

THE SEIZURE OF THE RUHR VALLEY  
BY FRANCE

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SPEECH

OF

HON. ROBERT L. OWEN

OF OKLAHOMA

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THE SEIZURE OF THE RUHR VALLEY BY FRANCE.

Mr. OWEN. Mr. President, the Versailles treaty, part 7, annex 11, paragraph 18, contains the following words:

The measures which the allied and associated powers shall have the right to take in case of voluntary default by Germany, and which Germany agrees not to regard as acts of war, may include economic and financial prohibitions and reprisals and in general such other measures as the respective Governments may determine to be necessary in the circumstances.

It will be remembered that Rumania invaded Hungary to collect reparations immediately after the armistice and that the Allies, led by France, rebuked Rumania for a violation of the treaty of Versailles, and at a time when M. Loucheur, of France, was then chairman of the Reparation Commission and Mr. Clemenceau was president of the Peace Conference, and that Clemenceau signed the note to Rumania on August 23, 1919, as follows:

The Peace Conference is in receipt of information, the accuracy of which, unfortunately, it seems impossible to question, that Rumanian forces in Hungary are continuing the systematic seizure and removal of Hungarian property.

In view of the recent correspondence between the Peace Conference and the Rumanian Government it is difficult for the allied and associated powers to comprehend such action of the Rumanian Government, except on the hypothesis that the Rumanian Government ignores the accepted principles of reparation.

The Rumanian Government, as a participant in the labors of the Peace Conference and as a signatory of the treaty of peace with Germany, should not, however, be unaware of the care which has been exercised by the allied and associated powers to provide for an orderly scheme of reparation.

If indemnification for damage suffered had been left dependent upon such factors as geographical proximity to enemy assets or upon the result of competition between allied States in possessing themselves of such assets, it would have been inevitable that flagrant injustices and serious discord would result. Accordingly, the treaty with Germany, to which Rumania is a party, consecrates certain fundamental principles of reparation, notably:

(3) A central Reparation Commission is established as an exclusive agency of the allied and associated powers for the collection and distribution of enemy assets by way of reparation.

The acts referred to likewise depart from the agreed principle that the Reparation Commission should act as the exclusive agency of all of the allied and associated powers in the collection of enemy assets by way of reparation.

The further possible consequence of the course of action which Rumania appears to have adopted are so serious and fraught with such danger to the orderly restoration of Europe that the Allies and associated powers would, if necessity arose, feel constrained to adopt a most vigorous course of action to avoid these consequences.

For it is obvious that if the collection of reparation were to be allowed to degenerate into individual and competitive action by the several allied and associated powers, injustice will be done and cupidity will be aroused and, in the confusion of uncoordinated action, the enemy will either evade or be incapacitated from making the maximum of reparation.

The allied and associated powers can not, however, believe that the Government of Rumania would create and force the allied and associated powers to deal with such a danger.

The Peace Conference accordingly awaits from the Government of Rumania an immediate and unequivocal declaration:

(1) That the Government of Rumania recognizes the principle that the assets of enemy States are a common security for all of the allied and associated powers:

(2) That it recognizes the Reparation Commission as the exclusive agency for the collection of enemy assets by way of reparation.



Rumania withdrew from Hungary. Therefore the treaty of Versailles was interpreted by France itself, through its most distinguished representatives, to forbid one of the Allies to take the initiative and attempt to collect reparations on its own initiative and with its own force.

The interpretation by France of the treaty of Versailles in regard to Rumania was a proper and righteous interpretation, but now the French statesmen are contending that paragraph 18, above quoted, of Part VII, of the treaty of Versailles, justifies her invasion of Germany and gives France the right to independent action, although, I understand, that England's chief law officers claim that this is not a righteous interpretation and does not give France a right to invade Germany for the collection of reparations.

Mr. President, the American papers are full of the seizure of the Ruhr Valley, its coal mines, its industries, by France, and the leaders of mankind are full of perplexity at the grave consequences which may ensue by the military invasion of German territory by France.

When the German people were being led by the military dynasty of the Hohenzollern leadership against France the great body of American opinion was keenly sympathetic with France. Then France was being invaded without moral right by military force and brute power. Then there was a contest between monarchy and democracy, between military autocracy and representative government.

Now France is invading Germany with military force, with her former allies standing aghast at the procedure. Now it is no longer a contest between German monarchy and French democracy. It becomes a contest between French leadership and German leadership, severally representing the French and German people, who are assumed to have a truly representative government, and a question arises as to the legal rights of the French leaders to invade Germany and of their moral right to do so. It is obvious that the allies of France and Belgium do not approve this step; that the world does not approve it. The question of legal right under the treaty of Versailles is challenged by men of the highest ability. That may be left as a controverted question. I merely wish to make an observation on the moral right of France to do this and the political wisdom of this procedure.

The French leaders undoubtedly believe that the German leaders are trying to evade the payment of the reparations provided by the treaty of Versailles and have determined that they will not permit it. It seems highly probable the people of Germany, especially those of great wealth, are at heart opposed to paying the reparations to the extent fixed by the Versailles treaty. The French leaders seem determined to use whatever military force is necessary to compel the German people to pay the amount fixed by France in the treaty of Versailles.

The treaty of Versailles was written by the victors and was a dictated treaty and was not written in the light of the 14 points laid down by the President of the United States and accepted by the Allies and by the German leaders as a basis upon which the German authorities agreed to the armistice in behalf of the German people. The 14 points and the speeches of President Woodrow Wilson upon which the Germans agreed to the armistice required the treaty to be based upon strict justice and upon high moral grounds. Therefore, the world has a right to inquire into this matter upon that basis.



The treaty of Versailles is not conclusive under the circumstances. The German people who are to pay the penalties have a moral right to expect that the reparations honorably and justly due to France and Belgium should be fixed at a figure which would be just and fair, and that these figures should be determined by disinterested powers and not dictated by the sword. The brutal conduct of Bismarck in dealing with the French in 1871 was a bad example and does not constitute a moral precedent upon which to determine this matter.

When we come to consider the matter of reparations, I believe all the world will agree that as between the people involved the actual cost of repairing the devastated region of France and Belgium ought to be borne by the German people. The actual cost the Germans can assuredly meet, but the actual cost should be ascertained in a judicial manner, where so earnestly controverted, not by a victor's dictum.

It is impossible for any reparation to be made for the death of the millions of men involved in the struggle.

When we come to consider this matter from a moral and ethical standpoint it may be now seen, after five years from the termination of the conflict, that this devastation of life can not justly or fairly be visited upon the unhappy peoples who were afflicted by it.

The amount of the physical reparations and the payment of these reparations by the German people should be considered in the light of the extent to which the German people were themselves the victims of a structure of government which had been built up through generations of men. The Hohenzollerns claimed to rule by Divine right, and they had control of the military and naval power; they had control of the legislative powers of the people of Germany. It was not a government based upon the consent of the people. It was a government ruling the people without their consent. It was a government controlling the purse of the German people. It was a government controlling the press absolutely, controlling the pulpit, the schools, the forum, every avenue of intelligence and communication, and, in very large measure, the expression of public opinion.

When the Kaiser and his military and naval leaders determined upon war there was no organized public opinion in Germany which had the least power to oppose it. No young German summoned to the colors by the order of mobilization had any option. Every German youth was absolutely compelled to answer the order under penalty of a drumhead court-martial and a firing squad consigning him immediately to an ignominious grave as a traitor to his country, as a traitor to his brothers and kinsmen, as a coward or a rebel, if he failed to come. He had only the option of coming, weeping or singing. He came singing.

Public opinion in Germany was completely enslaved by the Hohenzollern machine. The people did not know the facts. They had presented to them as facts flagrant falsehood. They had overwhelming argument submitted by their leaders which they had no means of answering.

Half of the German people were women, who had no voice whatever in public affairs, or pretended voice. A large part of the German population were minors, with no voice or pretense of voice. Millions of them were in complete infancy, and before the reparations shall have been paid a majority of the German people who pay the reparations will have been brought



into being in this world subsequent to and without any responsibility whatever for the World War and the devastations which were inflicted upon the unhappy people of France and Belgium and upon their allies.

Morally it can not be assumed that the unborn babe is responsible for the World War.

Morally it can not be assumed that the women of Germany and the minors of Germany were responsible for the World War.

The moral responsibility rested upon William II, now living in luxury in Holland, upon Ludendorf, Hindenburg, and the military and naval leaders of Germany.

And the leaders of the world have measurably condoned the moral responsibility of this culpable leadership of Germany and have imposed no penalties upon them for their crimes in leading the German people into this devastating war. Instead they have contented themselves with imposing economic penalties upon the German people, who were already afflicted to death by monarchy, and who are being afflicted by the results of this war almost as much as the people of the Allies. In the great thing, the destruction of life, the maiming of men, the German people have suffered just about the same as the French and Belgians and English and Italians and Americans. The leaders of the Allies have condoned the conduct of the leadership of Germany and they are contenting themselves with economic reparations imposed on the common people of Germany, upon whom always falls most heavily the folly of human leadership.

Mr. President, the people of America have had a great sympathy with France and Belgium in the gigantic wrongs done them, but the people of America desire absolute justice from a moral and ethical standpoint to be done. They desire the peace of the world. They desire that the productive powers of mankind shall be brought to a speedy maximum in order to make possible the economic reparation for the damages of war.

The invasion of Germany by the French military forces will not meet the moral approval of America, first, because they see in this invasion the sowing of dragons' teeth, the building up of a more intense hatred between the German and French people, and the building up of greater hostilities between those who will sympathize with Germany on the one hand and the French and the Belgians on the other, dividing the world again into two vast contending camps, where the ultimate attitude may be another appeal to organized military force.

Second, because the French leadership seems to be indisposed to allow controverted questions as to the amount of the reparations and the means of collecting reparations to be settled by economic methods. They have dictated the amount, the terms, and are collecting or trying to collect by military force, and they will probably break down the productive power of the German people.

If France and Belgium should show a disposition to permit the intermediation of friendly nations on these questions and to invite such mediation before it is too late, there would be an outburst of approval in America of such an attitude.

It will be very deplorable if French leadership should persist in a policy which will alienate the confidence and respect of the world. The rattling of sabers does not appeal to American opinion, and the best friends of the French people in America are deploring a policy which they fear will ultimately do France irreparable injury.



I believe we should, before it is too late, join the other great nations in some plan for guaranteeing France from invasion, under the principles of the League of Nations, but only on the condition that France itself does not invade other countries. I think the German people should have the same guaranty from the world of freedom from invasion and that the world should use economic pressure on the German people to enforce reparations to the extent a world tribunal shall ascertain such reparations are due and payable.

Mr. OWEN. Mr. President, without taking the time of the Senate to read, I will ask to have inserted in the RECORD in 8-point type articles 232, 233, and 234 of Part VIII of the Versailles treaty, which sets forth the plan by which the reparation was to be made.

There being no objection, the matter referred to was ordered to be printed in the RECORD in 8-point type, as follows:

ARTICLE 232.

The allied and associated Governments recognize that the resources of Germany are not adequate, after taking into account permanent diminutions of such resources which will result from other provisions of the present treaty, to make complete reparation for all such loss and damage.

The allied and associated Governments, however, require, and Germany undertakes, that she will make compensation for all damage done to the civilian population of the allied and associated powers and to their property during the period of the belligerency of each as an allied or associated power against Germany by such aggression by land, by sea, and from the air, and in general all damage as defined in Annex I hereto.

In accordance with Germany's pledges, already given, as to complete restoration for Belgium, Germany undertakes, in addition to the compensation for damage elsewhere in this part provided for, as a consequence of the violation of the treaty of 1839, to make reimbursement of all sums which Belgium has borrowed from the allied and associated Governments up to November 11, 1918, together with interest at the rate of 5 per cent per annum on such sums. This amount shall be determined by the Reparation Commission, and the German Government undertakes thereupon forthwith to make a special issue of bearer bonds to an equivalent amount payable in marks gold, on May 1, 1926, or, at the option of the German Government, on the 1st of May in any year up to 1926. Subject to the foregoing, the form of such bonds shall be determined by the Reparation Commission. Such bonds shall be handed over to the Reparation Commission, which has authority to take and acknowledge receipt thereof on behalf of Belgium.

ARTICLE 233.

The amount of the above damage for which compensation is to be made by Germany shall be determined by an interallied commission, to be called the Reparation Commission, and constituted in the form and with the powers set forth hereunder and in Annexes II to VII, inclusive, hereto.

This commission shall consider the claims and give to the German Government a just opportunity to be heard.

The findings of the commission as to the amount of damage defined as above shall be concluded and notified to the German Government on or before May 1, 1921, as representing the extent of that Government's obligations.

The commission shall concurrently draw up a schedule of payments prescribing the time and manner for securing and

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discharging the entire obligation within a period of 30 years from May 1, 1921. If, however, within the period mentioned Germany fails to discharge her obligations any balance remaining unpaid may, within the discretion of the commission, be postponed for settlement in subsequent years or may be handled otherwise in such manner as the allied and associated Governments, acting in accordance with the procedure laid down in this part of the present treaty, shall determine.

#### ARTICLE 234.

The Reparation Commission shall, after May 1, 1921, from time to time consider the resources and capacity of Germany, and after giving her representatives a just opportunity to be heard shall have discretion to extend the date and to modify the form of payments, such as are to be provided for in accordance with article 233, but not to cancel any part, except with the specific authority of the several Governments represented upon the commission.

Mr. OWEN. Mr. President, I wish to take only a moment or two to reply to the suggestions which have been made by the Senator from Pennsylvania [Mr. REED]. That Senator emphasizes the criminal conduct of Germany. I differentiate between the criminal conduct of the military leaders of the Hohenzollern dynasty and the mass of the German people who were the subjects and victims of that organized military and political power. I made that distinction very clearly in what I had to say, but I do not know whether or not the Senator from Pennsylvania was then present.

The Senator from Pennsylvania also emphasizes the great importance of minding our own business. We did not think when the great World War broke out in 1914 that we were concerned in the wrongs then done to Belgium. We made a great mistake. We ought to have protested, instantly Belgium was invaded, the violation of her sovereignty and of her territorial integrity.

When one nation is allowed to be broken down by such conduct all the nations in the world are jeopardized and a policy is pursued which is destined to break down the peace of the world in which we are greatly concerned. It is emphatically "our business." I do not believe in the doctrine of Cain, who, in response to the inquiry, "Where is thy brother?" asked, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Cain assumed no responsibility for his brother Abel's safety. He asserted before God it was "none of his business." I want to tell the Senator from Pennsylvania and tell the Senate that it is "our business" to speak the voice of morality and of justice among men and to say to France in a voice that shall be heard, "Keep out of Germany," and to say to Germany, "Keep out of France." That is the only way we are going to have peace on earth. We can not consent that nations without objection—and with a silence "that gives consent" on our part—may invade other nations and then expect that it will not react upon us and upon all the world.

I do not feel so much concern about the commercial aspect to which Governor Lowden referred. If Europe is kept in an eternal broil, if the productive powers of Europe are broken down, it is true that Europe can not create commodity values, send them to our country, and establish the credit with which to buy cotton and corn and wheat and copper, and that is an important matter. It is a more important matter that there



should be peace on earth. I am concerned in that; the United States is concerned in it; the whole world is concerned in it.

A plan has been arranged by which 51 nations have already pledged themselves to protect France from invasion. It is difficult for me to believe that French leadership is afraid of the invasion of France by Germany, whose powers to make and hold arms have been taken away, when 51 nations stand behind France to protect France against invasion, when Great Britain was willing to make a special guaranty to France, and when our great Nation has, by its declaration of principle, expressed its sympathy against the invasion of France, and when Germany proposes a solemn pledge to the world not to invade France.

The principle of territorial integrity and political independence is vital. It must be maintained if world peace is to be maintained. The French leaders, having such guaranty against invasion, are now breaking down the principle agreed to in the League of Nations, Article X, by which French safety from future invasion was safeguarded and will justify the world in abandoning the guaranty as far as France is concerned.

We went into the last war not for sordid purposes, but to establish liberty throughout the world. That is what our sons fought for and that is what they died for—not the liberty of France alone but the liberty of mankind. The liberty of the French people, yes; but the liberty also of the German people. I am just as much in favor of giving liberty to the German people as I am to the French people. We can not give liberty to one and take it away from another and establish the divine doctrine of peace and good will on earth. The thing that men are willing to live for and to fight and die for is "liberty." It ought not to be put upon a sordid plane.

Nothing which I said showed any lack of sympathy for the French people. I have the greatest sympathy for the French people. I wish I could believe that the French people had a greater measure of democratic self-government. In my judgment they are being largely governed now by an organized commercial, military, and political force which is leading them and the world into injury and harm.

From their recent gestures I can not help thinking that the military leadership of France is dictating the economic policy of France. However, whether that be true or not, it is my judgment that it is an injury to the people of the United States that this controversy between the French leadership and the German leadership should remain unsettled and that war should grow out of it.

It is not a question of sympathizing with the unborn babe of France or the unborn babe of Germany or the unborn babe of the United States; but it is a question of establishing by orderly processes a means by which men shall live at peace, and the first fundamental of that principle requires the recognition of the doctrine of the territorial integrity and political independence of each self-governing nation. When we depart from that principle we set the world on fire.

I feel entirely justified in what I said with regard to the invasion of the Ruhr. I hope, indeed, that time may prove that our grave apprehensions are not well founded.

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