

Option 1

Progressive Internationalists: Support the Treaty

The Great War has changed the nature of international relations, and we Americans need to be at the forefront. The Great War has taught us that our old reliance on isolationism and a unilateral foreign policy is no longer feasible. The world has become smaller with the advent of modern transportation and communication. The United States needs to embrace this change. The old methods of rule, centered on the balance of power and wartime alliances, can no longer hold sway. International trade and overseas markets are more and more important to our economic well being. Because of these changes and the fact that our old buffers of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans can no longer shield us from the rest of the world, we must accept the mantle of leadership that has been thrust upon us. We did not seek this role, but we have an obligation to future generations to fulfill it.

The League of Nations will insure the peace by providing economic, legal, and security organizations to address global problems. This “general assembly of states” will offer a place for nations to come together with issues and complaints to be discussed with other members in order to solve problems before conflict occurs. The League’s International Labor Organization would provide a forum for labor disputes to be resolved between workers and business and provide global workers’ rights—a need demonstrated by the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. The League’s International Court of Justice would provide legal norms by which all countries would abide and to which they would be held accountable. The confusion surrounding the “freedom of the seas” provisions during the War demonstrated the need for international laws to be codified and enforced by an international court.

The provisions in Article X do not require the United States to send forces to every situation. As President Wilson said, “when you have a fire in Omaha, you don’t send to Oklahoma for the fire department.” Furthermore, military force is not the only means to protect the

territorial integrity of the borders drawn at Versailles. Economic sanctions will also be a powerfully persuasive force to coerce belligerents to abide by the treaty. League members, led by its Council, of which the United States would be a permanent member, would assess every situation on its own merit and decide on the appropriate action. In addition, the United States will not assume any control over mandates that have been established by the Versailles Treaty. The United States’ Monroe Doctrine, and its declaration of hegemony over the Western Hemisphere, is maintained under the League as is the right of Congress to declare war before U.S. forces would be introduced. The League is essential to the peace of the world, and we must support it.



Beliefs and Assumptions Underlying Option 1

1. The United States should accept the role of leader of nations. The twentieth-century world requires that the United States consider other nations' views and work with other nations when executing foreign policy.

2. The League of Nations will not

demand undue military participation on the part of the United States.

3. The League of Nations and its Council will prevent conflicts such as the Great War in the future.

Supporting Arguments for Option 1

1. Joining the League will put the United States in a leadership position with which it can influence world events to meet our national interests.

2. Without support from the United States the League as a whole will fail

and the world will have learned nothing from its experiences in the Great War.

3. The League of Nations will allow the United States to work for peace throughout the world.

From the Historical Record

Woodrow Wilson, September 1919

"For the first time in history the counsels of mankind are to be drawn together and concerted for the purpose of defending the rights and improving the conditions of working people—men, women, and children—all over the world. Such a thing as that was never dreamed of before, and what you are asked to discuss in discussing the League of Nations is the matter of seeing that this thing is not interfered with. There is no other way to do it than by a universal League of Nations, and what is proposed is a universal League of Nations."

Woodrow Wilson, September 1919

"All that you are told about this covenant [the League of Nations Covenant], so far as I can learn, is that there is an Article X. I will repeat Article X to you; I think I can repeat it verbatim, the heart of it at any rate. Every member of the League promises to respect and preserve as against external aggression—not as against internal revolution—the territorial integrity and existing political independence of every other member of the League, and if it is necessary to enforce this promise—I mean, for the nations to act in concert with arms in their hands to enforce it, then the council of

the League shall advise what action is necessary.... The point is this: The council can not give that advice without the vote of the United States, unless it is a party to the dispute; but, my fellow citizens, if you are a party to the dispute you are in the scrap anyhow. If you are a party, then the question is not whether you are going to war or not, but merely whether you are going to war against the rest of the world or with the rest of the world, and the object of war in that case will be to defend that central thing that I began by speaking about. That is the guaranty of the land titles of the world which have been established by this treaty."

Woodrow Wilson, September 1919

"Instead of wishing to ask to stand aside, get the benefits of the League, but share none [of] its burdens or responsibilities, I for my part want to go in and accept what is offered to us, the leadership of the world. A leadership of what sort, my fellow citizens? Not a leadership that leads men along the lines by which great nations can profit out of weak nations, not an exploiting power, but a liberating power, a power to show the world that when America was born it was indeed a

finger pointed toward those lands into which men could deploy some of these days and live happy in freedom, look each other in the eyes as equals, see that no man was put upon, that no people were forced to accept authority which was not their own choice, and that out of the general generous impulses of the human genius and the human spirit we were lifted along the levels of civilization to days when there should be wars no more, but men should govern themselves in peace and amity and quiet. That is the leadership we said we wanted, and now the world offers it to us. It is inconceivable that we should reject it.”

United States Secretary of War Newton D. Baker, 1919

“...It is necessary to remember the lack of such a league in 1914 threw the world into the chaos of this war. Terrified statesmen endeavored to sustain the delicately poised balance of power. They ran here and there, uttering their old-time cautions and speaking with pathetic diligence for what they called a formula that would compose the mad impulses which were threatening to engulf the world. They failed because the means were not adapted to the ends—because in the modern world, things move too fast for the stagecoach diplomacy of the Middle Ages. Had there been a League of Nations then, could Sir Edward Grey have summoned into conference the authoritative representatives of the great civilized powers, and through them have focused the intelligence and the conscience of mankind on the Austro-Serbian quarrel? There would have been gained the priceless moment of mediation which would have enabled the heady currents of racial and national passion to be allayed. Today there would be in all the devastated countries of the world that calm progress which a continuation of peaceful civilization ensures. Billions of wealth, now utterly lost and destroyed, would still be in existence to comfort and enrich the life of nations, and millions of men, women, and children, gunned to death in battle, or carried away by famine and pestilence, would still be alive to enjoy the normal portion of human happiness and to contribute by their labor and their love to the making of a better world.”

Senator Robert L. Owen, November 19, 1919

“This great covenant of the league presents the hope, and aspiration of good men of all nations of the world.... There is one great difference, I think, between those who favor this league and those who are opposed to it. Those who favor the league believe in the common honesty and common sense of mankind.”

Senator Joseph T. Robinson, November 19, 1919

“Membership in the League of Nations is treated, in the reservations, with so little dignity and as such slight importance as to authorize its termination by the passage of a mere concurrent resolution of Congress. This attempt to deny to the president participation in withdrawal by this government from the league and to vest that authority solely in the two Houses of Congress [is] in disregard of the plain provision of the constitution.”

Senator Gilbert M. Hitchcock, November 19, 1919

“How can Senators view this great attempt to organize the world as a joke? Who made these reservations? Did we have any voice in them, we who expected to furnish the bulk of the votes for the ratification of the treaty? No... [Senators who have] declared that [they] will never vote for the treaty in any form [were] influential in making the reservations.... Yes, I believe the time has come, and I urge Senators upon the other side of the aisle who believe in the League of Nations, as I know many of them do, to do something to make it possible for the two sides of the Senate to get together in a final settlement of ratification of the treaty by some feasible means.”

Senator Joseph T. Robinson, November 19, 1919

“Make no mistake about it. The Senate should either ratify this treaty unqualifiedly or upon such terms and conditions as will...enable [the president] speedily to conclude peace by an exchange of ratifications.... It is plain that our self-respecting allies will not accept the terms and conditions which we seek [in the reservations].”