

WILSON, RAPPARD, THE PARIS PEACE CONFERENCE,  
AND THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

The scarcity of food during the winter of 1918-19, the continuing blockade of Germany, the concern about sufficient tonnage to transport the necessary supplies across the ocean, and the coal crisis in the winter of 1919-20, were all temporary problems of little long-range significance, urgent at the time when they arose and in need of immediate solutions, but forgotten as soon as the emergency had passed. It was very different with another set of issues which occupied the responsible statesmen and politicians during those months, namely those of terminating the war, making peace, and creating a world organization to prevent the recurrence of war. The United States and its President, Woodrow Wilson, played a most significant role in the debates and decisions concerning these far-reaching matters, and those decisions touched Switzerland in many different ways.

As soon as the Central Powers began to extend their peace feelers in the fall of 1918, Washington started to debate seriously the question of a meeting place for the coming peace conference. It was clear that the French strongly desired to have the conference in Paris, but President Wilson did not think much of this suggestion. He preferred a neutral venue. In late October he wavered between Lausanne and Geneva, both cities in French Switzerland on the Lake of Geneva. Colonel House was in Europe to make the preliminary arrangements and prevailed upon the Allies to tentatively agree to hold the peace conference in Switzerland. He secured the assent of the English Prime Minister, David Lloyd George; French Premier Minister Georges Clemenceau did not argue the matter strongly, and Vittorio Orlando stated that Italy would vote for any place favored by the United States. The matter had already reached the point of Switzerland being approached on the question of suitable accommodations, the installment of a central telegraph and telephone service, and the guarantee of freedom from censorship, when Wilson abruptly changed his mind. On November 7 he cabled House: "On second thought it occurs to me that Versailles may be the best place for the peace conference where the friendly influences and authorities in control rather than Switzerland which is saturated with every poisonous element and open to every hostile influence in Europe."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Wilson to House, Oct. 28, 1918, Lansing to House, Nov. 2, 1918, House to Sec. of State, Nov. 5, 1918, and Wilson to House, Nov. 7, 1918, *FR, 1919, Paris Peace Conference*, I (Washington, 1942), 119-21.

House immediately informed Clemenceau who was very pleased saying that he would prefer "almost any place [other] than Geneva" even if it had to be London or Washington. But, as House cabled back to Washington: "No final decision can be reached until I have had an opportunity to communicate with both George and Orlando inasmuch as before these gentlemen left Paris we had tentatively agreed on Geneva."<sup>2</sup> What had happened to cause this reversal in plans?

For some time, alarming news had been reaching Washington about the revolutionary activities of certain dissatisfied elements in Switzerland. The fact that international socialists had held several meetings in Switzerland during the war and that Lenin had spent some years in exile there assumed a growing significance with the success of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia and the spread of the communist creed into eastern and central Europe. The U.S. legation in Bern and the American consulates in other Swiss cities regularly advised the Department of State of people who engaged in what they considered subversive activities. It was on the basis of the files of the Bern legation that a "List of bolchevists or persons of bolchevist connections or tendencies residing in Switzerland" with over a thousand short personal sketches was compiled and sent to all U.S. embassies and legations in Europe.<sup>3</sup> The President had made a remark to Sulzer when the Swiss minister presented his credentials in August, 1917, in which he expressed concern about Switzerland being used "as a base for conspiracies by people who were not truly refugees." Sulzer at that time had attributed the remark to exaggerated reports about spy activities in Switzerland. The real meaning, namely the fear of a Bolshevik takeover in Switzerland, escaped him, probably because it was too fantastic to even conceive of it. In the fall of 1918, the President had been subjected to strong and ominous warnings, the tenor of which was reflected in his telegram to Colonel House as well as in those from the Department of State to House. Lansing wrote House: "The fact that Switzerland is the headquarters of Bolsheviks and other revolutionaries makes it to my mind impossible for the President to go there." He also mentioned the "constant danger of the activities of spies." And the second man in the Department, Polk, wrote in a similar vein: "Department seriously concerned over revolutionary committees in Switzerland. Fear it would be difficult to adequately protect lives of peace delegates as we could not take in our own armed forces."<sup>4</sup> From one day to the

<sup>2</sup> House to Sec. of State, Nov. 9, 1918, *FR, 1918*, Supplement 1, I, 485-86.

<sup>3</sup> See N.A., File No. 854.00/21, 39, 43, and No. 854.111/31.

<sup>4</sup> Lansing to House, Nov. 9, 1918; Lansing to Sharp: For House from Polk, Nov. 9, 1918, *FR, 1918*, Supplement 1, I, 157.

other, almost, these apprehensions had become so strong as to bring about the rather drastic change in the American conference plans. The apprehensions were to disappear just as fast, and only a few months later President Wilson was strongly supporting Geneva as the future headquarters of the League of Nations.

The Swiss government was probably not aware of how closely Switzerland missed becoming the venue of the peace conference. It had other things to worry about. During the first days of November, 1918, its whole attention was absorbed by the threat of revolution which had been mounting over the preceding months. Widespread dissatisfaction among the working class on account of deteriorating economic and social conditions led to the founding of the so-called Olten Action Committee in February, 1918. Composed of leaders of the Swiss trade union movement and the Swiss Social Democratic Party, this committee pressed a series of demands upon the federal government, with little success. By fall the workers took their grievances to the streets. The largest demonstration, to take place in Zurich, on November 7, the first anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, was suppressed by a strong contingent of federal troops. The Olten committee felt provoked by this measure and answered it by calling for an unlimited general strike on Monday, November 11, the very day Germany signed the armistice. The strike call was accompanied by a proclamation demanding such things as new elections, the right to vote for women, a forty-eight hour week, social security legislation, federal monopoly of exports and imports, and the payment of the national debt by the capitalists. Although tens of thousands of workers obeyed the strike order and most public services, railroads, streetcars, and industries came to a standstill, the strike was doomed when it became apparent that the Federal Council remained firm and could rely upon the army to carry out its orders. In the night of November 13/14, the Olten committee decided to terminate the strike. Within a few days things were back to normal, the danger of revolutionary upheaval had passed.<sup>5</sup>

These had been tense and dangerous days and not only because of the internal upheaval. The Federal Council was also very concerned about the effect of the strike upon the foreign powers. It feared that the Allies might intervene in Switzerland if the threatening revolution could not be stopped within a short time. Rumors were current at the time that the supreme command of the Entente powers in France was ready to intervene in Switzerland to restore constitutional order and that, specifically, American troops had been readied for this task.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Dürrenmatt, *Schweizer Geschichte* (Zurich, 1963), 623-27; Hans Nabholz et al., *Geschichte der Schweiz* (Zurich, 1938), II, 648-57.

Much time has been spent attempting to substantiate these rumors, but so far to no avail. No documentary evidence for the sinister task assigned to the American Expeditionary Forces exists.<sup>6</sup>

There had been, then, some very good reasons for American apprehension, although the danger had been exaggerated. By the time the American delegation went to Paris to attend the peace conference, Geneva was a perfectly safe and pleasant place again, and within half a year it was presented to the readers of the *National Geographic Magazine* as a city which "will make an ideal world capital."<sup>7</sup>

Switzerland prepared actively for the peace conference. In those preparations it was guided to a considerable extent by a desire to please and to lean upon President Wilson. The reasons for this desire are rather obvious. The United States had entered the war for no selfish reasons, ostensibly, and with proclaimed goals of a high moral value. It was still looked upon by Switzerland as a leader in the cause for which the small and neutral nations had always stood, namely to allow them and all peace loving people on the globe to conduct their affairs in freedom and prosperity without being endangered by the folly or the greed of the powerful nations of Europe. President Wilson himself was adored and revered and looked upon by many Swiss as the representative of all that was best in the American character. Hailed by some as the prophet of the sovereignty and majesty of the little and weak nations, he was said to be a true son of Geneva and Calvinism.<sup>8</sup> Even those who were not as exuberant in their appraisal of Wilson's personality saw in him the man who best represented their hopes, as against the narrow national interests of the French and the British. As a high official in the Political Department expressed it in a memorandum to his chief, Federal Councilor Felix Calonder: "We will be forcibly led to take side with Wilson in all questions of a general nature."<sup>9</sup> Genuine appreciation of Wilson's proven sympathy for Switzerland led the National Council, the popular branch of the federal legislature, to pass a resolution

<sup>6</sup> Gottfried Guggenbühl, *Geschichte der schweizerischen Eidgenossenschaft* (Zurich, 1948), 624-25; Bonjour, *Geschichte der Neutralität*, 707-18, "Möglichkeit einer bewaffneten Intervention."

<sup>7</sup> Ralph A. Graves, "The Millennial City," *The National Geographic Magazine*, XXXV, No. 6 (June, 1919), 475.

<sup>8</sup> Leonhard Ragaz, *Die Bedeutung Woodrow Wilsons für die Schweiz und für die Welt* (Zurich, 1924), 12, 18ff. See also Mattmüller, *Leonhard Ragaz*, 315-21 and 491-99.

<sup>9</sup> Memorandum, Charles L.E. Lardy for Calonder, Dec. 13, 1918, EPD 1918/20, Sch. 127.

extending an official invitation to Wilson to visit Switzerland.<sup>10</sup> The much beleaguered President, though "deeply moved" by the invitation, regretfully had to decline.

Switzerland was very interested in the problems that confronted the world at the end of the war and was eager to contribute its share toward the solution of them. Wilson's proposals for the creation of an international society of nations had found receptive ears in Switzerland. The Federal Council requested its judicial consultant, Professor Max Huber, to draft plans for a future world organization to be eventually submitted to the other nations. Huber's draft "covenant" was discussed by a committee of experts consisting of Swiss academic and political leaders in long and exhausting meetings. Much serious thought went into this project which was to provide the world with a workable, solid blueprint and at the same time reserve the special rights and privileges of small neutrals such as Switzerland. Charles E. L. Lardy in the Political Department had misgivings about the effect of these efforts. He stated his doubts in a memorandum to Calonder in the following words:

We prepare, with great zeal, all by ourselves, with intelligence and care, our League of Nations project. But when it will be finished we will discover that Wilson has another one ready. Perhaps he would have accepted some of our ideas if he had known them — while in a public discussion he will reject them out of vanity. Would it not have been wiser to publish our plan before his was made known? The important thing is that our ideas prevail and not that we have the vanity and glory of this triumph. Let Wilson steal our ideas and make them his.<sup>11</sup>

What he feared happened. When the Swiss draft was submitted to the powers assembled in Paris in February, 1919, it was hailed as an excellent piece of work, well conceived and written. Its influence on the Covenant of the League of Nations, then in the final drafting stage, was, however, practically nil.<sup>12</sup>

Another Swiss effort was similarly futile. The Federal Council would have liked to be represented at the peace negotiations and so

<sup>10</sup> B.A., Nationalratsprotokoll vom 12. Dez. 1918.

<sup>11</sup> Memorandum, Lardy for Calonder, Dec. 13, 1918, EPD, 1918/20, Sch. 127.

<sup>12</sup> Bonjour, *Geschichte der Neutralität*, 743–46; "Botschaft des Bundesrates betreffend die Frage des Beitrittes der Schweiz zum Völkerbund (vom 4. August 1919)," *Bbl.* 1919, IV, 541–680, and Beilagen zur Botschaft.... (Bern, 1919). See also William E. Rappard, *L'Entrée de la Suisse dans la Société des Nations* (Geneva, 1924), and Sergio Stupán, *Comment la Suisse a adhéré au Pacte de la Société des Nations* (Lausanne, 1943).

informed the victorious belligerents. Its message stated that "Switzerland regards it as its right and duty not to stand aloof from the settlement of a certain number of questions in which it is directly interested...." The Italian and British diplomatic representatives in Washington inquired on behalf of their governments what the United States proposed to do about this request which "raises the whole question of the participation of neutrals." The American answer was evasive; no final reply could be given until the arrival of President Wilson in Paris.<sup>13</sup> Semi-official contacts had established that there was little hope for Switzerland's request to be fulfilled.

On November 20, 1918, William E. Rappard had a long interview with President Wilson in which they discussed this matter. Rappard was in Washington to assist Sulzer in the negotiations for the renewal of the commercial agreement of the previous year. Since his services were not really needed he had the time and leisure to pursue the other objective of his trip, namely to find out what official Washington thought about the upcoming peace negotiations and the role of the neutrals in them. He found Washington disappointingly divided and vague on the issue. Nobody was sure what the President wanted and it was intimated that not even he himself knew. Therefore Rappard welcomed the opportunity to have a chance to talk with the President himself. He found him gay, completely relaxed, speaking freely on many subjects and being personally most cordial and intimate.<sup>14</sup>

Rappard's diary entry reveals a truly unusual informality in the discussion between the two men. Taking off on the recent Congressional elections which had been a personal defeat for Wilson in that they returned a Republican majority to both houses of Congress, the President maintained that this would not interfere with his plans. For the work at the peace conference they were unimportant. "I'm not going to relax in the least. I'm going over to Europe because the Allied governments don't want me to." Wilson declared that he was aware of the tremendous power of public opinion and that it was on his side, a fact which made the Allies jealous. He also said that he knew he could not satisfy everybody and that many people would be disgusted with him, although he would try to do the impossible in order to be fair.

Concerning the chances of Swiss participation in the peace negotiations, Wilson was rather negative. He thought that the neutrals

<sup>13</sup> Sulzer to Sec. of State, Nov. 21, 1918, and Lansing to Sulzer, Nov. 30, 1918, *FR*, 1919, *The Paris Peace Conference*, I, 279–81.

<sup>14</sup> Rappard, "Wilson et la Société des Nations avant la Conférence de la paix," *Centenaire Woodrow Wilson*, 51, 54.

might be consulted when their interests were involved. But they had to look out for themselves, or as he said, they should be "alert and intimate" so that they knew what was going on. Rappard argued that this approach was contrary to the best interests of a just arrangement and that the exclusion of the neutrals would mean a loss of support for the American viewpoint at the conference. The President wanted to reserve a final decision until he had had a chance to see what the situation was like in Paris. In the meantime, he recommended that the neutrals present their requests to the other victors too. Whereupon there developed this little dialogue:

I [Rappard]: 'As a formality, yes. But we prefer to ask you because we know that you are more disinterested.' Wilson: 'Yes, but the Allies are getting a bit jealous. I had to tell the Germans to address us all, as the people over there resented it. They think I want to run everything.' I: 'But you are, I hope.' Wilson: 'I hope so too, but it wouldn't be wise to let them feel it too obviously.'<sup>15</sup>

Rappard reiterated his concern and tried to impress upon the President that neutrality was very dear to Switzerland and that there was reason to fear that this might be forgotten at a conference in which Switzerland was not represented. If so, Switzerland could not participate in a future League of Nations. Wilson simply replied: "If you remain outside you will always have our support in case of aggression." The surprising aspect of this statement is not the sweeping promise of support, which was rather easy to give in a private conversation, but that the President should be so little concerned about the prospect of non-participation in his pet project by one of its leading supporters. The conversation ended with the assurance that they would get in touch with one another in Paris. Rappard went away from the interview impressed by the extreme frankness of the President, who was actually thinking aloud, but disappointed with the President's stand on the question of neutral participation in the peace conference.<sup>16</sup>

Rappard was troubled and concerned about President Wilson's views. After consultation with Minister Sulzer he wrote a warm personal letter to Wilson in which he pleaded for a reconsideration, venturing to do so "not only as a Swiss citizen, but as one of the countless European admirers and supporters of the far-sighted and generous policies" outlined by the President in past public state-

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 52-53.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

ments. He reiterated that "if the free and stable neutral nations of Europe are to cooperate whole-heartedly, it would seem necessary to admit them at the outset as partners, and not later on as adjuncts to, or protectorates of the founders." It would only be a matter of democratic justice to let the small nations participate on equal terms in the discussion and determination of the problems of a lasting peace and of the League that was to seal the peace. Rappard also argued once more that the President could only profit from the participation of the neutrals, writing: "Your policy and your person, Mr. President, have no warmer friends, no more disinterested advocates, and no more enthusiastic supporters than the common people of Europe. The governments of these countries, who have no immediate share in the passions of the war, are naturally freest to express the general secret longing for impartial justice which pervades the masses everywhere." What united the neutrals with the American President, according to Rappard, was their common interest in an impartial and just settlement. Was it not possible that situations might arise where the cooperation with and support for Wilson's policies by the neutrals might insure "the triumph of wisdom over prejudice, of right over violence, and of permanent general stability over momentary special advantages?" Rappard expressed strong apprehension that the idealism of the President might flounder on the rock of European rivalries and that the League of Nations might be launched in a wrong direction, thus bringing disappointment to millions of people. "I write as one who believes that the whole world is on the eve of a new era, that no man in history has ever achieved an opportunity and a responsibility similar to your own. I write as one who would contribute in his small measure to the avoidance of a decision which might possibly imperil the future . . ." Rappard concluded the letter with the concrete proposal that all free democratic nations be invited to participate in the debates leading towards the creation of the League of Nations and that in order to distinguish those discussions clearly from the business of terminating the war they be transferred to either the United States or Switzerland.<sup>17</sup>

The President was probably flattered by the tone of the letter and by the picture it painted of his historical role. However, he was fast getting used to that kind of adoration. As to the proposals contained in the letter, there was little chance that they would be seriously considered. The President's plans were crystallizing in exactly the opposite direction; the covenant of the League of Nations had to be an integral part of the peace treaties, which he wanted his partners at

<sup>17</sup> Rappard to Wilson, Nov. 26, 1918, unsigned copy in B.A., Schweiz. Gesandtschaft Washington, 1918-19, "League of Nations."

the conference to accept before they proceeded to the other matters at hand. The support of the small, neutral countries of Europe was not nearly as vital as the Swiss friend pretended it was. He, Wilson, was strong enough and his prestige great enough, to achieve his goals on his own. If there was an opportunity to do something for the Swiss he would try to do his best, but that had to be decided on the spot, at the Paris peace conference itself.

Nothing further could be achieved in this matter in Washington. The scene of activity changed to Paris. It was important for Switzerland to be represented in Paris by someone who was conversant with the issues at stake and who was able to gain access to the prominent participants, especially since it seemed that Switzerland would have no official say in the proceedings. Federal Councilor Calonder felt that Rappard would fulfill these qualifications, and early in December, 1918, he cabled to Washington for him to return as soon as possible. His judgment was confirmed by confidential advice from the American legation in Bern to the effect that "the best thing that Switzerland could do at the moment would be to send a representative here of the standing and delightful personality of Professor Rappard and let him keep in close touch with the situation."<sup>18</sup> Obviously, Rappard had lost none of his charm and appeal for President Wilson and his entourage. That fact turned his personal activities during the sessions of the peace conference into a signal service to his country.

From January to May, 1919, Rappard was in Paris almost constantly. At first his exact standing worried Calonder. The Federal Council considered his official accreditation at the Allied missions, while the Swiss minister in Paris, Alphonse Dunant, suggested that Rappard be made a secretary at his legation. Both ideas were dropped since neither could do much for Rappard's mission. He was to be a "liaison agent" (*Verbindungsagent*) with the Anglo-Saxon delegations to the peace conference, freewheeling and largely independent, vigilant and intimate, as President Wilson had suggested in his interview. He was in almost daily contact with the President's alter ego, Colonel House, and the members of the American delegation in the Crillon Hotel, David Hunter Miller, the chief judicial counselor, and Gordon Auchincloss, House's son-in-law, foremost among them. He also met frequently with Lord Robert Cecil of the British delegation. From the Americans he heard everything of importance

<sup>18</sup> EPD to Swiss Legation Washington, Dec. 2, 1918, and copy of letter of the Commissioner Plenipotentiary of the U.S.A. to Herter, Am. Legation, Bern, Jan. 4, 1919, B.A., EPD 1918/20, Sch. 127.

that was going on in the negotiations and thus he was able to keep the Political Department in Bern constantly informed. Every week he wrote two or more lengthy reports to the Federal Council of up to twenty type-written pages in which he described in detail everything that was of interest to Switzerland. At times he was assisted by Professor Huber and at other times Federal Councilors themselves travelled to Paris. Twice, in January and April, the President of the Swiss Confederation, Gustave Ador, came to Paris in person, a rather extraordinary thing, for usually the Federal Councilor who is President does not leave the country during his presidential term. As former president of the International Red Cross, and because of his close relationship to Clemenceau and the French, Ador was the best man to exert influence in a place where Switzerland's prestige was none too strong. In March, Calonder went to Paris for a conference of neutral nations, and afterwards a delegation of Swiss officers appeared there to discuss with Allied colleagues the military aspects of Swiss neutrality.<sup>19</sup>

The activities of Rappard and the other Swiss representatives in Paris had two principal goals, one, to protect the rights of the neutrals and, specifically, to prevent the inclusion in the covenant of the League of Nations of anything that might impair the neutrality of Switzerland, and two, to induce the powers to select a Swiss city as the future seat of the League of Nations. The second goal proved to be easier to achieve than the first, thanks mainly to the favorable disposition of President Wilson toward Switzerland. As presiding officer of the so-called Crillon Commission which dealt with problems concerning the League of Nations, he exerted a determining influence on the solution of these problems. After the receipt of the official invitation by Calonder to bring the League of Nations to Switzerland, the commission tentatively agreed to put the names of Geneva or Lausanne in the blank space provided for the designation of the seat of the League in Article V of the draft covenant. Then Wilson appointed a subcommittee to study this question, with Colonel House as one of its four members. House had a difficult time choosing between Geneva and Lausanne. After considerable hesitation he decided in favor of Geneva. William Martin of the *Journal de Genève* tells the story that House stopped wavering only after a hotel waiter, a native of Lausanne, told him that the climate in Geneva was better, since the summers were not so hot there. If even a Lausannois had to concede that, then Geneva truly promised to be a more salubrious site for people who, like himself, had to be careful about their

<sup>19</sup> See Rappard reports in B.A., EPD 1918/20, Sch. 129.

<sup>20</sup> David Hunter Miller, *The Drafting of the Covenant* (New York, 1928), I, 285.

health.<sup>21</sup> The subcommittee unanimously recommended Geneva as the future seat of the League at the 14th meeting of the Crillon Commission, on April 10, 1919. President Wilson energetically supported its recommendation with the words:

It is the desire of all of us to free the world from the sufferings of war. We will not succeed in this goal if we choose a city in which the memories of the past war would make all impartial discussion impossible. The peace of the world can not be assured by the perpetuation of international hatreds. Geneva is already the seat of the International Red Cross which placed itself at the disposal of both belligerent camps and which has remained aloof as much as possible from the antipathies provoked by the war. Moreover, the Swiss are a people devoted to absolute neutrality by their constitution and by their ethnic composition made up of diverse races and languages. Their country is destined to be the meeting place of other peoples that desire to engage in the work of peace and cooperation.<sup>22</sup>

The French and Belgians, however, strongly pressed for Brussels. Cecil and General Smuts agreed with Wilson that the choice of Brussels would link the League too closely with the memories of the war. The session, "the last and stormiest of the Committee," lasted into the early hours of April 11. When the division was taken, twelve of the nineteen members of the Crillon Commission voted in favor of Geneva.<sup>23</sup> Immediately after the adjournment of the meeting House told Rappard about its outcome. He stressed how much the result was due to Wilson's personal intervention and warned the Swiss representative: "You must go and convince some of the other nations before the plenary conference."<sup>24</sup>

Two weeks of intensive activity bore fruit when on April 28, 1919, the plenary conference ratified the choice of Geneva as the seat of the League of Nations. The most important hurdle had been crossed.

<sup>21</sup> William Martin, *Les hommes d'état pendant la guerre* (Paris, 1929), 285.

<sup>22</sup> Rappard, "Wilson, la Suisse et Genève à la Conférence de la paix," *Centenaire Woodrow Wilson*, 58. Retranslated from the French. See also William E. Rappard, *Uniting Europe* (New Haven, 1930), 239-40.

<sup>23</sup> F.P. Walters, *The History of the League of Nations* (London, 1952), 36-37.

<sup>24</sup> Rappard, *Centenaire Woodrow Wilson*, 59. D.H. Miller would not agree with this assessment. He states that the feeling in favor of Geneva "was so strong that it is very doubtful if Brussels could have been chosen even with Wilson's support. . . . The British were outspokenly in favor of Geneva; there was hardly a country except France and Belgium which would have favored the choice of a capital so obviously under French influence as Brussels." *The Drafting of the Covenant*, I, 316.

Yet some formidable obstacles remained, as the implementation of the resolution was by no means assured and the opponents of Geneva continued their fight. They based their hopes on the Executive Council of the League, which, according to an amendment to the original resolution, was empowered to remove the seat from Geneva if it should consider this necessary. After the refusal of the U.S. Senate to ratify the Versailles Peace Treaty, the American representatives in the various League organs were withdrawn by the beginning of the year 1920. With their departure the Swiss lost their most stalwart supporters, and they immediately began to feel the loss. The advocates of Brussels concentrated their efforts upon having the first meeting of the League of Nations convene in the Belgian capital. By the spring of 1920 they had prevailed upon the Executive Council and the Secretary General, Sir Eric Drummond, to change the site. The only obstacle in their path was Woodrow Wilson who according to Article V of the covenant of the League of Nations had the right to summon the first meeting of the Assembly and the Council of the League. Drummond requested several times that he call the first meeting of the Assembly for Brussels and informed him by telegram of the unanimous decision of the Council members assembled in Rome in May, 1920, in favor of Brussels. Colonel House and the American ambassador in London implored the President to give in. Even the Swiss government reluctantly agreed with this plan. The Swiss could not well oppose the united opinion of the European powers and thought that by making this concession they could still save Geneva as the ultimate seat of the international organization. But Wilson remained adamant. Having stubbornly resisted all changes in the peace treaty advocated by the American Senate and thus having contributed substantially to the failure of its being ratified, he was now steadfastly refusing to heed these requests and exhortations. On July 17, 1920, he summoned the Assembly of the League of Nations to its first meeting at Geneva for November 15, 1920, at 11 a.m.<sup>25</sup>

It is conceivable that a first meeting in Brussels could have led to that city becoming the provisional seat of the League and that after some time the provisional seat might have become permanent. The records in the Secretariat of the League of Nations strongly suggest such a possibility, and President Wilson may have suspected it. It was his decision which prevented such a development. At the opening ceremony

<sup>25</sup> See Rappard's detailed account of this episode, based on the records of the Secretariat of the League of Nations, entitled "Wilson et la venue à Genève de la Société des Nations après la Conférence de la paix" in *Centenaire Woodrow Wilson*, 61-74; also Walters, *A History of the League of Nations*, 110.

of the first meeting of the Assembly in Geneva, Swiss President Giuseppe Motta addressed a few words of gratitude to the American President for his "friendly and spontaneous gesture" in summoning the meeting there. His remarks constituted a well deserved recognition of the decisive role which Wilson had played in bringing the League to Geneva and Switzerland.

The Swiss representatives in Paris were somewhat less successful in achieving their other goal, namely that of making it possible for Switzerland to become a member of the League without impairing in any way its neutrality. Ador, who met with President Wilson in Paris on January 23, 1919, was assured that the complete independence of Switzerland, within or without the League, was a thing resolved in advance and not subject to discussion. The President also promised to plead on behalf of Switzerland as best he could and pointed out that in his opinion the League was above all else a protection for the small countries who needed such an organization much more than the strong powers which could conduct their affairs without consulting anyone.<sup>26</sup> Ador received similar assurances of support from Colonel House.

On February 12 House showed Rappard the first draft of the covenant of the League of Nations under the seal of strictest confidence. Rappard was gravely disappointed by what he was given to read. He found the project to be much weaker than the one worked out by Huber and the Swiss committee of which he had been a member and which had been submitted to the powers just a few days before. He criticised the draft for its limited extension, its rudimentary organization, its badly defined competences, and the many reservations contained in it. The proposed organization, in his opinion, hardly merited the name of League of Nations. House sought to console him by asking him to regard the draft as a first step toward an organization that was destined to grow.<sup>27</sup> In the evening of the same day Rappard had an interview with the President himself. He told Wilson that he had knowledge of the content of the draft and that Switzerland could not accept the economic and military sanctions outlined in it. They would force Switzerland to give up its neutrality. The President was surprised, but felt that a way out might be found.<sup>28</sup>

During the following weeks the concerted efforts of the Swiss representatives were directed against the clauses of the covenant

<sup>26</sup> Memorandum, "Conversation entre Monsieur Gustave Ador, Président de la Confédération et Monsieur Wilson, Président des Etats-Unis d'Amérique," Jan. 23, 1919, B.A., EPD 1918/20, Sch. 130.

<sup>27</sup> Rappard to Calonder, February 12, 1919, *Ibid.*, Sch. 129.

<sup>28</sup> Rappard diary, *Centenaire Woodrow Wilson*, 55.

which contained the objectionable obligations mentioned by Rappard to President Wilson. They criticised especially Article XVI which dealt with the military sanctions against an offending state and spoke of allowing passage through one's territory to the forces of other members of the League. Switzerland would never become a member if it had to adhere to such a clause. Yet, if Switzerland did not join the League Geneva could not become its seat. During March and April, 1919, the Swiss in Paris waged an intensive struggle to escape this dilemma.<sup>29</sup> All the work had to be done informally since Switzerland was not an official member of the peace conference, and personal relations were therefore of prime importance. In this respect Switzerland was probably better off than many of the other states which belonged to the victorious Allied and Associated Powers but had very little indeed to say in the actual negotiations. The Swiss were heard because they had access to the leading statesmen. But on the question of military sanctions they got nowhere. Even the American delegation, with David Hunter Miller being the most outspoken member on this point, remained adamant.<sup>30</sup>

On April 28, 1919, the plenary meeting of the peace conference was to vote on the text of the covenant which had undergone only minor changes from its first draft. On the morning of that day Rappard had managed to see Wilson once more in private. Again his reception was cordial. Wilson declared himself to be in full agreement with military neutrality and thought that the neutrals could join the League with reservations. Article XXI, which specifically excepted the Monroe Doctrine from being affected by the covenant, could be construed to include also other "international engagements" such as the perpetual neutrality of Switzerland. Yet Wilson was unwilling to make a public statement to that effect at the plenary meeting. That would awaken jealousies. The silent acceptance, without objections from anybody, of Article XXI would be sufficient.<sup>31</sup> Rappard immediately took this news to President Ador, again in Paris, who went to see Clemenceau to question him on this point. Clemenceau agreed with Wilson's view, and Rappard was able to catch the American President again just before he entered the meeting room at the Quai d'Orsay and informed him of Clemenceau's opinion.<sup>32</sup> This arrangement of a tacit recognition of Switzerland's reservations regarding the clauses which were in conflict with its neutrality was

<sup>29</sup> See Miller, *The Drafting of the Covenant*, I, ch. 31, "The Swiss Amendment," 428-38; also 285 and 303-5.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 432-35.

<sup>31</sup> Rappard, *Centenaire Woodrow Wilson*, 59-60.

<sup>32</sup> Rappard to Calonder, April 28, 1919, B.A., EPD 1918/20, Sch. 129.

not really satisfactory. The situation improved somewhat when the recognition of the Swiss neutrality principle was incorporated in Article 435 of the Versailles Peace Treaty.<sup>33</sup>

These, then, were the most important results of the Swiss labors at the Paris Peace Conference. There were other issues which concerned Switzerland and in which American experts played a role, such as the navigation of the Rhine and the incorporation of the Austrian province Vorarlberg into the Swiss Confederation. In these matters too, Switzerland found full understanding for its desires. The results achieved were in certain respects excellent, while in other respects they did not represent everything that was hoped for. The Federal Council found them good enough, however, to ask the Swiss people to approve them by joining the League of Nations. Since there was strong opposition to this move, mainly because of the fear of impairing Swiss neutrality, the task of "selling" the League to the federal legislature and the people turned out to be a hard one.<sup>34</sup>

In this "League campaign in the Swiss Republic" the United States again played a role, although a passive and negative one this time. In its message on the accession of Switzerland to the League of Nations of August 4, 1919, the Federal Council pointed out that it was of great importance to Switzerland that all of the great powers adhered to the League. The message made a special reference to the United States by emphasizing that "this power which above all has represented the idea of a League of Nations and which is removed from the European conflicts due to its geographic location is especially destined to act as an equalizing and stabilizing element of European politics within the League of Nations."<sup>35</sup> The Federal Council doubted that the League could begin operating before all the great powers had joined it. This opinion of the Federal Council became a condition for Swiss accession. On November 21, 1919, the two chambers of the Federal Assembly resolved that Switzerland would decide about its membership by plebiscite only after the "five great powers," Great Britain, France, the United States, Italy, and Japan, had ratified the Treaty of Versailles of which the covenant was an integral part.

One can well imagine the interest and the growing concern with which the Federal Council pursued the debates about the ratification of the treaty in the American Senate. Time and again it requested its

<sup>33</sup> See Bonjour, *Geschichte der Neutralität*, 752-56, and "Botschaft des Bundesrates betreffend die Frage des Beitrittes der Schweiz zum Völkerbund (vom 4. August 1919)," *Bbl.* 1919, IV, 569-71.

<sup>34</sup> Bonjour, *Geschichte der Neutralität*, 757-69; "The League Campaign in the Swiss and American Republics," *World Peace Foundation Pamphlets*, III, No. 3 (Boston, June, 1920).

<sup>35</sup> *Bbl.* 1919, IV, 627.

envoy in Washington to report about events in the Senate and about the chances of Wilson's prevailing against the opposition in that body. By the end of the year the treaty had died in the Senate, which gave the opponents of the League in Switzerland new ammunition.<sup>36</sup> The great power reservation of the federal resolution of November 21, 1919, had become an obstacle now to Swiss accession and was cast into the debates under the label "America clause." Fortunately for the friends of the League in Switzerland, the Federal Council was able to achieve a great success when the Council of the League issued the so-called London Declaration of February 13, 1920, which stated that "the neutrality and the inviolability of Switzerland and her independence from every foreign influence are to the real interest of the politics of all Europe." In recognition of this fact, Switzerland was exempted from having to participate in the military sanctions of the League, but not from being obligated to adhere to the clauses concerning the economic sanctions.<sup>37</sup> Joined to the declaration was a reminder that Switzerland would have to act fast if it wanted to be officially admitted as one of the original members of the League.

It became impossible for the Federal Council to stall any longer; the "America clause" of the federal resolution of November 21, 1919, had to be changed. This was not so easy to do since it involved a justification for the reversal of a previously strongly held opinion. In a new message to the Federal Assembly of February 17, 1920, the Federal Council declared that the clause had been incorporated under circumstances which did not permit an exact estimate of its possible consequences. The absence of the United States from the League was a deplorable fact which could not be foreseen. The Federal Council was still of the opinion that American presence was of great importance and that the activities of the League would suffer as long as the United States had not occupied its seat in the Council. Once more the gratitude and esteem of Switzerland for the American Republic were eloquently expressed:

The United States is an immense country, still young, prodigiously rich in raw materials and in money, marvelously active, called upon to play a more and more important part in the history of the

<sup>36</sup> Rappard, *L'Entrée de la Suisse*, 41 and 54.

<sup>37</sup> "Zusatzbotschaft des Bundesrates betreffend die Frage des Beitrittes der Schweiz zum Völkerbund (vom 17. February 1920)," *Bbl.* 1920, I, 342-43. This "Supplementary Message of the Federal Council to the Federal Assembly Concerning the Accession of Switzerland to the League of Nations, February 17, 1920, with Annexes" was published in translation by the American Association for International Conciliation in *International Conciliation*, 1920, 313-47.



world. Her place in the new international organization is, therefore, clearly indicated. We Swiss would be acting with very bad grace if we did not render grateful homage to the American people and their authorities, who during the whole world war did not cease to show us their active and enlightened sympathy and to give us their fraternal assistance in supplying us with raw materials and food-stuffs.<sup>38</sup>

The American presence in the League, "given the reasons which determined her entrance into the war and the part she played in it," would help to weaken the contention that the League was an alliance of conquerors against conquered. The Federal Council believed it to be morally improbable that the United States with its impelling and powerful idealism would stay aloof from the "grandest attempt yet undertaken by men to banish blind violence from the relations between the states and to make justice and law triumph." Eventually, America would respond to the appeal of all its friends.<sup>39</sup>

In the meantime, would it be in the best interests of Switzerland, the Federal Council asked rhetorically, to make its entrance into the League dependent upon the entrance of the United States? The United States seemed to be returning to a strict adherence to the Monroe Doctrine, opposing any interference of Europe in American affairs and abstaining from participating in non-American affairs. In this isolationist withdrawal Switzerland could not follow suit, situated as it was in the heart of Europe. "No matter what are the sympathies and the profound affinities which unite the old Helvetic democracy and the transatlantic democracy, it would not seem to us very dignified for a state like ours to make itself in a way totally dependent upon, and to enter thus completely into the wake of, another state." Abstinance would be the more harmful since the Swiss mission in London had just been crowned with complete success.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, the Federal Council proposed to change the federal resolution of November 21, 1919, concerning the accession of Switzerland to the League of Nations, by deleting the phrase which made Swiss accession dependent upon the adherence of the five Great Powers.

With the elimination of the "America clause" the way was open for submitting the question to the people. On May 16, 1920, in a historic referendum, after intense debates and a very lively campaign, the proposal to join the League was accepted by the Swiss voters in a

<sup>38</sup> *International Conciliation*, 1920, 330.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 331-32.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 333.

close vote.<sup>41</sup> Switzerland had become one of the original members of the League of Nations, whose seat was to be Geneva. It had to pay for its accession by giving up its integral neutrality and exchanging it for a differentiated neutrality. The United States, however, upon whose sympathetic support the Federal Council had depended so much, remained outside, which was a disappointment for Switzerland and a fatal weakness for the League as a whole.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 347.