

LOWELL THOMAS - SUNOCO - THURS. NOVEMBER 13, 1941
WASHINGTON, D.C.

GOOD EVENING EVERYBODY:

No doubt you have all heard the news about the Administration victory, the outcome of the Neutrality battle in the House. The Senate passed it; and now the Lower House has done likewise. The final vote: two hundred and twelve to one hundred and ninety-four, a margin of eighteen.

At noon today I chatted with members of both Houses of Congress who thought it would be even closer. Some predicted the Administration would win by only one or two votes.

~~At any rate, it's all over now and~~ soon our ships will be free to visit any port in the world. No more neutrality restrictions.

Sensing that this might be an historic occasion I decided at the last minute last night to run down and be here for the closing hours of the great debate, a debate far more interesting than the one in the Senate, because of the time limits placed on the speakers. Only a few minutes each.

So I sat for hours, listening today, in the new radio gallery just above Speaker Rayburn. With me were some of my distinguished colleagues -- Baukhage, and Earl Godwin; also Harold McGrath who now presides over the Senate radio offices, and who I went to school with in Cripple Creek, long, long ago.

It seemed to us that the two most forceful speeches of the day were made in favor of repeal of the Neutrality law. One by a veteran Republican, Jim Wadsworth of New York. The other, a Democrat, Speaker Sam Rayburn. Others who were listened to most attentively were Congressman Fish for the opposition, and Congressman Richards of South Carolina, the Democrat who bolted from the Administration forces at the eleventh hour. He cried that the passage of the Amendment would mean "our entry into the war by the back door!" Then he made it even stronger. "by treachery!" When Congressman Richards finished his impassioned speech he said:- "If my attitude be treason", then make the most of it!" Oddly enough, for his courage he received an ovation not only from those who were with him, but from the other side as well.

NEUTRALITY

The story of the neutrality controversies and the motives involved in it were vividly flashed in the speeches during the debate.

Starnes of Alabama cried out that he was willing to vote for war if it was necessary to remove the menace of Adolf Hitler. This was typical of a number of Administration supporters.

Flanigan of Virginia said: "This may mean war. But, if it does, we will have allies."

Woodrum of Virginia said: "To all intents and purposes, we are at war."

At one time Congressman Dewey Short interrupted with a jibe, saying: "Let us save the United States, and let God save the King." There were other expressions of hostility toward Great Britain.

McCormick of Massachusetts, supporting the Administration neutrality changes, got an ovation when he shouted: "I do not like England, but I love America."

Further evidence of Administration action in the Congressional battle was seen in a declaration by Army Chief of

Staff, General Marshall today. He denied rumors that the Army is getting the soldiers ready for a new A.E.F. There has been gossip to that effect, based on an Army attempt to build up a large fighting force that would not come within the provisions of the Selective Service Law. That law forbids draftees to be sent out of the Western Hemisphere.

General Marshall today referred to the stories that are current. "One paper, I understand," said he, "has already taken us to Africa," and he added, "there is no foundation whatsoever for the allegation or rumor that we are preparing troops for a possible expedition to Africa or other critical area outside this hemisphere." He explained that the Army wants most of all to enlist men so that they are eligible for service in American defense areas, like Iceland. Congressman McCormick told all this to the House.

The final hours of the debate today illustrated one of the most important facts -- that the Administration was bringing all of its pressure to bear. So momentous was the issue and so doubtful did the outlook appear to be, that President Roosevelt made his own

voice heard -- in his letter sent from the White House the letter read by Speaker Rayburn.

There was a turn of drama when Treadway of Massachusetts spoke. He was one of the fifteen members now in Congress who voted for Woodrow Wilson's declaration of war in Nineteen Seventeen. Today he said: "President Wilson openly asked for war. President Roosevelt has led us step by step into war." And he argued: "To protect the sons of the men who fought in the last war you must vote against the Senate amendments."

A dominant keynote was struck by Moses of Pennsylvania who said he was against the Administration on this issue because of the way strikes in defense industries have been permitted to go on. Much of the swing against the Neutrality law changes was because of the way the Administration has been handling labor troubles.

During a large part of the day the members of the House came and went, milled about, talked out loud when speeches were under way, and paid very little attention to what was going on in the well. They were not at all respectful to many of the speakers. But

when Congresswoman Byron of Maryland got up, a handsome woman who had taken the place of her husband who was killed in an airplane accident, a hush fell over the House. In a few brief sentences she mentioned that she is the mother of five sons, the daughter of a General who was at West Point in the same class with General Pershing and widow of a World War veteran. She said the oldest of her five sons who is almost old enough for service, begged her to vote for the repeal of the neutrality law. So of course her vote was to be "yes". Let our ships go wherever they will.

One who spoke against the Amendment was a former assistant Secretary of the Treasury under Andrew Mellon -- Congressman Dewey of Illinois. The gist of his argument was:- "Let's not ship any more guns, tanks and planes to Europe until our own boys in our own Army are equipped."

Congressman Whittington of Mississippi eloquently pleaded for the members of the House to back the President at this time when as he put it the President has John L. Lewis on his neck threatening to wreck our national defense. He also went on to point out that we are already deeply involved in this war.

Therefore we must be victorious, and he added that you can never win a final victory in a war unless you fight it on the enemy's own soil.

And so on and so on it went all day long. Congressman Taber of New York explained that he had absolutely no sympathy with the President and the way he had handled the entire war problem. But said he, now that we are in it, I can only vote for such measures as will end the ~~the~~ war with victory for us. Saying there was no alternative, that we either had to surrender, or win, he therefore would vote yes, much as he disliked doing it.

Bearded Congressman [^]Tinckham of Massachusetts kept strolling back and forth in front of the speakers with whom he disagreed, apparently trying to annoy them. Then when the roll call was taken, Tinckham was absent. Meaning, he would have to come in a few minutes later and thus attract a little more attention, in order to have his vote count.

In the corridors many were wondering how a certain group of Irish Congressmen were going to vote. Apparently they were on the fence. If they voted to repeal the Neutrality Law it might

just make the difference. Congressman Casey of Massachusetts acted as spokesman for this group. He told how he and other members had been uncertain, full of doubt. But, his concluding remarks were:- "Our giving aid must be made effective. We cannot shackle ourselves with the Neutrality Law." Whereupon observers concluded that the bill would surely pass.

Majority Leader McCormick congratulated the House on the high plane on which the debate was conducted. And as an observer sitting there in that packed gallery, I agreed that it was far more dignified than some other Congressional debates I had heard. He received a great ovation, from both sides. Finally Speaker Rayburn read the letter from the President, the letter in which Mr. Roosevelt said "The government ~~is~~ proposes to see this thing through." Speaker Rayburn declared that he agreed with the President one hundred percent. His final remark was:- "Let's not cast a vote that would bring rejoicing in Germany, Italy and Japan!" He also received a great ovation, from both sides. And then came the vote as we all waited breathlessly for a final count. For every shout of Aye there seemed to be an answering No, from the opposition.

BRITISH REACTION

The American neutrality news was received in London -- with cheers. And rather a dramatic outburst of cheering it was. United States Ambassador Winant announced the Congressional vote at a London dinner tonight. He was a guest at a brilliant gathering, and was listening to speeches praising American aid to Britain, British First Sea Lord, Sir Dudley Pound, had just completed an address, when a note was delivered to Ambassador Winant. He looked at it, and promptly arose and read it -- the news of the eighteen vote Administration victory in Washington. The British audience arose with a pandemonium of cheering.

The swift flashing of British reaction across the trans-Atlantic cables is an indication of the intense interest with which London has been regarding the neutrality fight. Late reports tonight tell of increasing anxiety, until the result was announced. And even then the British expressed regret because of the magnitude of the opposition. London spokesmen are explaining that the importance of the Administration victory was not so much a matter of practical effect -- the vital necessity of sending American ships to British and other belligerent ports. It is more the case of the moral effect, declare British observers. They say

they understand that the close vote in Congress, the magnitude of the opposition, was because of factors of domestic American politics -- like the labor question. But, they add, if the neutrality change had failed because of such domestic reasons the Axis powers would nevertheless have regarded it as a rebuff for Britian.

LABOR

With the problem of labor playing so great a part in the congressional drama this afternoon, there is a new focus of interest on the strike situation.

In the long distance telephone dispute, the United States Federal Conciliation Service today asked the Union to postpone a strike -- scheduled for tonight. Or rather -- for one minute past twelve. Fifteen thousand employees who work on long distance wire communications, are demanding wage concessions. The Union may very well agree to the conciliation service request - or postpone the strike.

Here's the latest. It has been postponed for a week.

The threat of a railroad walk-out was increased today by action on the part of fifteen cooperating unions. These are labor organizations affiliated with the powerful Railroad Brotherhoods. And they represent some eight hundred thousand workers. The major railroad unions, the brotherhoods, have rejected proposals offered and have voted to strike early in December -- if their demands for increased wages are not met. Today the cooperating

unions announce a decision concerning the recommendations made by President Roosevelt's Emergency Fact Finding Board. The fact finders have suggested a compromise. The unions want an increase of thirty-one cents an hour. The fact finding board suggested a boost of nine cents an hour. This proposal was today turned down by the cooperating unions, who thereby joined the brotherhoods in the rejection of a compromise. But the cooperating unions did not today order strike action. They did not declare for the brotherhood walkout scheduled for early in December.

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What about coal? Everything still indicates that if John L. Lewis orders a walkout for Saturday night, the Army will take over the Captive Mines owned by Steel. Today, Federal Coal Coordinator Ickes stated that the steel mills generally have enough coal on hand to last for thirty-one days -- strike or no strike. He added, however, that some of the steel mills would feel the pinch a good deal sooner if the miners should go out on Saturday night, as threatened.

In the Buffalo aircraft dispute, involving the Bell

Corporation, the C.I.O. thinks that negotiations should be resumed between the Union and the Company -- in an effort to avert a strike in big defense aircraft plants.

The American labor situation was reflected in today's debate in the London House of Commons. A labor member warned Great Britain about the strikes in the United States. He said that we over here may be even facing the danger of a general strike. He explained this was caused by the inexperience of American labor leaders. He argued that unionism in the United States is now going through the stages that it did in England generations ago. "It has not got the experience that British trade unionism has got," he declared. Then he added these words: "The result may be leading up ^{to} a general strike, simply due to inexperience of trade union leaders."

After presenting that rather apocalyptic vision of the American labor situation, the London parliamentary debate went on to attacks launched against the Churchill cabinet.

Once again the war news tonight is about the same.

A deadlock on the Moscow front. Berlin reports the beating off of Soviet counterattacks, which seems to be ample evidence that the Blitzkrieg is making little progress. The news keeps telling about impossible weather -- halting the mechanized forces.

In the South the Nazis repeat that they are on the shore of the narrow four mile Strait that separates the tip of the Crimea from that all-important War area of the Caucasus.

Rome today gives us a rumor that has a curious ring for American ears. It charges the Red Army with the execution of eight persons -- one of them an American citizen. The Fascist report is that just before the Nazis captured the great industrial city of Stalino, the local Soviet authorities ordered the population to be moved out. Eighty people demurred, and were shot, including the American. The part of it that has so curious a ring for American ears is this:- The name of that American citizen is said to have been Lindbergh.