



The House in Session, with Speaker Champ Clark Presiding.

(C) Harris & Ewing.

THE OBSTRUCTIONISTS

Small Group of Senators and Congressmen Whose Tactics Encourage Enemy and Block War Plans

SENATOR LEWIS of Illinois said the other day, referring to the few members of Congress who were doing what they could to hamper the United States Government in the war, that of course they could not be called actual traitors. The term "obstructionist" is the one commonly applied to them. But that hardly fits the case, for these men have had little success in delaying the passage of war measures through the House, where the rules of procedure are all against them, and except for the costly delay in the passage of the Food bill in the Senate, the upper body of the Congress also has had a remarkable record of both patriotism and celerity in its favorable action on tremendous and vital war questions in spite of its hampering rules and its handful of obstructionist members.

The country at large, however, need have no doubt that the daily utterances and tactics of the small group are charged with the possibility of grave danger for the thousands of young men in the army and navy; that there is ample evidence that the acts and utterances of those men, whether or not they succeed in delaying legislation, are being made much of by the enemy as propaganda to create the impression that this country is divided as to the war and will not see it through.

Perhaps President Wilson himself will use stronger language the next time he is obliged to take public and official notice of the men who are trying in Congress to block the Government. At about the time the Food bill was finally got through the Senate, he told some of the loyal supporters of this and other war measures that some way would have to be found for putting an end to such hampering tactics. Just what it will be, nobody seems to know. Undoubtedly an attempt will be made at the Winter session to liberalize further the rules of the Senate in order to make obstruction more difficult. But that, of course, will

not stop the making of remarks and the introduction of measures which result only in giving material for enemy propaganda here and abroad.

Charles Edward Russell of the American Mission to Russia says that the speeches of the anti-war members of the American Congress are more useful to German agents in keeping Russia demoralized and uncertain in battle than are the German troops. Furthermore, there are patriotic members of Congress who see in the making of such speeches a close parallel to the Vallandigham case of the civil war. As Vallandigham eventually became a good deal of a joke and a fizzle, his name did not stick in the American memory as has that of Benedict Arnold. But his case is worth recalling now if only for the sake of the letters it brought forth from President Lincoln on the damage that disloyal citizens at home might do to the cause of a country at war.

Vallandigham was a distinguished member of Congress from Ohio at the beginning of the civil war, but failed of re-election in 1862 because of his disloyal attacks on the floor of the House against the Government and its war measures. He continued these attacks outside of Congress at mass meetings in Ohio. At one of these gatherings he talked of "King Lincoln," denounced the conscription law, and declared that the South could never be conquered. This was in May, 1863. He was arrested, tried by court-martial for treasonable utterances, and sentenced to imprisonment at Fort Warren, Boston Harbor, for the period of the war. President Lincoln commuted the sentence and sent Vallandigham over to the Confederates to be among his friends. A troop of Union cavalry in General Rosecrans's army escorted the ex-Congressman to the enemy lines and delivered him to a private soldier of a regiment of Alabama infantry on outpost duty.

At Richmond, according to the records

in the Confederate War Department, Vallandigham said to an official of that department: "If you can only hold out this year the peace party of the North will sweep the Lincoln dynasty out of political existence." The Ohio man was not much more popular in the South than he had been in the North. He escaped to Bermuda on a blockade runner, and thence to Canada, where he made speeches on the Dominion side of Niagara Falls, and conducted a long-distance campaign for the Governorship of Ohio, to which he had been nominated by a small anti-war faction of Ohio Democrats. He was defeated by a majority of more than one hundred thousand votes. When he returned to his State a year later he was neither hero nor martyr. The Government and the public ignored his existence.

But for some time after his arrest and before his shipment to the South Vallandigham had been something of an issue. A group of New York Democrats passed resolutions denouncing the Government for what it had done and sent the resolutions to President Lincoln. He replied in a letter which fits the case of disloyal citizens in and out of Congress for all time. After explaining to the New York Democrats why ordinary trials in civil courts in war time in such cases as that of Vallandigham were not adequate, Mr. Lincoln said in his letter:

"And yet again, he who dissuades one man from volunteering, or induces one soldier to desert, weakens the Union cause as much as he who kills a Union soldier in battle. Yet this dissuasion or inducement may be so conducted as to be no defined crime of which any civil court would take cognizance."

Further on he wrote:

"In such cases the purposes of men are much more easily understood than in cases of ordinary crime. The man who stands by and says nothing when the peril of his Government is discussed cannot be misunderstood; much more if

he talks ambiguously—talks of his country with 'buts' and 'ifs' and 'ands.'"

And also this from the same letter:

"Long experience has shown that armies cannot be maintained unless desertion shall be punished by the severe penalty of death. The case requires, and the law and the Constitution sanction, this punishment. Must I shoot a simple-minded soldier boy who deserts, while I must not touch a hair of a wily agitator who induces him to desert? This is none the less injurious when effected by getting a father or brother or friend into a public meeting and there working upon his feelings till he is persuaded to write the soldier boy that he is fighting in a bad cause, for a wicked administration of a contemptible Government, too weak to arrest and punish him if he shall desert. I think that in such a case to silence the agitator and save the boy is not only constitutional, but, withal, a great mercy."

It is true that Vallandigham was not a member of Congress when he made the specific speech for which he was convicted and punished, and there is a provision of the Constitution that members shall not be questioned in any other place for any speech or debate in the Senate or House. But that same section says: "They shall in all cases except treason, felony, and breach of the peace, be privileged from arrest" during their attendance in Congress and in going to and from Congress. Another section provides that either House may expel a member upon a two-thirds vote.

Senator Lewis says there are no traitors in Congress, so there is no occasion to resort to the methods adopted in the case of Vallandigham and to get safe conduct across the sea and to the German boundary for a handful of our Senators and Representatives. If they should go, and did not find a welcome, that would be ample proof of the ingratitude of Germany.

What legislative bluff, for example,

could have pleased the Kaiser more than that bill introduced the other day in the house by Representative William E. Mason of Illinois to repeal the conscription law for the raising of the national army? Of course, it was immediately buried in a committee, and it will never come out. Mason knew that it would be. But, whatever Mason's purpose may have been, the result of the mere introduction of his measure was to give the Germans abroad and their agents in this country the chance to say that in the very beginnings of our getting a great army together there was pending in the American Congress a measure to stop the entire proceeding by repealing the act that makes the army possible. And the Germans and their agents have made good use of the material handed to them by Mason. They already have spread the report through Russia that the United States cannot be depended upon. Mason mustn't be thought of as indulging in the treasonable business of giving aid and comfort to Germany. He is merely a Congressman at Large from Illinois, and perhaps he thinks that the many Germans in that State want him to do such things.

Fred Britten, another Representative of Illinois, put in a bill forbidding the enlistment of soldiers of German ancestry in the American army. This, too, goes to a pigeonhole for all time. But when translated into German propaganda it is used to assure the enemy that the hundreds of thousands of Germans in this country will not fight for America and that it has been necessary to introduce a measure in Congress to exempt them. The only explanation of Britten's conduct to be obtained from fellow-members of the House is that he is of German ancestry. Mason and Britten may be taken as samples of a very small group of members of the House who are doing the country no good.

In the Senate the group is larger; at least its members are more conspicuous, and they can not only put in pernicious bills but can seriously handicap the Government by delaying the good ones. It was the action of the eleven Senators of the last Congress, the "small group of willful men," in blocking the armed merchant ship bill that led to the change in the Senate rules by which a limited power of closure has been obtained.

The new rule provides that if at any time a motion signed by sixteen Senators to bring a debate to a close the motion shall be offered to the Senate for a vote two days after it is presented and if it is then passed by a two-thirds vote of those voting, no member thereafter shall be allowed to speak more than one hour on the question before the vote

on it is taken. Even with that rule there is possibility of a delay of two days plus ninety-six hours. It is the hope of Senator Pomerene and many others to go much further in the work of reform and fix it so that debate may be cut off at any time if there is a two-thirds vote in favor of so doing. Such a safeguard would have saved about three-fourths of the delay on the Food bill.

A good many more big war measures have got to be put through Congress before there is any hope of further changing the Senate rules, and the Government is menaced with the same danger of delay on each and every one of these bills that has been encountered in the food control legislation because of the obstructive tactics of La Follette, Gronna, France, Penrose, Hardwick, Reed, and Hollis.

La Follette is easily the chief of the anti-war group, and has fought every Government measure since America went to war. No sooner had he been overwhelmed by the vote on the Food bill than he offered the amazing peace resolution demanding that the United States and her allies contribute to a joint fund of all the belligerents to pay for the devastation Germany had caused in France, Belgium, and Serbia, and everywhere else where her armies have been. If that resolution did not give aid and comfort to the enemy, there is nothing that ever will please that enemy. Of course, La Follette did not intend to give comfort and aid, for he is no traitor. He is just La Follette without the slightest capacity to take an impersonal or broad view of anything under heaven. It is a reasonable inference that he did not really think of helping Germany by that resolution or by anything else that he has done or said, because he cannot see so far off as Germany. He cannot see beyond Wisconsin and La Follette. What he has seen and heard or thinks that he has seen and heard in Wisconsin makes him believe that this war is going to be an unpopular war in America and that by opposing it at the outset, and all the time, he will eventually reap the political benefit of having been from the start

on what he thinks is going to be the popular side sometime in the future.

In other words, La Follette thinks he is already running for the Presidency in 1920 on an anti-war issue, and it is a part of his campaign to make the war unpopular now. Just why he wants the United States to pay for Germany's destruction of cities is not so clear. But La Follette is queer as well as very personal.

Then there is Gronna of North Dakota. His seat in the Senate is right next to La Follette's. They whisper together. Perhaps that explains Gronna sufficiently. But there are other things about him. He thinks in terms of dollars and cents and acres of land. He owns 18,000 acres of farms, 10,000 acres of this in wheat. He opposed the Food bill. Perhaps it was because he feared that its

passage would mean a smaller return on that wheat. But, except on the subject of his land and its returns to his pocket, Gronna gives voice to no ideas whatever. He is dominated by La Follette. If Gronna had happened to get a seat beside somebody else, somebody who whispered patriotism to him, he might have been for war, if it didn't cost too much. A comparatively friendly criticism of Senator Gronna from a fellow-member of Congress is this:

"Gronna doesn't know what any of these national and international questions mean. They don't mean anything to him. He has had a life of

hard work in acquiring thousands of acres of land and has come down to Washington to rest."

William J. Stone, of Missouri, known formerly as "Gumshoe Bill," who has had one of the worst anti-war and anti-governmental records in the Senate, has improved a little lately. He has had less to say, and he voted for the Food bill as it came out of the conference.

But Stone's colleague, Senator Reed, has been entirely uniform in his performances as an obstructionist. Yet Reed is not classed with La Follette. His associates don't question his motives. On the contrary, they like him. They think that it is a bad thing for the United States

that he should be in the Senate at the present time, but they qualify every criticism of his conduct with the remark that he is honest and sincere and trying to do what he thinks is the best thing for his country. The trouble with Reed is that he has been a prosecutor so long that he cannot get over it. He has the mind of a prosecutor. The Senate Chamber is merely a court room to him. Every great question that comes up, national or international, is merely a case to be tried. His job is to convict somebody. It was, for example, the working of the prosecutor's mind in the old court room groove that made him call Herbert C. Hoover a food gambler, in the course of one of his long tirades against the Food bill. He thought he was addressing a jury—he couldn't help it.

Hardwick of Georgia, who voted against the Food bill and did his best to delay it with meaningless talk, is another obstructionist for whom his fellows find excuses. He is honest, he means well, but he is too provincial to be a member of a Federal legislature. He should be in the town council or possibly on a school committee. Although a very young man, born long after the civil war, he is a good example of the old-style, ante-bellum States-rights Democrat. He knows only Georgia. To him Belgium and France are very far countries.

No credit is due Gore of Oklahoma and Sherman of Illinois for not voting against the Food bill. They were paired with two other Senators, and both of them announced that they would have voted in the negative. They both belong in the obstructionist group.

And there is Vardaman of Mississippi. The chief point of difference between Vardaman of the present and Vardamigham of 1863, who petered out into a joke at the end of his career, is that Vardaman has been regarded in Washington as a joke from the start. His chief fear in life is that nothing will be said about him, that his presence will not be noted. If you can't praise him he wants you to abuse him. Why is he against the war? Why did he vote against conscription? For the same reason that he had himself dragged about his State by eighty milk-white oxen in one of his political campaigns. It attracted attention to Vardaman. If this war were unpopular, if the majority of the members of Congress were against it, Vardaman probably would be for it. He has so much better show of being conspicuous in a very small group than when he is one of a score or more. Vardaman did vote for the Food bill. But he would be vexed if for that reason his name should be omitted from this brief summary of the obstructionists.



Senator W. J. Stone, Though an Outspoken Pacifist and Anti-war Advocate, Has Refrained from Voting With the Obstructionists.