to the Treaty as Wilson presented it; he refused on principle to accept Wilson’s unaltered version, and unlike Johnson and the other touring senators, Lodge
stayed in Washington DC to continue the fight in the senate. Tensions in the Senate were palpable; the Republican Party had a majority, but only by two votes. Sixteen of those Republicans were "irreconcilables" who refused to accept the League of Nations in any form. Of the rest of the Republicans, "perhaps as many as ten favored moderate revisions but would support the League, and nearly eighteen aligned with Lodge . . . in wanting major alterations as a condition for joining the organization. The rest fell somewhere between the two groups."16 The Democrats were also divided, Wilson demanded that the Democrats support his version, but some of them were uncomfortable with it.

Lodge saw the benefit of delaying the treaty vote; the more time before the vote, the more senators he could sway to his side. He did everything he could to delay the treaty vote; including using his position as chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to pack the committee with irreconcilables and other opposition senators. Lodge was willing to do whatever was necessary to delay the treaty in the senate: "when the treaty came before the Foreign Relations Committee, Lodge read all 264 pages of the text into the official record, a stall tactic that required two weeks, drove everyone (including the stenographers) out of the room, and prevented the hearings from beginning..."17 The opposition Wilson faced in the senate drove him to embark on his speaking tour to persuade the public, hoping public opinion would help pressure the Senate into accepting his version of the treaty.
Wilson's tour was news even before it officially began. In early September, the *Billings Gazette* ran a political cartoon depicting the public, hat in hand, offering a diffident opinion to a rather aloof-looking Wilson, "If you want my advice, --everybody knows about the high cost of living and I'm sure they would rather you'd stay in Washington and *do* something than come out and make speeches to them (see Fig. 3)."

The editorialists and cartoonists had not forgotten that Wilson had ignored the senate's wishes when he went to Paris without their recommended advisors. That harsh sentiment, however, seemed to mellow as the date of the president's arrival grew nearer. The Wilson Day committee decided that $2,000 would be needed to help defray the costs of the festivities, and the committee claimed "little difficulty is anticipated in raising the desired amount."
On September 4, the mayor of Billings issued the following proclamation:
The city of Billings [sic] will have the honor of entertaining the
president of the United States Thursday Sept. 11, 1919. I hereby
declare Thursday forenoon, Sept. 11, 1919, a half holiday and request
that all city offices, stores and business houses and the city schools be
closed until noon on said day. I also suggest that the city be
appropriately decorated and that all business houses and residences
display the national colors. I hereby affix my hand and seal this fourth
day of September, 1919. W. Lee Mains, Mayor.\(^{20}\)

It was necessary to proclaim the half-holiday because of the extent of the
preparations, many city officials, teachers, students, and other citizens were
needed to help arrange and take part in the welcoming festivities.\(^{21}\) The town
was concerned with its planning, but the officials of Billings chose to distinguish
themselves by not adhering to the usual ceremonies with which other cities had
greeted the President. “Absolute lack of usual formalities is the keynote of the
plans being made by the committee in charge of arrangements for President
Wilson’s visit...there will be no public reception, except that that accorded the
chief executive during his brief ride through the streets from his car to the
fairgrounds auditorium where he is to deliver his address.”\(^{22}\) The timing of
Wilson day was convenient, at least in terms of public attendance; the week
that the president came to town, Billings was also hosting the Midland Empire
Fair.
People from neighboring communities arranged for special trains to carry them to the special Wilson Day festivities. There were also other visitors arriving by train; two secret service agents, the advance security detail for the president, arrived on the night of September 7. The secret service was there, in part, to insure that the cadre of 20 Yellowstone County veterans of the World War would be prepared to act as part of the president's bodyguard. The war veterans, members of the Foreign Legion who were to work as ushers in the auditorium, and select members of the President's welcoming motorcade were "sworn in with full powers as special police. They have also been given the authority of secret service men and will assist both the local police and the secret service men who are accompanying the president."

With only two days before the president's arrival, September 9 was a day filled with preparations. Benches were installed in the auditorium where the president was to speak, and flags and bunting affixed to the rostrum. The people of Billings had prepared their town as well as they could. "Thousand [sic] of flags of the allied nations, countless yards of bunting and endless strings of brightly colored streamers strung across the streets . . . and festooned from window ledges and cornices constitute a silent tribute to the nation's chief executive." The principals of Billings schools were even given specific directions to ensure that the parade routes were filled with spectators; when the students were released from their classes, they were to be taken to specific locations along the president's route in order to watch the motorcade.
That the president had chosen Billings as one of the stops on his tour suggested that Billings had a certain status, and the town was prepared to prove its worth. Everything, from the decorations to the menu was planned to the smallest detail. The president was due to arrive early in the morning, and he would have time for breakfast aboard his train before it was time for his speech. The organizers of the grand event decided that President Wilson should have the opportunity for a Montana breakfast. They asked Ben “Pack Saddle” Greenough, an old man who had been a trapper and a guide, to provide trout for the president’s group. He “had made the trip by packhorse to Beartooth lake, where he caught the trout, packed them in the way his experience in the wilds had taught him, and loading them onto his horses had taken the trout back to Billings, to be [there] in time to greet the president.”

Others from the committee procured fruit and other native foods to complete the breakfast arrangements for the presidential party. Mrs. Sam V. Stewart, the wife of the governor, also had a twenty-pound rainbow trout to present to Mrs. Wilson; the fish was part of a gift of grayling and trout from the superintendent of state fish hatcheries and the city of Anaconda.

The excitement continued to mount throughout the day, as the president drew closer to Billings. The president’s journey was carefully reported, even down to the smallest of details. The Billings Gazette included a short article from Miles City, Montana: “President Wilson’s special train passed through Miles City at 10 o’clock tonight without stopping. A large crowd that had gathered at the depot in hope of getting a glimpse of the president saw only a
darkened car speed by. The president evidently had retired. While much of the city was involved in preparations to welcome Wilson, there were still those opposed to the Treaty of Versailles, and those opponents were working to present another view of the treaty. That same day, Montana Republican leaders announced that they were inviting Hiram Johnson to speak in Billings and Helena, “party leaders here express[ed] the belief that the senator should visit each city which the president visits, giving the people an opportunity to hear both sides of the league argument.”

The Gazette printed a list of seven questions for President Wilson; they chose the most vital of the “sixty important queries he should answer.” Taken as a group, the questions provide a reasonable summary of revisionist sentiment and a good example of the kind of rhetoric they employed. “First: Do you, Mr. Wilson, intend to become a candidate for a third term as president of the United States?” The list began with a simple question, likely something asked out of general political curiosity. The first question is the only one presented with no clear political intention. The second through seventh questions all show a distinctly reservationist bias.

“Second: What objections do you raise against the reservations to the league of nations covenant recommended in the report of the foreign relations committee of the senate?” The second question the Gazette poses is likely a genuine question, but the reference to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and by extension Henry Cabot Lodge, hints at the tense relationship between the Executive and Legislative branches. Wilson had
never explained why he objected so strongly to the revisions suggested by the Republicans or even his fellow Democrats.

"Third: Why, in view of the fact that after the peace treaty and the covenant of the league of nations were practically completed in Versailles, several changes in the treaty were made at the instigation of the German government, should the United States be denied the same privilege?" The third question is a rhetorical device; all parties to the treaty contributed and made changes, not just Germany. There was never any chance that the United States would not be allowed to make changes to the treaty.

"Fourth: Just what did you mean by covenants openly arrived at, and do you guarantee that there are in existence no secret treaties or agreements, other than those already disclosed, that may come before the proposed league of nations for enforcement?" Considering that the United States had just been involved in a conflict in which secret alliances had played a large part in widening the scope of the war, this was a pertinent question. It refers to Article X of the League of Nations covenant, which concerns the potential deployment of American troops abroad as part of League peacekeeping activities. It seems slightly unfair, however, to demand that Wilson guarantee that no secret agreements exist, when, by definition, he would not be aware of them.

"Fifth: Does not your admittedly vast knowledge of history tell you that every republic in the history of the world, excepting the few existing today, met destruction because of interference in the affairs of other nations, which resulted ultimately in foreign influences becoming the dominating and
disintegrating factor in the government of the republics themselves?" This question hints at Wilson’s career as an academic, and references the republican governments of Athens and Rome. It clearly illustrates the rising isolationist sentiment among postwar Americans, and hearkens back to George Washington’s cautions against foreign entanglements.

"Sixth: What is your objection to the proposed amendment under which the vote of the United States in the affairs of the league of nations would be increased from one to six, to equal that of Great Britain?" The sixth question deals with one of the most widely opposed portions of the treaty. The proposed amendment to change the voting structure was widely supported by Republicans, the general public, and even a small minority of Democrats. Wilson had never explained his opposition to this particular amendment, and that lack of communication created suspicion of his motives.

"Seventh: Will you agree to reservations to the treaty and covenant sanctioned by Democratic senators at Washington?" When the treaty was delivered to the Senate, Wilson demanded that all Democratic senators support his unaltered version of the treaty. The implications were serious; it seemed that any senator who supported amendments or changes would be considered a betrayer of the party and the president. It seems that the intent behind this question was to determine whether or not the president objected to Republicans meddling with his treaty, or if he was opposed to all revisions, even those proposed by his own party. It also reminded Democratic readers that some of their party’s senators also disagreed with the president.
The next morning, the headlines loudly proclaimed the magnitude of Wilson's visit, "9,000 Hear Wilson; Thousands More Unable to Jam Way Into Auditorium," "Streets Thronged as President Heads Parade Through City On Way To Expound Peace Pact," and "City Handles Crowd Easily; Largest Throng Ever in Billings Well Cared for." Wilson's speech was one of the most important events in Billings history; it was recognized as an important city, important enough to play host to the president of the United States. The hour-long speech was concerned mostly with the ideology behind the League of Nations, and the importance of passing the Treaty of Versailles so that peaceful, internationalist ideologies could prevail over warlike societies. Wilson delivered his speech to a packed auditorium, and concluded with these words,

I tell you, my fellow citizens, the whole world is in [a] state where one can feel that there are hot tears upon every cheek and that these hot tears are tears of sorrow, but they are also tears of hope. It is amazing that throughout the sorrows of mankind, "hope springs eternal in the human breast," and God knows that men and particularly governments have done everything they can to kill the hope in the human heart, but is has not died. It is one of the great forces of mankind. I anticipate your verdict to what I am pledged with deep and serious thought, to satisfy the heart of the world.

The president returned to his train, and continued west. His next official speech was in Helena, but the next stop on his journey was Livingston, which offered Wilson another chance to sway the people of Montana.

The stop at Livingston offered a completely different set of circumstances from those of the speech at Billings. First, the train was not scheduled to stay for very long, so no one from the presidential party would leave the train. Second, the president had ceased to make speeches from the back of the train,
whether it was to save his health or to save time is unclear.\textsuperscript{44} When the train stopped in rail yard at Livingston, it was met by two thousand people, all eagerly awaiting a glimpse of the president. When Mr. and Mrs. Wilson appeared, they were greeted with cheers and bouquets of flowers presented by two young girls.\textsuperscript{45} A group of children waving small flags caught Wilson’s eye, and he said, “Look at the children. It seems to me there are more children here this afternoon than at any place we have visited.”\textsuperscript{46} Unfortunately for the crowd at Livingston, the president’s physician advised against delivering a short speech. Rather, the president spent the short stop shaking hands and talking with the people on the platform. Wilson then boarded the train once again, and headed to Helena for his evening speech.\textsuperscript{47}

When the special train arrived in Helena, it was greeted by yet another enthusiastic crowd. There was a special “flower reception” for Mr. and Mrs. Wilson that greatly impressed the members of the presidential party. “One hundred little girls, charmingly dressed and carrying flags, showered the president and Mrs. Wilson with the flowers when they stepped off their special train. Other blossoms were wound into a floral rope... and decorated the automobile[s].”\textsuperscript{48} Missoula women had shipped a five foot packing crate full of dahlias, asters, gladiolas, golden glows, pansies, sweet peas, and roses. The organizers were very specific about the source and generosity of their gift: “The city gave generously from her wealth of blossoms to aid the less fortunate parts of the state... people on both sides of the political fence contributed their flowers make Missoula’s fragrant message worth of the Garden City.”\textsuperscript{49}
Wilson was escorted from the train to a waiting car, along with the rest of his party. The presidential cars were part of a parade of more than one hundred automobiles that took the assorted notables from the Northern Pacific Railway depot north of town to the Marlow Theater downtown.\textsuperscript{50} There were 400 people seated on the stage with Wilson, and the rest of the theater was filled to hear him speak. The governor of Montana, Samuel V. Stewart, briefly introduced the president, who then spoke for an hour and a half about the Treaty of Versailles.

Again, Wilson's speech was less concerned with political realities than with the broader ideological context of the Treaty of Versailles. He did, however, make certain attempts to better communicate his reasoning to his Montana audience,

Suppose that the land titles of Montana were clearly enough stated and somewhere recorded, but yet there was no way of enforcing them; do you know what would happen? Every one of you would enforce his own land titles. You used to go armed out here long ago. (Applause). If this is a poor speech, I hope none of you do tonight. (Applause). And you would resume the habit if there was nobody to guarantee your legal titles; you would have to resort to the habit if society should not guarantee them. You have got to see to it that others respect them for your own protection; and that was the condition of Europe and will be the condition of Europe again if these settled land titles which we have laid out are not guaranteed by organized society; and the only organized society that can guarantee them is a society of nations...\textsuperscript{51}

His speech to Helena contained much more specific discussions of the issues than his speech at Billings, but it was still largely vague on the most divisive subjects. When the president had finished his address, his audience of more than a thousand cheered until he had left the building to return to his train.\textsuperscript{52} He returned to his car, which had been bedecked with flowers during his speech.
The women of Helena, who had provided the flowers and decorations for the theater and the motorcade, also provided more food for the presidential party.53

There was one notable issue with Wilson’s Montana itinerary. At the time, Butte was one of the largest cities in Montana, and voted overwhelmingly Democratic. It would have seemed logical, then, for Wilson to speak in Butte. However, Butte was home to the powerful Anaconda Mining Company, a massive monopoly that dominated the world copper market and held an even tighter grip on the daily life of many Montanans. Marcus Daly, the Copper King who founded the company, had died in 1900, but his company continued many of his policies. Even more than a decade after Daly’s death, the Anaconda Company either controlled or exerted significant influence over seven of the eight daily papers in Montana. Because of the Company’s influence and its large percentage of Irish-American and German-American immigrants, Butte was strongly opposed to Wilson and the Treaty of Versailles. The president’s advisors chose to bypass Butte in order to avoid what would likely be a complete disaster.

In 1919, Montana newspapers were not entirely free agents. The majority of the large dailies were influenced by the Anaconda Copper Mining Company and its agenda, and most of the other newspapers were small-run weeklies printed by individuals and organizations to promote specific agendas. The people of Montana knew which newspapers supported which perspective, though, and many of the newspapers made at least some attempt to represent the different sides of any given issue.
Wilson had spoken of the journey as a chance to deal directly with the people, but some who attended his Billings speech were disappointed in the chief executive. The editorial section of the Billings Gazette showed that dissatisfaction quite clearly. The authors expressed concerns that the president had not directly engaged their questions; the hotly contested parts of the treaty were glossed over in Wilson’s speech, and none of their Seven Questions were addressed. There was no mention of the Shantung question, nor of the issue of American troops abroad, nor mention of the voting structure of the league itself.

One editorial directly addresses that dissatisfaction:

Mr. Wilson, in short, did not explain anything of vital consequence. So far as public opinion in the Midland Empire concerning the treaty is concerned, it is as it was before the president came. There are those who were swayed by the sentimental and visionary and idealistic character of Mr. Wilson’s words, who fell subject to his ability to sway an audience with gracefully worded but unsubstantial sentences. But these are not many.  

Wilson’s impassioned speech had a significant emotional impact, but the lack of focus on the controversial sections of the treaty did not provide opponents with a reason to change their opinion. A person in the crowd said, “Well, I wasn’t ever very strong for this league stuff, but now I know it shouldn’t be passed without reservations.” Still others wanted to know why Wilson demanded that his treaty—without any modifications—be the one ratified by congress. In the views of some, an unmodified Treaty of Versailles was tantamount to an attack on the Constitution.  

The president was not without his supporters, however. Some of the people in the crowd expressed their outright support, and even those who may
have had reservations were impressed by his speaking ability. One commenter said, "More popular men may have spoken in Billings, but never one who was more sincere." The editorials, which were largely critical of the League (unsurprising in a republican-leaning newspaper), were nevertheless open to the idea, as long as modifications were made to Wilson’s version of the treaty. One man who had already supported the League was vindicated by the speech, saying, "Well, I was for the league of nations anyway, and now I’m for it stronger than ever." Billings met the president with all the enthusiasm and ceremony due a visiting president, but the people still held a myriad of opinions about his treaty.

Editorials in Helena painted a much more positive picture of the president’s plan for peace, saying, “The League of Nations is the only plan which has ever been submitted to the world as a hope of cessation of bloody strife. Those who seek to emasculate or reject it ought to realize that they are withholding from a wrecked world, a pledge of hope and faith in mankind.” They also evidenced a hostile attitude toward treaty opponents in congress, because, “now as a climax to all the heavy load of responsibility, he is forced to tour the country and speak directly to the people in order that the mass of misrepresentation as to the peace treaty and the League of Nations, put forth by partisans, trifling with the future of the world, may be straightened.” Another Helena editorialist simply referred to opposition senators as “the peace-wrecking chatterboxes.”
While only three Montana cities played host to Wilson, every other newspaper put its own particular slant on the president, his motivations, and the merits of the treaty. The *Butte Daily Bulletin* dedicated nearly a full page to a list of more than fifteen accusatory rhetorical questions, as well as printing editorials that were little more than a collection of blatant ad hominem attacks.\(^{63}\) The *Anaconda Standard* explicitly stated, "He should feel at home here. He is among his friends today."\(^{64}\)

While many newspaper accounts also commented on Mrs. Wilson, their remarks were generally limited to what she was wearing and that she seemed very grateful for the gifts of flowers and food they received at nearly every stop. Mr. Wilson was also subject to the same scrutiny of personal appearance; a *Billings Gazette* article quotes a bystander, "Gee! Look, Skinney! The president's all freckled! An' he's pretty near bald-headed, too!"\(^{65}\) Statewide, the coverage of Wilson and his tour ranged from serious, detailed accounts of the action to sarcastic, name-calling editorials. Various Montana newspapers also carried stories from other, larger newspapers. Some of those stories were also of questionable neutrality, such as this short piece from the *New York World*:

"With Mr. Walsh's 20,000,000 Irish-Americans and the late Prof. Munsterberg’s 25,000,000 German Americans and all the American-American followers of Senators Knox, Borah, & Co., against it, it’s a wonder the League of Nations has any friends at all."\(^{66}\)

One of the forms of journalism that Montanans were exposed to was the political cartoon. Each of the major dailies printed at least one political cartoon
per day, and sometimes more. During the month of September, the political
cartoons were dedicated almost exclusively to Wilson, his speaking tour, and the
Treaty of Versailles. Depending on the newspaper, the cartoons ranged from
vehemently anti-Wilson to fervently pro-treaty. The majority of the cartoons were
from major newspapers on the East Coast, reprinted in smaller papers all around
the country, so none were specifically related to Montanans’s experiences,
although they did influence Montanans.

The local Montana papers did, however, run their own ads for local
businesses and organizations. By the second week of September, 1919, Billings
and Helena papers were packed with advertisements for Wilson Day specials
and sales. Everything from shoes to gems were sold with Wilson-related
taglines, whether they were related to his visit or his policies.\textsuperscript{67} Newspapers also
ran advertisements advocating particular political views. For example, the
\textit{Billings Gazette} published a full-page message from the local Irish Victory Fund,
a part of the Friends of Irish Freedom and Associated Societies, accusing the
Treaty of Versailles of violating fundamental American ideals (see Fig. 4).\textsuperscript{68} In
1919, the only widely accessible form of media was the newspaper, and both
proponents and opponents of the Treaty of Versailles used the medium to its
fullest extent.
What Would
WASHINGTON
SAY

What Would
JEFFERSON
SAY

What Would
LINCOLN
SAY

If asked to surrender to a League of European and Asiatic Nations the right of final decision upon matters affecting the life, liberty and happiness of the American people?

If asked to subordinate to expediency those principles of human liberty for which Washington suffered at Valley Forge, which Jefferson wrote into the Declaration of Independence, and which Lincoln extended to the black man?

 THEIR ANSWER WOULD BE THAT WHICH IS IN THE HEART OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE TODAY!

God Grant That the Senate May
Hear and Understand That Answer!

When President Wilson went abroad to carry into effect his fourteen points, he went with the ideals of Washington, of Jefferson, and of Lincoln upon his lips; in matchless phrase he had voiced the right of all peoples to self-determination, to choose the form of government under which they desired to live. He went with a challenge upon his lips for any nation which might seek to rule another nation by military force.

He went, the spokesman for open diplomacy, carrying with him the hopes of humanity. He met, according to his own statement, secret agreements and secret treaties which had previously been consummated by European and Asiatic Powers; he went into executive session and the Peace Conference became a secret committee of four men. The ideals of the United States of America were in a minority of one.

To use his own phrase, "Old entanglements of every kind stood in the way—promises which governments had made to one another in the days when might and right were confused and the power of the victor was without restraint."

He came back bringing with him not the Wilson plan for a League of Nations but a British plan presented as a substitute for the Wilson plan and adopted in lieu thereof. He came back stating that the proposed Covenant of the League of Nations is not all that he desired it to be, but, in effect, that if it was the best he could get.

Where Principle and Expediency Conflicted, the Result Was Compromise!

And this is the proposed League which is now before the Senate for acceptance or rejection.

Already the Italian Government which assented to it has fallen.

Already the man who is known as the maker of government in Italy is denouncing it in unmeasured terms.

Already, with a keenness following centuries of persecution, the Irish among our citizenship have awakened to the fact that American institutions are threatened; that participation in such a League as proposed would mean partnership between the United States of America and the tyrant Empires of Europe and Asia, with the European and Asiatic partners the sole beneficiaries; that the boys now in primary schools over the length and breadth of this land must be prepared to march at future day to safeguard the territorial integrity of Empires which are none of our concern; that if the League goes into effect, the United States of America no longer continues a benefactor of peoples struggling for liberty, but becomes an international policeman, or is relegated to the position of the dissenting minority.

If Washington or Jefferson or Lincoln Could But Speak Today!
The Ideal Survives! Voice It!

PUBLISHED FROM
THE IRISH VICTORY FUND
UNDER THE AUSTRALIS OF
FRIENDS OF IRISH FREEDOM
and ASSOCIATED SOCIETIES

Figure 4. The Irish Victory Fund's full page advertisement in the Billings Gazette.
Wilson’s journey to convince the people that the original Treaty of Versailles was the best choice for America was cut short not long after the president concluded his speech in Pueblo, Colorado. His health, already poor before the strenuous journey, could not withstand the rigors of several thousand miles of rail travel and dozens of hour-long speeches. He collapsed on his train on September 26. He was taken back to Washington, DC, where he nearly died of a stroke a few days later. He served out the rest of his term as an invalid until William Harding took office in 1922.

Two versions of the treaty were presented to the Senate on November 19, 1919. The first version contained Lodge’s revisions; it failed, but the irreconcilables and the Democrats (except for four that refused to follow Wilson’s orders to oppose Lodge’s version of the treaty) provided enough votes to defeat the treaty. The second vote was on was Wilson’s unaltered version, and it too failed. On March 19, 1920, the treaty again came to the Senate for a third and final time. Twenty-one Democrats refused to side with the president and voted for the amended treaty, but it was still seven votes short of the majority needed, and the third version also failed. Despite Wilson’s speaking tour, the opposition senators’ speaking tour, countless hours of debate, numerous revisions, and several votes, the United States of America never ratified the Treaty of Versailles.

When President Wilson came to Montana, it was a recognition of the importance, not only of the state, but also of the people. Billings got a chance to prove itself as an important city, Helena reaffirmed its position as the political
center of Montana, and Livingston got a chance to host, however briefly, a sitting United States president. With their Republican-leaning newspaper, press coverage of Wilson’s visit to Billings was representative of Montanans who opposed Wilson. Helena, with the Independent’s enthusiastic praise, represented the Montanans who supported him. Livingston’s coverage reflected a fairly evenhanded, issue-centered account of Mr. Wilson’s time in Montana. It is through the experiences of these three towns that it is possible to gain a better understanding of Montana’s reaction to President Wilson’s dramatic speaking tour.

Historians of the interwar period have studied Wilson, his determination to pass his own version of the Treaty of Versailles, and his speaking tour in light of the United States’ failure to ratify the treaty. In Thomas Bailey’s seminal work, Woodrow Wilson and the Lost Peace, he describes Wilson’s fundamental error:

Wilson had a noble vision but he made the mistake of thinking that mankind, without the proper preparation and education, could attain a kind of international millennium at a single bound...He took it for granted that our people would respond gladly to his gospel of unselfishness, speedily assume responsibilities commensurate with their new power, and willing shoulder burdens from which they could expect no direct gains.69

Ultimately, Wilson’s idealism and heroic efforts to rally the public to his cause were not enough to overcome partisanship, fear, and sheer wrong-headedness, and the result was one of the greatest tragedies in American diplomatic history.


8 Howard Jones, *Crucible of Power*. 111.


13 Ibid.


16 Ibid., 112.

17 Ibid., 112.

18 "Deeds, Not Talk," Billings Gazette, September 1, 1919.

19 "$2,000 Needed For Expenses of Wilson Visit," Billings Gazette, September 2, 1919.


21 "Children To Parade When Wilson Arrives," Billings Gazette, September 6, 1919.

22 Ibid.


25 Ibid.

26 "Honor Guard is Picked by Vets; Service Men Will Have Police Power While On Guard Duty," Billings Gazette, September 10, 1919.

27 Ibid.


29 "To the Principals of the Billings Schools," Billings Gazette, September 10, 1919.

30 "Midland Empire Products Added to President's Larder," Billings Gazette, September 12, 1919.

31 The baskets of food presented to Wilson also included cantaloupes, watermelons, strawberries, apples, tomatoes, cucumbers, string beans, pieplant [rhubarb], Montana baking potatoes, and eight ducks, in addition to the 100 trout. "Wilson To Eat Native Trout For Breakfast" Billings Gazette, September 10, 1919; "Midland Empire Products Added to President’s Larder," Billings Gazette, September 12, 1919.
32 It is unknown whether the president and Mrs. Wilson actually enjoyed eating fish. Hopefully, given the amount of fish presented to them in Montana alone, there was someone in the party who liked trout. “20-Pound Rainbow Trout for Mrs. Wilson,” Billings Gazette, September 11, 1919.

33 “Passes Miles City at 10:00.” Billings Gazette, September 11, 1919.

34 “Johnson To Be Asked To Speak In Montana,” Billings Gazette, September 10, 1919.

35 “Seven Questions For Mr. Wilson.” Billings Gazette, September 11, 1919.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 The majority of the Billings Gazette on 12 September 1919 was dedicated to Wilson’s speeches in the state, including those made at Livingston and Helena. Headlines taken from pages 1-2 of the Billings Gazette, September 12, 1919.

43 “Full Text of Woodrow Wilson’s Talk At Auditorium”, Billings Gazette, September 12, 1919.

44 “Executive May Not Speak Here,” Livingston Enterprise, September 6, 1919.


46 Ibid.

47 “Two Thousand Greet Wilson in Livingston.”

49 The rest of the state was in the midst of a drought, making Missoula one of the only sources of flowers in Montana. Butte and Helena papers specifically acknowledged Missoula for their gift. Ibid.

50 "All Prepared For President's Visit Mr. Wilson To Be In Capital Tonight," *Helena Independent*, September 11, 1919.

51 "Cheers of Thousands Ring In His Ears As Chief Executive Passes Through Streets Of Capital." *Helena Independent*, September 12, 1919.

52 "Cheers of Thousands Ring In His Ears As Chief Executive Passes Through Streets Of Capital." *Helena Independent*, September 12, 1919.


58 "What Some of the Crowd Said."

59 Ibid.


61 Ibid.


