November 2, 1923.
Remarks by the President to the Newspaper Men

I have here an inquiry about Mr. Mondell and Mr. Lyer. They have returned from a somewhat extensive trip through the West, which they reported to me informally. They are making out a carefully prepared written report, which will be released, I think, for publication, by Monday. That will be so much better than anything I could give you offhand, that I think you better wait and get that. They were encouraged by their trip, and think it will be fruitful of results.

Another inquiry about the terms laid down by Poncaire. I haven't seen the official notes on that. In fact, I am not certain that any official notes have been received. There have been some press reports of speeches that have been made by Poncaire, but all the notes that have been received indicated a hopeful acceptance of our proposal. Now, the proposal is set out carefully in our note. As I went through these questions today, I found that many of them would be answered by a careful perusal of the note, much better than I could answer them. We made the suggestion for an inquiry into the capacity of Germany to pay reparations. That is broad and inclusive and not limited in any way. To those to whom we made the suggestion, it is open to acceptance or rejection, or if they see fit to present any limitations that they might think were proper, that would bring it back, of course, to the question of whether, under those circumstances, we should want to participate. The negotiations have not progressed far enough about that, so that we can be certain. The only thing we need to keep in mind about it, is that, if the investigation can be made on the terms that we suggested, we think it would be hopeful of results. Now, if it is to be limited very definitely and conclusively, that, in our opinion, would diminish the hope of securing any very beneficial results. It might limit it so far that it would seem to be useless to proceed. It might make it desirable to proceed, but to proceed only with the clear understanding that, probably, it would be futile.

No steps have been taken towards the appointment of an American member, and anyone that is designated, doesn't go, insofar as I have in mind any plan now, representing the American Government. That, too, is carefully stated in the note. He goes as an American, to assist - not at all to represent our Government.
do I know whether our Government would take any steps towards making an appoint-
ment. It is suggested that Americans could undoubtedly be secured who would
participate in such an investigation. Now, they might be chosen by the Reparations
Commission, or chosen in any other fashion. But it was carefully stated that they
are not to represent the American Government.

I have already mentioned the wheat situation. I know that former Governor
Lewis met Mr. Mondell, and Mr. Meyer, at Chicago. I know that he has a Committee and
has indicated his desire to be as helpful as possible in the wheat situation, or
my other agricultural matter. He is active in his work of encouraging agriculture.
It is my impression that he is President of the
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tive to ships bringing intoxicating liquor into port, and the inquiry is relative to
a prospective treaty with Great Britain. Now, no definite information has been re-
ceived about that. It is expected that Ambassador Harvey is to bring some proposal,
or some answer to our proposal, when he returns. It has been so stated in the press.

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supersede the law. Then it would be open to the Congress, as I understand it, at
any later or subsequent time, to reenact a law, or to make one that was different
from the terms of the treaty, and then the newly made Congressional law would be the
law of the land. That is, you have a sort of concurrent power between the treaty-
making authorities and the law-making authorities, and the one that has acted last
is the one that is binding.

Mr. President, some of the editorial writers seem to think that the pro-
posed treaty would contravene the Constitution — not the Volstead law, but the
Constitution itself. Do you believe it within the power of the Government to make
a treaty that would contravene the Constitution itself?

Of course not. The only power the Government has to make a treaty comes
from the Constitution, and there wouldn’t be any question about it, for any treaty
that might be made made, that was contrary to the provisions of the Constitution,
would be absolutely void. Like the treaty made for the purpose of reviving the slave
trade — anything of that kind, I take it, would be void. I presume that what this
treaty would contemplate, would be the abolition of the penalty, the same as is now
in effect in Panama. Congress reserved the privilege to ships to transport liquor
through the Panama Canal, and I suppose the treaty making power to have the same
authority to have liquor transported inside the present limits of our territorial
waters without any penalty. That wouldn’t change the Constitution in any way.

I have another question about the reparations question, which, perhaps,
I have already covered. Are the financial experts empowered to inquire into
Germany’s present capacity, but without authority to recommend any change in the
amount of $132,000,000,000 gold marks? Of course, it goes without saying, from a
reading of the note, that it isn’t proposed to make any change in the treaties that
Germany and France, and the other powers have made with each other, nor is it pro-
posed that the findings of this Commission are to be binding on any one. It is
simply an inquiry into the capacity of Germany to pay; not a proposal to make any
recommendation whether the reparations shall be diminished or increased. It couldn’t
be done without the concurrence of the French Government.

An inquiry about conditions in Germany, as revealed by reports, and whether
any outline can be given of any plan for American relief. Reports are constantly
coming in, of unofficial character, which present the lack of food in Germany, lack
of ability to secure such food as there may be, and indicating very strongly that
it is going to be necessary, within a short time, for some one to help in the way of rations. Where the help should come from, I am not in a position to say at the present time. It is possible that, if France is occupying a part of the territory, that they would take care of that territory, and charitably minded individuals or Governments would try to assist in rationing those that were in need in other parts of what was formerly the German Empire.

An inquiry about the proposed reduction of grain rates and the equalization of coal rates, in relation to the voluntary reductions that the railroads were considering. I suggested, at one time, and it was merely a suggestion, that some of the railroad executives should consider whether they, on investigation, could adopt any voluntary plan of this kind. I didn't expect any reply to come to me, because I didn't make any inquiry. I have understood indirectly that it hasn't been found to be feasible. The matter is before the Interstate Commerce Commission. My only thought was that if a remedy could be found by voluntary action, it would be more expeditions than to do that which might result from a long hearing. Nor am I trying to indicate that a change ought to be made. That is a matter for the Interstate Commerce Commission to determine.

Another question as to a tax problem for the next Congress. I haven't formulated any tax problem at the present time. That is about all I can say about any inquiry about a plan that I am likely to lay before the Congress.

Here is another inquiry about the proposed reparations inquiry. Whether the American experts will represent the United States Government. They would not represent the Government, as I have already indicated.

Another inquiry about the "new methods of payment." The French Foreign Office says the committee of experts may consider "new methods of payment."

Under that heading, would you determine that Germany's future capacity to pay should be assessed? I don't know that I could answer that either "yes" or "no".

I think, again, it will be best answered by a careful reading of the note. The proposal, as I understood it, was inclusive and broad, and took in Germany's capacity to pay. I don't mean the capacity to pay this minute, or tomorrow, or the next day; the capacity to pay until reparations were paid that it could pay. The limit of its ability, I think is the phrase that has generally been used about reparations.
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Also an inquiry as to whether the Senate reservation to the Four-Power treaty makes that treaty meaningless. I don't think it does. If it had, I am sure that neither the Senate, nor President Harding, or the Secretary of State, would have bothered themselves to pass it, or, if it had been passed, to pro-\n\nalgate it and submit it to foreign governments for their approval, which was done. Another inquiry about the sale of American wheat in Germany. Nothing has been done about that.

A statement that the Goodyear people at Akron have bought out the Zeppelin interests, and the exclusive right to become sole makers of Zeppelins, and the suggestion that there be comment on the importance of this deal to the country, from the standpoint of commercial aviation in America, and as to benefits both in peace and war. Are there any treaty obstacles to be overcome? I don't know of any treaty obstacles. None occur to me. I wouldn't want to give that as a professional opinion without examining some of the authorities, but I should imagine that it is perfectly lawful, and permitted under our treaties, for private interests to buy an enterprise of that kind. I think you can readily see, as well as I can, about the importance that it would be to the commercial aviation in America. Our Navy is especially interested in that. You will recall it was only a few days ago that our airship sailed by here, and our Government is undertaking to advance that interest, both through the Navy and through the Post Office Department.

Another inquiry as to whether Secretary Mellon may be designated to represent the nation in the economic conference abroad. I wouldn't want to indicate for a certainty, but I should judge it would be difficult for him to leave his post as an official here, for our Government is not to be represented. It would be very difficult to divorce the Secretaryship of the Treasury, which Mr. Mellon holds, from his personality, so that we could carry out that plan.

An inquiry about the resumption of diplomatic relations with Turkey. My understanding is that a treaty has been negotiated, and which has not been ratified, either by Turkey or the United States, and that further negotiations are in progress relative to a plan for settlement of American claims. One of the things that we are trying to get is proper protection for American citizens that have claims there, and about the only influence that we have to exert is the question of whether we are going to recognize Turkey.
Also an inquiry about the Monroe Doctrine. Whether it would be repugnant to the country if monarchies were created in the western hemisphere. I don't know as I could discuss that in a way as to shed any new light. The general prescription on all of these questions is to read the original document, whether it be a note or the Monroe Doctrine. Of course, it is well known that there was a statement by President Monroe that he didn't want any European or foreign establishments set up that might be inimical to American institutions. That is capable of a great many different interpretations, on which you are at liberty to use your ingenuity.

Whether I am favorable to a grouping of all social service activities under the proposed Department of Welfare, and whether I believe that the periodic disturbances in the Veterans Bureau would react unfavorably, in a political sense, on a Department. Of course, a disturbance, in any Department, reacts unfavorably on the whole Department, but I think that one of the prime reasons for suggesting that the Veterans Bureau be put into some Department was in order that it might have a responsible Cabinet head. If/If The Veterans Bureau, which expends, at present, almost one-sixth of our money expended by the United States Government, is a Department under the President, without a responsible Cabinet head. It is very difficult for the President to function as a Cabinet head. It is practically impossible, and I suppose, that is, as I say, one of the main reasons why it is suggested that the Veterans Bureau would be very much better off under a Cabinet head, and, if that were done, I shouldn't think that there would be periodic disturbances in its administration.

It is a new Bureau, brought together from different Departments, experimental and difficult of operation.

There was one matter that I was going to bring to the attention of the Conference. I will read you from my statement of October 26th, which I thought might have been misunderstood. This is a question that someone asked. "Have you said that whether contemplated the amalgamation of the War and Navy Department, and that you approve of it?" My answer was: "I am not entirely convinced about that, but, so far as I have made up my mind, I should hesitate to approve that. I think that is so large a project, that if it is ever put into operation, it would better go through as a separate proposition, rather than to link it up with the general proposal of reorganization." I thought that perhaps I had been misunderstood. I am not at all sure that it would be wise to consolidate those Departments, and thought I had made that plain. I am advising you that it wouldn't be wise to make that consolidation,
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because of the opposition that I know it would meet.

Mr. President, in connection with the Veterans Bureau matter, can you tell us about Mr. Reed's visit?

No. He didn't have anything to say about the Veterans Bureau. He came in on another matter entirely.

Can you tell us about the Cabinet meeting?

Not anything more than I have indicated in the suggestions I have made about the reparations.