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WOODROW WILSON: PROPHECY AND PERSPECTIVE FOR THE PRESENT

By
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at
Yale University
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It is an honor to have been designated as Lamont lecturer and to speak to you of some phases of the work of Woodrow Wilson.

I feel particularly gratified that you should have chosen a Princeton man for this task, but possibly after what took place a week ago Saturday, you can afford to be magnanimous.

In the presence of Charles Seymour, your distinguished President Emeritus, I speak of Woodrow Wilson with a great deal of humility. He is, after all, the real expert on the subject, and I shall draw liberally from ideas he has expressed.

A few weeks ago I returned from a 35,000 mile trip around the world, visiting particularly the countries of the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and the Far East. I had rather planned to work out, during this trip, what I would say to you today. But although I did some thinking, I found little time for writing, while visiting some twenty countries. As I talked, however, with the leaders of these countries, many of which had newly found or fought out their freedom, I could not help but ponder how fiercely had burned the fire of self-determination which Woodrow Wilson had helped to kindle some 40 years ago.

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Before taking up the main subject of my talk I would like to say a word about Yale and my chosen field of intelligence. The connection between Yale and national intelligence is an old one. Two members of your class of 1773, Nathan Hale and Benjamin Tallmadge were, as many of you may know, pioneers in the field of intelligence. The story of Hale's martyrdom while gathering information from the enemy is well known.

Hale's friend, Ben Tallmadge, was an almost equally fabulous character. He devised an ingenious system of information collection on British troops during the Revolutionary War, used primitive codes and invisible ink and played an important role in the apprehension and conviction of Benedict Arnold's accomplice, ~~Colonel~~ Major Andre. After the war, he became a businessman, a land speculator, a member of Congress, and a lay preacher in the Congregational Church. As you can see, a career in intelligence prepares you for almost any occupation.

Your university today is contributing able men to American intelligence, and I am one of the chief beneficiaries. Among them, none is more outstanding than a former Yale Professor, Dr. Sherman Kent, who as Chairman of the Board of National Estimates in the Central Intelligence Agency, plays a major role in our work.

We have, of course, come a long way in our national life since the days of Hale and Tallmadge and with our growth to manhood as a nation, our responsibilities have increased well beyond the dreams of our forefathers.

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Since I finished my academic studies in 1916, I have divided my time evenly between government service and the practice of the law. During these years I have served, in one capacity or another, under every President of the United States; the first was Woodrow Wilson. He was my college president during the early months of my freshman year at Princeton before he became Governor of New Jersey. He was also my first chief as I entered the Foreign Service in 1916.

In what I am going to say about President Wilson today, I am drawing very largely on my recollections of the man. I may say that despite the passage of time, these recollections are clear. My association with Wilson modest as it was, has had a definite impact upon my own thinking and my approach to the international problems with which I have been engaged from time to time.

Universities in the Nation's Service

It is appropriate for us here ~~tonight~~ today to start where Wilson himself began, by stressing the important role that must be played by the university communities in the service of the nation.

Wilson said prophetically to his own university some 60 years ago that "when all is said, it is not learning but the spirit of service that will give a college a place in the public annals of the nation . . . There is laid upon us the compulsion of the national life. We dare not keep aloof and closet ourselves while a nation comes to its maturity. The days of glad expansion are gone, our life grows tense and difficult; our resource for the future lies

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in careful thought, providence, and a wise economy; and the school must be of the nation."

Little did Wilson suspect when he took office how great his own role would be in America's coming of age -- despite the fact that he well appreciated America's growing leadership in international affairs.

You will recall that Wilson was elected to the Presidency on a platform that dealt almost exclusively with domestic problems and reforms -- such as lowering tariffs and overhauling the banking system. Wilson wrote to a friend just before assuming office that "it would be the irony of fate if my administration had to deal chiefly with foreign affairs." In his first inaugural address in the seemingly peaceful days of 1913, he scarcely mentioned foreign policy. When his first term was half over we were in the thick of it; and before his second term had finished, a series of fateful decisions were taken which affected world history.

In the years between these events there was a vast growth in our world responsibilities which Wilson understood with a foresight that many in this country were slow to appreciate.

Wilson and Responsible Government

From the time he was an undergraduate in college, Wilson had been fascinated with problems of bringing government up to meet the challenges and problems of the times. He viewed America's growing-up with excitement and hope. At his inaugural address as President of Princeton in 1902, he had spoken of "a new age before us in which, it would seem, we must lead the world."

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And in the same year he wrote that: "We have come to full maturity with this new century of our national existence and to full self-consciousness as a nation. And the day of our isolation is past. We shall learn much ourselves now that we stand closer to other nations and compare ourselves first with one and again with another..."

Several years later at Columbia he concluded one of his many speeches on government with the prophetic remark that, "We can never hide our president again as a mere domestic officer." There could be no more eloquent proof of these words than Wilson's own tour of service in that high office.

Some 25 years ago I came into the possession of the original of one of the rare documents of Woodrow Wilson's career -- a personal letter to Secretary Lansing -- which illustrates his convictions as to the high responsibility of the presidency in the conduct of foreign relations.

While the letter was published in Ray Stannard Baker's "Life and Letters of Woodrow Wilson," it has never received the attention which it deserves.

Before the end of the campaign of 1916, the President became fully aware that the election was to be a close one, that it was more or less of a toss-up whether he or Mr. Hughes would win. That election, as was the case of the election the other day, was fought out during a period of great international crisis. America then faced hard decisions and as the letter indicates Wilson was deeply disturbed about the consequences to the country of the situation which would arise if he were defeated and yet remained on as the President

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from early November until the coming March. It is fortunate that Wilson set forth his ideas in a letter which he wrote Mr. Lansing, then Secretary of State, who had left Washington to vote in his home of Watertown, New York.

The main source of concern was, in Wilson's words, that: "The direction of the foreign policy of the government would in effect have been taken out of my hands and yet its new definition would be impossible until March."

He added this: "I feel that it would be my duty to relieve the country of the perils of such a situation at once. The course I have in mind is dependent upon the consent and cooperation of the Vice President; but, if I could gain his consent to the plan, I would ask your permission to invite Mr. Hughes to become Secretary of State and would then join the Vice President in resigning, and thus open to Mr. Hughes the immediate succession to the Presidency.

"All my life long," Wilson continued, "I have advocated some such responsible government for the United States as other constitutional systems afford as a matter of course, and as such action on my part would inaugurate, at least by example. Responsible government means government by those whom the people trust, and trust at the time of decision and action. The whole country has long perceived, without knowing how to remedy, the extreme disadvantage of having to live for four months after an election under a party whose guidance had been rejected at the polls. Here is the remedy, at any rate as far as the Executive is concerned."

The original letter was given to me by my Aunt, Mrs. Lansing, who found it among my Uncle's papers after his death. It was marked to be

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destroyed, but I disobeyed this injunction, as I have done frequently since in similar situations.

The problem which President Wilson poses in this letter has been in part solved by the 20th Amendment, moving the date of inauguration from March 4 to January 20. The possibility of the solution he suggested has been eliminated by legislation which changes the line of succession, after the Vice President, from an appointed officer (the Secretary of State) to an elected officer (the Speaker of the House of Representatives).

It seems to me questionable, however, whether the 20th Amendment has adequately solved the problem. True it has reduced the lame duck period from about four months to a little over two and a half months. But in the present state of the world, in the atomic age, 75 days is a very long period. For example, if by chance we were today in a "lame duck" period I can hardly conceive how adequate machinery could be set up to reach the decisions that are required daily if not hourly, with one man holding the titular authority and another enjoying the popular mandate.

In the lame duck period of 1933 an attempt was made by President Hoover to solve the problem by collaboration between the outgoing and the incoming administration. This proved unrewarding. I imagine that any incoming administration will be reluctant to share the responsibility without having the real power of decision. It would, it seems to me, be easier to get the willing cooperation of outgoing officials who have turned over their offices to the newly elected or appointed officials than to try again what failed in 1933. Most European constitutional governments, including the British, manage in one way or another to make the transition without any formal delay.

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There are other curious anomalies in the present lame duck system of 75 days. The outgoing administration in early January must put in a State of the Union message, an economic report, and a budget message. Except for the actual work done on the budget, this trilogy of swan songs serves very little useful purpose.

Of course the real log jam comes from the Electoral College procedures, which the 20th Amendment did little to set right. The Amendment rightly ruled that electoral votes should be counted only by the newly elected Congress so that a possible tie could not be broken by a "lame duck" Congress. But, since the new Congress does not meet until January 3rd according to the Amendment, the long period of waiting for a change in administration seems destined to be with us until some better way is found to solve this problem which Wilson first tried to meet.

Wilson and the Soviet Union.

Wilson was President when two great revolutions swept through Russia in 1917; first the Kerensky revolution of March, then the Bolshevik revolution of Lenin-Trotsky in November. He had great sympathy for the democratic revolution in March of 1917 and made every effort to extend support to it.

You may remember that he sent a distinguished mission under Elihu Root to review the prospects of the Provisional Government and to ascertain what steps we could take to help it. The Mission brought a very optimistic report from which the only dissenter was Charles R. Crane who

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possessed that most valuable of all qualifications: first-hand knowledge of an area he had visited many times.

Even after the hopes for democracy and freedom in Russia were dispelled by the November revolution, Wilson sought to make clear that our policy was one of deep friendship for the Russian peoples despite their form of government. "Whether their present leaders believe it or not, he said, "it is our heartfelt desire and hope that some way may be opened whereby we may be privileged to assist the people of Russia to obtain their utmost hope of liberty and ordered peace . . ."

Today, almost 40 years after the Russian revolutions we are still thwarted in our quest to convince the Russian people of our desire for peace and friendship with them. The tight dictatorship in the Kremlin has attempted, with a large measure of success, to keep the truth and the facts from the people of the Soviet Union. For example, they have never published the text of Khrushchev's speech denouncing Stalin and Stalinism, which has been printed elsewhere throughout the civilized world. The people in Russia have never been told the truth about events in Poland. They have been told hardly anything, and certainly none of the truth, about what has transpired this past month in Hungary.

It seems to me, however, that the Soviet leaders have made two fatal errors if they propose to retain the hard dictatorship which the teachings of Lenin and Stalin envisage.

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First, the new leaders of the USSR admitted to respectability the Tito experiment in Yugoslavia. I do not pose as a prophet, but in an address which I made 18 months ago at the Columbia University Commencement, I put this question: "If the Tito form of heresy, denounced a few years ago more vigorously even than capitalism, is now to be forgiven and approved, how can the Soviet deny the European satellites the right to a similar heresy if they so desire?"

I only wish that this question had been a prophecy because it is proving to be true. Poland has already made moves in this direction. In Hungary the people were unwilling to accept a halfway station toward liberty and have electrified the world by their struggle for complete independence. In doing so they have tended to disprove the theory so long held that revolt against a tyranny equipped with the modern weapons of war was foredoomed to failure.

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Whatever the final outcome in Hungary, those who have sacrificed themselves will not have failed. They have alerted the world once more to the meaning of Soviet despotism, and have struck a blow for freedom which will rank in history with the American and French revolutions.

The second fatal error the Kremlin has made was in calculating that it could safely introduce mass education into the Soviet Union and that those who were educated in science and technology would not come to think in political terms as well. Education has made it difficult, if not impossible, for the Soviet leaders to continue to close off their people from access to the realities of the outside world.

An interesting report that has recently been received indicates that the men in the Kremlin understand the danger and are trying by artificial means to meet it. They are apparently now proposing that advanced degrees will not be given to those who have completed their educational work until they have had four additional years of a compulsory work assignment on top of their educational career. Perhaps the Soviets believe this time would serve as an adequate antidote to independent thinking. But artificial means such as these and the resuscitation of Molotov to lecture to the writers and artists will do little to solve the problem. You can brainwash a few for a period of time, you could never brainwash a whole nation.

In each of these problems the Soviet Union's difficulties stem from indifference to beliefs Wilson held most deeply: the rights of any nation to determine its own destiny, and the necessity of bringing intellectual enquiry into the life of the nation at large. I daresay that Wilson would

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not have been surprised to see the proud peoples of Eastern Europe led in their latest struggle for self-determination by students and writers as well as workers and peasants.

We are now going through dramatic days in our relations with the Soviet Union and it seems that some inexorable laws are at last catching up with the Soviet system. In the industrial and educational progress which has been made they have gone far towards turning serfs into thinking human beings. They have seen satellites move dramatically toward freedom, and it is not too much to predict that the Soviet Union can never be the same as it was in the days of Stalin. In the not too distant future we may find new means of evidencing to the Russian people the basic friendship which the American people have always had toward them and which Wilson tried to show in the early days of the Russian revolution.

Wilson and the Search for Facts.

In his development of our foreign policy, Wilson was an avid searcher for the facts. In preparation for the work at the Paris Peace Conference in 1918-19, he gathered together, in a committee aptly called "The Inquiry", the ablest experts, in and out of government, to prepare the position papers on many of the intricate subjects to come before the Conference.

As a young Foreign Service Officer in Paris, I worked closely with this group. I was not officially a member of it as was Charles Seymour,

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but I can state that to the surprise and amazement of the European negotiators, the American delegation to the Paris Peace Conference arrived there better documented, even on most of the intricate European problems, than the representatives of the European states themselves.

I recall a particular instance at the Conference in 1919 when Woodrow Wilson had an exceptionally difficult problem to solve, and one which was fraught with deep international significance. It related to the allocation of the port of Fiume between the conflicting claims of Italy and Yugoslavia. Here the President's advisors were not in accord, and he was faced with detailed memoranda presenting both sides of the case. Few of the international issues presented at the Conference illustrated so well Wilson's determination to get at the facts and then to decide without fear or favor.

In this case, after considering the issues,-particularly that to take Fiume from Yugoslavia would leave that country without any readily accessible port on the Adriatic, while Italy had a plethora of ports in the area, including Venice and Trieste, - the decision went to the Yugoslavs. It resulted in the temporary withdrawal of Italy from the Peace Conference, led to the Greek invasion of Asia Minor, and stirred a deep wave of indignation against the United States throughout Italy. Wilson who had been the idol of the Italian people became overnight an enemy in their eyes.

With all the political changes in the area, this issue has long since become academic. The incident, however, has helped to reconcile me to the fact that if this country is to follow the right course, we cannot always

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hope for popularity or the love of other peoples. I find this a somewhat consoling thought these days. In the long run if our conduct follows the course of justice and fair dealing, even though unpopular at the time, we will eventually gain and hold respect.

Wilson wanted not only the facts, but a solid conclusion from them. President Emeritus Seymour in his article in Foreign Affairs for January 1956, recounts that on his way to the Paris Peace Conference on the George Washington, he called together his expert analysts in "The Inquiry" and said this, "Tell me what is right and I'll fight for it. Give me a guaranteed position."

More than any of his predecessors he sent special envoys and special missions to various foreign countries to bring him reports on particular situations. I have mentioned the Root mission to Russia. He sent a series of missions to Mexico when others were urging him to take action without worrying about petty details. Likewise in the early days of the World War he sought information on the attitudes of the great powers through his roving Ambassador, Colonel House.

I sometimes wonder why Wilson was not the originator of the plan which led to the creation of the Central Intelligence Agency. After all, its task is to do on a worldwide and systematic basis what Wilson was endeavoring to do with special missions as emergencies occurred.

What we are trying to do day by day in the Central Intelligence Agency is to pull together the facts of those situations abroad which affect our

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national security. These facts range from the military and economic power of a given country, which we call the "hardware", to the plans and intentions of the leaders of that country.

As coordinator of foreign intelligence, we have also set up machinery in government today which greatly reduces the danger of being caught unprepared, as we were at Pearl Harbor. There the essential facts, to a large extent, were available; but at that time there was no central machinery to pull them together and bring the conclusions to the attention of those who had the responsibility for action.

Today there is a 24-hour "watch" machinery established to bring important factors to the attention of competent officers as soon as they are received.

Of course, after each crisis you will find allegations in the press that our intelligence has failed and that we have been caught flat-footed in situations such as in the Middle East, Poland, Hungary, and the like. Such criticisms have to be left unanswered -- not because they are justified, but because the information available to us cannot be advertised before the event. Sometimes it cannot be mentioned even after the event without risking disclosure of intelligence sources and methods which, under the law constituting the Central Intelligence Agency, are not to be divulged. Those who bring this criticism are generally not in a position to know what facts are in the government's possession, but they do not hesitate to accuse

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the government of being taken by surprise.

Of course, the fact-finding mechanisms are as fallible as the human beings who do the collecting and the assessing of information. On several occasions Woodrow Wilson discovered this. His missions to Mexico were often hampered by the partisan interests of his reporting officers; and his mission to Russia in 1917 was handicapped by the unfamiliarity of most of the delegation with Russia's traditions and problems.

In our own day, even if one were to know all the hard facts, the problem of determining how a given country will act is no easy task. This is particularly true in dictatorships, where action depends upon the decisions of a small group of men, taken in secret, with no control by responsible legislation and with only a modicum of attention to the possible reaction of public opinion. Even at times the actions of democracies are not easily predictable.

Wilson in the Contest for Men's Minds.

One of the great tests we face in the contest with international communism is the battle for men's minds. In our search for effective instruments of political persuasion, we can perhaps take a lesson from Woodrow Wilson. The First World War was won not only on the battlefield. The victory was mightily aided by a convincing program of struggle for the allegiance of men.

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Even before the military tide turned in favor of the allied powers, Wilson succeeded in creating almost on a world-wide basis the picture of himself as a man who stood for a just settlement of the war issues. Just as today President Eisenhower's great influence in the world is based on the realization that our war time leader is a man who places peace above all other aims.

Wilson's feat was all the more remarkable because it was carried out before the days of radio and television, and before we had all the modern means of mass communication. He did have some advantages, however, which we do not now have in our dealings with the Communist countries. The press in Germany during World War I was relatively free except in the military field. Also, Wilson was addressing himself to a people whose education and sophistication made them particularly susceptible to his messages.

The Wilsonian phrase "peace without victory", proclaimed before we entered the war and not very warmly received by either of the warring groups, was still well remembered in Germany when, during the latter days of the war, he enunciated his 14-Point program.

This statement of war aims aided in undermining the German power to resist because he persuaded great segments of the German people that an end to the war would not mean their humiliation or annihilation, and that there was an honorable way to bring the hostilities to an end. Without seeming to do so Wilson was able to carry out that most difficult and generally dangerous

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operation of appealing to the people over the heads of their own governments, and of giving them statements of ideals, aims, and objectives which made the statements of their own leaders seem hollow and unrewarding. In so doing he was following exactly the opposite course from that adopted in World War II when the unfortunate unconditional surrender slogan contributed so mightily in aiding Hitler and the Nazis to wage war to the bitter end.

When Prince Max of Baden, the German Chancellor, put out very tentative peace feelers in the autumn of 1918, allied leaders abroad, and prominent figures in the United States, called upon Wilson to reject these approaches unconditionally. But Wilson continued the correspondence and slowly brought the German people over to his side -- much to the consternation of German military leaders. Ludendorff, in particular, saw that he was losing the war because the home front was failing at a time when his armies remained largely undefeated in the field.

In stressing the right of self determination, Wilson also broke the will to resist of great areas of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and in the view of our Minister to Switzerland at that time completed the demoralization of that country. So appealing was Wilson's idea of a "peace of impartial justice" that the Chancellor of Germany himself eventually justified surrender with the reasoning that: "...if we comprehend that the significance of this frightful war is above all a victory for the idea of Justice, and if we do not resist this idea, but submit with all good faith, then we shall find in it a

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cure for our present wounds and a reservoir of future strength."

In a sense, Wilson proved one of our first and most effective psychological warriors. His success was attributable not only to the inherent appeal of his ideals, but to his own deep and genuine belief in the importance of the intangibles in human affairs.

Wilson and World Organization.

There may be a kind of justice in the fact that this centennial anniversary of Wilson's birth falls at a moment when vitally important roles are being assumed by the United Nations in the Middle Eastern, the Hungarian and other crises. The great dream of Wilson was of nations united in a covenant of peace, which would hold guarantees against armed aggression. In Wilson's view the deterrent was primarily, but not exclusively, in the moral forces of nations united for peace.

"Armed force is in the background in this program," he said, "but it is in the background, and if the moral force of the world will not suffice, the physical force of the world shall." "But that is the last resort," he added, "because this is intended as a constitution of peace, not as a league of war."

It is also well to remember that Wilson's idea of a League of Nations was not merely a passive organization to keep the peace in a negative sense. "It is a League," he explained, "which can be used for cooperation in any international matter." When we look at the work being done by the various

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humanitarian, cultural and economic organs of the U.N., we see again acceptance of Wilson's injunction that more and more men in all walks of life must be "drawn into the field of international consultation."

It is, of course, too soon to be carried away by optimism about the potential of the United Nations for realizing our goal of a world at peace. We can have hope, however, that its role in the current Middle Eastern and Hungarian situations -- like its moral and material force in meeting the challenge of Korea -- will give it such stature that no would-be aggressor will dare to risk directly opposing it.

It is, I feel, a vindication of Wilson's vision that the United States is not only an active participant in the U.N. and the site of its permanent headquarters, but that America has taken a position of leadership in bringing together the moral force of a great majority of the U.N. members on all of these three challenges to the rules laid down in the charter.

Certainly the world is now awakened to the realities of the present era. Wars in the days of the bow and arrow had limited repercussions, and even after gun powder was discovered they did not quite succeed in destroying our civilization. But today with nuclear weapons, long range bombers and guided missiles, there is no answer to our survival unless we have an effective instrument to guard the peace. The laws of the jungle can no longer prevail.

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Some historians have criticized Wilson for being too inflexible in his beliefs, too quick to act on slogans, too sure that he had a guaranteed position. There is no doubt some justice in these criticisms. Basically, however, Wilson was right in his major beliefs -- and, indeed, these have been largely accepted as American policy: a deep concern for the freedom and independence of peoples everywhere; and, at the same time, commitment to an international body as the best hope for peace in troubled times. From the depth of his spiritual convictions, Wilson realized in his own day -- and reminds us in ours -- that national policy like life itself needs a sense of direction and high purpose.

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