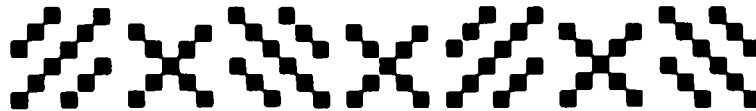


Henry Lane Wilson and Republican Policy toward Mexico, 1913-1920

*Raymond L. Shoemaker**



Henry Lane Wilson of Crawfordsville, Indiana, is best known to students of American history for his activities as ambassador to Mexico between 1910 and 1913, during the tumultuous Mexican Revolution, but Wilson also played a significant role after 1913 in the formulation of Republican party policy toward Mexico. This policy, which was openly hostile to the Mexican Revolution and its leaders, culminated in the party platform on which Warren G. Harding ran in 1920. From 1913 to 1920, Republican leaders repeatedly drew upon Henry Lane Wilson's knowledge and expertise to attack what they considered President Woodrow Wilson's weak and vacillating Mexican policy.

Henry Lane Wilson had served for seventeen years in the American diplomatic corps prior to Woodrow Wilson's election to the presidency in 1912.¹ Included in his services were ministries to Chile, Greece, and Belgium, and an ambassadorship to Mexico. Diplomacy was a logical career for Wilson; his father, James Wilson, had also been a politician and diplomat who served as minister to Venezuela in his last years. Henry Lane Wilson first tried his hand at business, only to lose his small fortune in the Panic of 1893.² He then turned to politics, working hard for William McKinley during the 1896 campaign. As a reward for his services, President McKinley appointed Wilson minister to Chile.³

At the time Wilson took up his post, United States-Chile relations were unsettled. Wilson was sympathetic to the Chileans and tried with some success to overcome their hostility.

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¹ *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York, 1936), XX, 325.

² Peter Calvert, *The Mexican Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), 38.

³ Henry Lane Wilson, *Diplomatic Episodes in Mexico, Belgium, and Chile* (New York, 1927), 1-6.



HENRY LANE WILSON

From Edward I. Bell,
The Political Shame of Mexico
(New York, 1914).

He made several diplomatic efforts in Chile's behalf and was instrumental in the resolution of a boundary dispute between Chile and Argentina. He remained in Chile after Theodore Roosevelt succeeded the assassinated McKinley. But in 1904, after seven years service, he gave up his post and returned to the United States in an attempt to improve his political career.⁴

President Roosevelt, then planning the 1904 campaign, asked Wilson to make a political analysis of the Midwest and West. The accuracy of the resulting report was borne out by the election returns, and shortly thereafter Wilson received an appointment as minister to Belgium, where he remained until 1910. His five years in Europe were uneventful, except for service as the President's emissary to the Brussels Arms Control Conference in April, 1908.⁵

From 1910 to 1913 Wilson held his most important diplomatic post, that of ambassador to Mexico. To fill that position President William Howard Taft was seeking an experienced diplomat familiar with Latin America. At that time Mexico was threatened with chaos and revolution, a situation that could prove disastrous to American investors. Wilson not only met Taft's requirements, but he had connections with the Guggenheim copper interests—an important company with large holdings in Mexico.⁶

After his arrival in Mexico City in 1910, the new ambassador began to have mixed feelings about the aging dictator, Porfirio Díaz. He believed Díaz provided the necessary order and stability to protect and encourage American business investments, but he was repelled by the autocratic methods Díaz used to control Mexico.⁷ In May, 1911, only a year after the

⁴ *Ibid.*, 78, 83-93, 105; *Dictionary of American Biography*, XX, 325; Calvert, *Mexican Revolution*, 38.

⁵ Wilson, *Diplomatic Episodes*, 109-13, 147-53, 156-66; *Indianapolis Star*, December 23, 1932; *Dictionary of American Biography*, XX, 325.

⁶ *Dictionary of American Biography*, XX, 325; Wilson, *Diplomatic Episodes*, 159; Calvert, *The Mexican Revolution*, 38; Stanley R. Ross, *Francisco I. Madero* (New York, 1955), 236-37. Henry Lane Wilson had been appointed to his post through the influence of Richard Ballinger, President Taft's secretary of the interior, who had close connections with the Guggenheim family. Further, Ambassador Wilson's brother, former Senator John Wilson of Washington and the Republican boss of the state, was associated with Ballinger in the management of affairs in the Northwest to the benefit of the Guggenheims. Edward I. Bell, *The Political Shame of Mexico* (New York, 1914), 136-37.

⁷ U.S., Congress, "Investigation of Mexican Affairs," *Senate Document 285*, 66th Cong., 2nd Sess., (U.S. Serial Set 7666) Volume 10, (1920), p. 2254; Wilson, *Diplomatic Episodes*, 167, 172-75, 194-201, 207; Calvert, *Mexican Revolution*, 41.

new ambassador had assumed his post, Francisco I. Madero overthrew Díaz. Wilson received the new government with misgivings. He was convinced that the ignorance of the majority of the Mexican population made it impossible to form a democratic government through revolution; this could only be achieved, he believed, by the education and training of the masses by the elite.⁸ The fact that Madero's family controlled a chain of smelters in competition with the Guggenheim, and thus Wilson's, interests made an objective judgment even more difficult for the ambassador.⁹

Wilson's views were partially vindicated when Madero proved unable to gain effective control of Mexico, as his forces represented but one of several revolutionary factions. Thus, Madero's victory over Díaz did not end the disorder that threatened American investments. Wilson's reports to Secretary of State Philander C. Knox were filled with pessimism; indeed, the ambassador presented a much more hopeless case for Madero than was justified. The contrast between Wilson's pessimism and the more optimistic American consular reports from other parts of Mexico confused Knox, although the secretary retreated when his inquiries met with a stinging rebuke from Wilson, who threatened to resign.¹⁰

A personality difference between Ambassador Wilson and Madero undoubtedly contributed to the Hoosier's dissatisfaction with the Mexican government. Wilson was a hard-headed businessman and realist, while Madero was a visionary and idealist. Clearly Henry Lane Wilson, like most Americans, never understood the Mexican Revolution. He could not comprehend why Madero failed to restore order, because he never realized the complex and diverse forces that the Mexican leader had to reconcile in order to carry out even limited political and economic reforms. Wilson may have been correct in his opinion that Madero was incapable of providing the required leadership for tranquility, but he also failed to appreciate the difficulty of that task.¹¹

⁸ "Investigation of Mexican Affairs," *Senate Document 285*, pp. 2254-56.

⁹ Ross, *Madero*, 3, 237; Calvert, *Mexican Revolution*, 38-39; Wilfred Callcott, *Liberalism in Mexico, 1856-1929* (Hamden, Conn., 1965), 220-21; Walter V. and Marie V. Scholes, *The Foreign Policies of the Taft Administration* (Columbia, Mo., 1970), 94-95.

¹⁰ Kenneth J. Grieb, *The United States and Huerta* (Lincoln, Neb., 1969), 4; Calvert, *Mexican Revolution*, 85, 40-46, 109-19, 123-27; Scholes and Scholes, *Policies of Taft*, 96.

¹¹ Grieb, *United States and Huerta*, 4-5; Calvert, *Mexican Revolution*, 94; Ross, *Madero*, 250-75.

Madero successfully quashed several uprisings before fighting broke out in Mexico City itself on February 10, 1913.¹² The American embassy was located in the battle area, and Wilson took advantage of his position to demand that Madero restore order for the safety of the Americans there. He telegraphed Knox: "the Government of the United States . . . should send firm, drastic instructions, perhaps of a menacing character, to be transmitted personally to . . . President Madero and to the leaders of the revolutionary movement. If I were in possession of instructions of this character or clothed with general powers in the name of the President, I might be able to induce a cessation of hostilities."¹³ Both Madero and Knox suggested that Wilson simply move the embassy to a safer location, but Wilson dismissed that recommendation by claiming that there was no safe place in Mexico City.¹⁴

Madero's situation rapidly deteriorated. First, his commander, General Victoriano Huerta, secretly betrayed him to the rebel commander, General Felix Díaz, nephew of Porfirio Díaz. Then Wilson, without authority from the state department, met with General Huerta—still acting officially as Madero's commander—to demand a cessation of the fighting, ostensibly to guarantee the safety of those in the embassy. In fact, recognizing Madero's weakness and actively seeking stability, Ambassador Wilson did everything in his power to facilitate a transition of rule to Huerta. He called a meeting of Mexican senators and through the foreign secretary, Pedro Lascuráin, stated that the United States would favor Madero's resignation. The senators took the hint, and the next day a delegation called on Madero to persuade him to step down. He refused, but within the next few days Huerta deposed him.¹⁵ On February 20, Huerta became provisional president, and shortly thereafter his men murdered Madero. Eager for a return to order, Wilson convinced the other foreign ministers that Huerta's recognition by their governments was imperative. He also ordered the American consular officers to report that the government and people of Mexico supported Huerta.¹⁶

¹² Ross, *Madero*, 250-75.

¹³ Quoted in Scholes and Scholes, *Policies of Taft*, 97-98.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 97-99; Calvert, *Mexican Revolution*, 133; Ross, *Madero*, 301; Wilson, *Diplomatic Episodes*, 260-61.

¹⁵ "Investigation of Mexican Affairs," *Senate Document 285*, pp. 2268; Grieb, *United States and Huerta*, 3; Calvert, *Mexican Revolution*, 131-35, 142-50; Ross, *Madero*, 291-304, especially 298-300; Scholes and Scholes, *Policies of Taft*, 99-101.

¹⁶ Scholes and Scholes, *Policies of Taft*, 101; Ross, *Madero*, 325-26; F. Edward Haley, *Revolution and Intervention: The Diplomacy of Taft and Wilson with Mexico, 1910-1917* (Boston, 1970), 72.

President Woodrow Wilson assumed office just six weeks after the Huerta coup. He regarded the overthrow of Madero in a different light from the American ambassador. He saw it as the death of democracy rather than the return to order and was incensed that an American diplomat should have played such a destructive role in another country's internal affairs.¹⁷ The President retained Henry Lane Wilson at his post only because to replace him with a new ambassador would imply recognition of Huerta's military government, an action he was determined not to take, despite the ambassador's entreaties for him to do so.¹⁸

By May, 1913, however, rumors and official reports of Ambassador Wilson's part in the coup and in Madero's death became too intense to ignore, leading the President to recall the ambassador to the United States for "consultations." The chargé remained as the senior American diplomat in Mexico. When Henry Lane Wilson realized upon arriving in Washington that the President was not the least interested in his views he presented them instead to the Senate over the President's objections. There he found a much more sympathetic audience. In August, Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan requested and received Henry Lane Wilson's resignation.¹⁹

If the President believed that he had seen the last of Henry Lane Wilson, he was mistaken. The former ambassador now began working for the defeat of Democrats and their "ruinous"

¹⁷ Calvert, *Mexican Revolution*, 111-16; Grieb, *United States and Huerta*, 30-49; Arthur S. Link, *Wilson the Diplomatist: A Look at His Major Foreign Policies* (Chicago, 1963), 19-21, 23-24. One of President Wilson's observers, William B. Hale, sent back a condemnation of Henry Lane Wilson's conduct, which became one of the major reasons the President felt he must recall his ambassador. Hale concluded in his critique of Ambassador Wilson's performance that "It must be a cause of grief that what is probably the most dramatic story in which an American diplomatic officer has ever been involved should be a story of sympathy with treason, perfidy and assassination in an assault on constitutional government." Quoted in Haley, *Revolution and Intervention*, 95.

¹⁸ Grieb, *United States and Huerta*, 36, 37, 69, 70, 71, 75.

¹⁹ Grieb, *United States and Huerta*, 68-89; Henry Lane Wilson to Theodore Roosevelt, May 27, 1914, Reel 184, Series 1, Theodore Roosevelt Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.). Huerta became so anathema to President Wilson that he used every means in his power, short of war, to force him from office. He resorted to interference in Mexican affairs, for which he had condemned his ambassador, and on a much larger scale. By 1914, the President was allowing arms to reach Huerta's rival, Venustiano Carranza, while forbidding their sale to Huerta. In April, 1914, the United States captured the Mexican port of Vera Cruz over a trivial point of honor, hoping to topple Huerta by withholding the shipping revenues collected at that port. For a detailed account of this affair, see Robert E. Quirk, *An Affair of Honor: Woodrow Wilson and the Occupation of Vera Cruz* (New York, 1964).

foreign policy. Henry Lane Wilson believed that the President's refusal to recognize Huerta had prevented the other major powers from doing so and kept from the Huerta government the mantle of legitimacy. This action, Henry Lane Wilson felt, would prolong the turmoil in Mexico and increase the danger to American investors. It was essential that Republicans regain control of the country and reverse the President's disastrous Mexican policy.²⁰

Henry Lane Wilson returned to Indiana and plunged deeply into national politics. He paid little attention to local or state affairs, but rather applied himself vigorously to the task of overturning the President's foreign policy. His expertise in foreign affairs, especially Latin America, made him a valuable asset to the Republican party as he pursued his objectives from his recall in 1913 until he was incapacitated by a stroke in 1927.²¹ Henry Lane Wilson's efforts fell into four categories: he worked through formal Republican organizations; he corresponded with important Republican leaders, trying to determine what needed to be done to defeat Democrats; he made valuable use of the media to keep the public aware of his views; and he provided essential service to the Republican party in platform writing and campaigning. In all these areas, Wilson proved a valuable asset.

Immediately after his recall, Henry Lane Wilson began writing articles denouncing President Woodrow Wilson's diplomacy, which he was convinced would undermine United States' prestige and business stability in Mexico.²² In addition, he began planning for President Wilson's defeat at the polls in 1916. The former ambassador and other Republicans were quick to take political advantage of what they perceived as the President's mistakes in Mexico.

Woodrow Wilson refused to recognize Victoriano Huerta's regime as the government of Mexico but favored instead Venustiano Carranza, who claimed to be the rightful successor to

²⁰ Wilson to Theodore Roosevelt, May 14, 1916, Reel 209, Wilson to Roosevelt, May 19, 1914, Reel 183, Wilson to Roosevelt, January 15, 1916, Reel 205, Series 1, Roosevelt Papers.

²¹ Indianapolis *Star*, December 23, 1932.

²² Henry Lane Wilson, "Latest Phase of the Mexican Situation," *Independent*, LXXVI (November, 1913), 297-98; Henry Lane Wilson, "Errors with Reference to Mexico and Events that Have Occurred There," *Annals of the American Academy*, LIV (July, 1914), 148-61; Henry Lane Wilson, "Last Phase in Mexico: Lest We Forget," *Forum*, LVI (September, 1916), 257-67; Henry Lane Wilson, "What Must be Done with Mexico: The Obligations of the United States on Our Illiterate and Bandit-Infested Neighbor Nation," *Forum* LXII (September, 1919), 257-64.

the fallen Madero. By withholding recognition from Huerta and forcing most of the European countries to do likewise, President Wilson gradually undermined Huerta's position and hastened his downfall and replacement by Carranza in July, 1915. Unfortunately for the President, he was never able to understand that Carranza, no less than Huerta, resented American interference in Mexican affairs: Carranza's hostility and opposition to Woodrow Wilson's moralistic lectures were a continuous source of embarrassment to the President.

As new president of Mexico, Carranza initially proved as incapable of controlling the revolution as his predecessors. His erstwhile ally turned enemy, Francisco (Pancho) Villa, ravaged northern Mexico and the border, killing American citizens in the process. Wilson reacted by dispatching General John J. Pershing into Mexico with a small army to capture Villa. This expedition not only failed in its objective but exacerbated Mexican-American relations by reviving fears of American intervention in Mexican internal affairs.²³

General Pershing's punitive expedition, or "puny expedition" as Henry Lane Wilson called it, became a prime target for Republicans when they met at their Chicago convention in June, 1916. The Mexican issue appeared as one of the major points in the platform.²⁴ Because the Republican candidate for President in 1916, Charles Evans Hughes, bore down heavily on the issue throughout his campaign, the former ambassador was a valuable aid and major figure in the Republican party in the months preceding the election.²⁵ Unfortunately for the Republicans, the President's slogan, "He kept us out of war," proved too effective to overcome, and Woodrow Wilson was reelected in a very close contest.

After the election, a bitterly disappointed Henry Lane Wilson wrote to former President Taft, with whom he had become cordial, bemoaning the capriciousness of the American voter. The former ambassador was so heartsick that he expressed an intent never to venture into politics again. Wilson was not one to quit so easily, however. Even while disclaiming politics, he proposed to go on a fact-finding tour of Latin America on behalf of the Republican party.²⁶

²³ Grieb, *United States and Huerta*, 69-192; Hale, *Revolution and Intervention*, 83-223; Callcott, *Liberalism in Mexico*, 239-42, 249-51.

²⁴ *New York Times*, June 11, 1916.

²⁵ James H. Jones, "Henry Lane Wilson and the Election of 1916," unpublished paper, copy in author's possession.

²⁶ Wilson to William Howard Taft, November 17, 1916, Series 3, General Correspondence, William Howard Taft Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.).

In January, 1917, Henry Lane Wilson gained national attention when he had a falling out with Taft over a new organization which Taft founded—the League to Enforce Peace, established in mid-1915 to educate Americans about the need for military preparedness. At Taft's request, Wilson had helped organize the Indiana branch of the League in 1916 and was trying to keep it Republican and opposed to Woodrow Wilson. But Taft, as its national president, was attempting to infuse more of a bipartisan character into the state organization. According to the *New York Times*, which carried a lengthy account of the struggle, Henry Lane Wilson felt that some of the leaders of the League were trying to divert it from its original purpose of military preparedness and "adopt as a program of action the plan for a world alliance put forward by President Wilson . . .," to which the former ambassador, and most other Republicans, were inalterably opposed.²⁷ In late January, Henry Lane Wilson wrote Taft that Democrats were being brought into the Indiana League with no counter-balancing Republicans. He warned that the League was now a Democratic organization that was being used to support President Wilson's program. If such a movement were allowed to continue, he would resign his office.²⁸ A few days later Henry Lane Wilson expanded his arguments and expressed his real concern. It was true that the League to Enforce Peace had as its basic principle the concept of a world court, he began; nevertheless, he feared President Wilson would turn the League into an organization "with new doctrines involving the entanglement of this nation in European questions and the abandonment of the Monroe Doctrine. . . ."²⁹

Taft's answer to Wilson demonstrated the ideological rift that existed between them and foreshadowed the split that developed in the Republican party between 1918 and 1920 over the League of Nations. Taft supported Woodrow Wilson's basic concept of a world organization. Indeed, he did not think such principles incompatible with those of his own League to Enforce Peace. "The President's proposition only is that we ought not to make a world organization unless the peace which we are to preserve should be a just one. . . . I don't understand that he surrenders the Monroe Doctrine in any way. He only uses the

²⁷ *New York Times*, January 28, 1917.

²⁸ Wilson to Taft, January 22, 23, 1917, Series 3, General Correspondence, Taft Papers.

²⁹ Wilson to Taft, January 26, 1917, *ibid.*

Monroe Doctrine to give the idea of the principle upon which he thinks the World League ought to operate. . . ."³⁰

Henry Lane Wilson wrote again on the subject on January 27, before receiving Taft's rebuttal, and he reported with pleasure the failure of the new leadership in Indiana to win converts to the new policy—an inference he made from the sparse attendance at a banquet the League had sponsored.³¹ In frustration the former ambassador resigned from the League and formed a rival organization, the Indiana Patriotic League, based upon the principles that he felt the League to Enforce Peace should have supported.³²

Despite their conflict over the League to Enforce Peace, Henry Lane Wilson and Taft remained close on other issues. A few months after his resignation from the League, Wilson again began to correspond with Taft. Their renewed contact remained cordial and frequent until the ambassador's paralyzing stroke in 1927. Their later thoughts and letters focused on international problems that both felt were complicated by President Wilson's alleged bumbling during the negotiations at Versailles ending World War I.³³

Henry Lane Wilson warned Taft of the potential danger posed by Japanese expansion onto the Asian mainland—a situation he felt was sanctioned in the Treaty of Versailles. Taft recognized the situation was "not free from difficulty," but he had every confidence the Japanese would honor their promise to withdraw from China. "I know a good deal about their leading men and their attitudes, and I am quite sure that they would be very much adverse to subjecting themselves to any criticism on the ground of a breach of good faith. . . ."³⁴ Technically the former President was right; the Japanese did withdraw temporarily from China. But in the 1930s, the ambassador's fears proved prophetic.

In 1919 Henry Lane Wilson again began to write for public consumption and enlightenment, as he had before the 1916 election. As a former minister to Belgium, for example, he expressed indignation at Germany's treatment of that nation.

³⁰ Taft to Wilson, January 26, 1917, Series 8, Letterbook, Yale 57, *ibid.*

³¹ Wilson to Taft, January 27, 1917, Series 3, General Correspondence, *ibid.*

³² *Ibid.* The Indiana Patriotic League had little significance except Henry Lane Wilson's desire to remain politically active. Wilson to Theodore Roosevelt, January 23, 1918, Reel 260, Series 1; Roosevelt to Wilson, February 3, 5, 1918, Reel 400, Series 3A, Roosevelt Papers.

³³ See Series 8, Letterbook, Series 3, General Correspondence, Taft Papers.

³⁴ Taft to Wilson, March 28, 1918, Series 8, Letterbook, Yale 70, *ibid.*

In an article in the *Forum* entitled "Restore Belgium," the former ambassador maintained that although Belgium had regained its territory the nation had suffered

from grave injuries which justice requires shall be promptly and adequately repaired at the expense of those who inflicted them. . . . Because she has been punished for being right she should be rewarded by the penalization of those who inflicted the wrong. . . . Germany inflicted great wrong on Belgium without provocation. She should be made to pay the penalty in full.³⁵

But Mexico, not Europe, remained Henry Lane Wilson's chief concern. His experience with that nation and his desire to see the return of a favorable climate for investment there made the ambassador as valuable to the Republicans in 1919 and 1920, as he had been in 1916. In September, 1919, in an article entitled "What Must be Done with Mexico," he opened with a short, simplified version of the events of the Mexican Revolution, portraying Porfirio Díaz and, to a lesser extent, Victoriano Huerta, as stable and pro-American. Mexico needed the type of rule provided by these men, Wilson maintained. He then went on to characterize Francisco Madero and the man who overthrew Huerta in 1915, Venustiano Carranza, as weak, vacillating rulers unable to maintain order or protect foreign property. He flayed President Wilson for failing to prevent anarchy in Mexico. "No civilized power, great or small, would tolerate, in contiguous territory, such conditions as we have reluctantly endured for eight years in Mexico." Since the time of effectiveness of "pacific penetration or financial assistance" had passed, Henry Lane Wilson now reluctantly advocated armed intervention and possible annexation of the northern part of Mexico.³⁶

Six months later, the former ambassador expanded his article for George H. Blakeslee's edition of *Mexico and the Caribbean*. Here Wilson presented three possible alternatives for dealing with Mexico. The first was "active and sympathetic support of the real governing elements in Mexico." These elements, according to Wilson, included the "white" minority, most of whom had been driven into exile. If this alternative were unsuccessful, he advocated "the creation, organization and recognition of a new independent republic to extend from the Rio Grand [sic] to the Twenty-Second Parallel." If the first two alternatives failed, "armed intervention" was the only choice left. Although Henry Lane Wilson disclaimed any desire for the

³⁵ Henry Lane Wilson, "Restore Belgium," *Forum*, LXI (June, 1919), 673.

³⁶ Wilson, "What Must be Done with Mexico," 257-64. Quotation is from page 262.

third alternative, he felt that it was now inevitable because of President Wilson's unwise policies.³⁷ The former ambassador's views had a direct bearing on the Republican platform of 1920.

In March, 1920, congressional Republicans, eyeing the approaching Presidential election, utilized Henry Lane Wilson's expertise. They called him to Washington to testify before the Senate Committee for the Investigation of Mexican Affairs, informally known as the Fall Committee. Republican Senator Albert Fall of New Mexico had persuaded the Senate to form a committee to investigate President Wilson's Mexican policies. The stated purpose of the committee was to evaluate proposed American responses to the nationalistic and anti-foreign Mexican Constitution of 1917. This constitution was the climax of the Mexican revolutionary effort to provide political, social, and economic reform. One article prohibited foreign ownership of Mexican land and natural resources, striking directly at American investors, especially the oil companies.

Many Republican politicians and businessmen blamed Woodrow Wilson for not forcing Carranza's government to rescind this provision.³⁸ Witness after witness before the Fall Committee condemned the lenient attitude the President had adopted toward Mexico as leading to the loss of American lives, property, and prestige. The most vocal witness was the last Republican ambassador to Mexico, Henry Lane Wilson. His testimony filled nearly seventy pages as he outlined events leading up to the Mexican Revolution and the turmoil that followed. Wilson believed that there had been a pattern of steady degeneration after Taft left office. The Fall Committee, dominated by Republicans, formed its questions to allow the former ambassador to list his grievances against the President's Mexican policy. He began by stating that "practically all of the material development of Mexico is due to American enterprise, initiative and capital." The former ambassador condemned the Mexicans for dislodging American business, thereby cutting their own throats because only the Americans and the "white" Mexicans, who were now in exile, were capable of keeping the system going. Wilson dismissed Francisco Madero as a weak leader who obtained power by chance and who had actually given less to the poor than Porfirio Díaz, the dictator he had overthrown.³⁹ Henry Lane Wilson also vehemently defended his

³⁷Henry Lane Wilson, "How to Restore Peace in Mexico," in George H. Blakeslee, ed., *Mexico and the Caribbean* (New York, 1920), 147-55.

³⁸"Investigation of Mexican Affairs," *Senate Document 285*, pp. 2249-2316.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 2250-59. Quotation is from page 2250.

own conduct during the revolt against Madero. He stated that by mediating between the rebels and Madero he had managed to stop the carnage. As the leader of the diplomatic corps in Mexico City, he explained, he had convinced Madero to resign for the good of Mexico. He attributed Madero's subsequent death to an attempted rescue by some of the Maderistas.⁴⁰ Wilson finished his testimony by recapitulating the events after Madero's death. According to a report by the Indianapolis *Star*, he stated that the Mexican situation became impossible after President Wilson's unneutral conduct had helped overthrow Huerta. He believed Huerta was the last hope for Mexican stability and order. After his defeat total anarchy seized Mexico.⁴¹ The Fall Committee, unsurprisingly, finished its hearings only five months before the 1920 elections.

The Republican party used Henry Lane Wilson's talents in other ways during the election campaign. He became one of the party work horses and strategy makers. Several months before the Fall hearings, Will Hays, the Republican National Chairman, placed fellow Hoosier Wilson on the Republican Committee on Politics and Platform. It was in this connection that Wilson wrote Taft, "I shall want your views upon a number of subjects but more especially on the Far Eastern situation, the Mexican situation, the industrial question, and, if the issues have taken definite form, on the League question. . . ."⁴²

After three years of silence, Wilson reopened the issue of the League of Nations with a flexibility absent in his earlier correspondence with Taft. In January, 1917, when he resigned from the League to Enforce Peace, Wilson would allow no room for compromise on the subject. Perhaps in 1920, in a national rather than a local setting, he realized that unity necessitated compromise and that Republicans had to unify to win the election. Perhaps also he hoped that Taft had modified his views as the issue became more and more a partisan one. In any event, Wilson wrote Taft that he hoped he would use his "great pres-

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 2261-316. The official Mexican version was absurd. Madero actually was secretly taken from his prison at night, driven down a back alley, and there he and his vice-president, Piño Suerta, were killed by their guards. It is doubtful that even Henry Lane Wilson believed Huerta's version; certainly few others did. He would have been on firmer ground had he reported that Huerta did not authorize the murder and it was the work of General Félix Díaz. There is some evidence for that possibility. See Grieb, *The United States and Huerta*, 15-30.

⁴¹ "Investigation of Mexican Affairs," *Senate Document 285*, pp. 2261-2316; Indianapolis *Star*, April 17, 1920.

⁴² Wilson to Taft, January 11, 1920, Series 3, General Correspondence, Taft Papers.

tige in public repudiation of the President's unfortunate attitude on the treaty [of Versailles]. His attitude will cost our adherence as the country is overwhelmingly in opposition."⁴³

The "unfortunate attitude" to which Wilson referred was the President's inflexibility concerning Article 10 of the Treaty of Versailles, which promised that member nations would respect and protect against aggression the territory of all other member nations. This article became the main Republican target of opposition.⁴⁴ Taft agreed with his former ambassador in condemning President Wilson, but he also lashed out at Republican Henry Cabot Lodge:

I am not surprised at Wilson's attitude. He is not a man of real patriotism—neither is Lodge—and we labor under the difficulty of having men of very similar motives, personal, partisan, and small opposed to each other. . . . Lodge seeks to put the treaty into politics, and so does Wilson.

Nevertheless, he told Wilson that he was going to Washington to attempt a compromise on the issue.⁴⁵

Henry Lane Wilson's willingness to discuss the League became more evident a few months later when, on March 11, he wrote to Taft, "In an address which I delivered at Washington which was published in the proceedings concurrently with the other addresses including that of President Wilson, I took the ground that preliminary methods and theories were not of great importance or consequences. . . ." Unified organization was all that mattered; divergent views on the League could be worked out later.⁴⁶ Taft was pleased that he and his former ambassador were closer in their positions than before; now they occupied common ground from which to attack President Wilson's League while still allowing for support of some type of international organization.⁴⁷

The first effect of Henry Lane Wilson's hard work since the Republican's narrow defeat in 1916 appeared at the Republican

⁴³ Wilson to Taft, January 9, 1920, *ibid.*

⁴⁴ Article 10 guaranteed each League member political and territorial independence. There was no provision made for America's unique position vis à vis Latin America as enunciated in the Monroe Doctrine. At first glance, it also seemed to diminish the power of Congress in foreign affairs and give the options to an international body. These worries were probably groundless, as the United States had veto power. It is likely that the issue could have been resolved if not for President Wilson's inflexible stance on the issue and his unwillingness to compromise with a Republican Senate. See Link, *Wilson the Diplomatist*, 127-56.

⁴⁵ Taft to Wilson, January 12, 13, 1920. Series 8, Yale 93, part 1, Letterbook, Taft Papers.

⁴⁶ Wilson to Taft, March 11, 1920, Series 3, General Correspondence, *ibid.*

⁴⁷ Taft to Wilson, March 13, 1920, Series 8, Yale 95, part 1, Letterbook, *ibid.*

national convention in Chicago. The presentation of the party platform revealed an inordinate amount of attention devoted to the Mexican question in a ringing rebuke of President Wilson's eight-year policy. It read like a pastiche of Ambassador Wilson's articles, letters, and speeches on the subject. The *New York Times* reported that "this plank, prepared by Henry Lane Wilson, former American ambassador to Mexico, and presented by him to the committee tonight, while not meeting with the entire approval of some Republicans, is expected to be accepted by the Resolutions Committee."⁴⁸ The plank began with a condemnation of President Wilson and accused him of allowing Mexicans to attack American lives, property, and honor with impunity. Although the President had often demanded retribution, the Mexican government felt that compliance was not necessary, for in a showdown they knew the President would first threaten with his fist and then scold with his finger. The Republican plank then issued a thinly veiled threat against Mexico: "The Republican party pledges itself to a consistent, firm and effective policy towards Mexico that shall protect the rights of American citizens lawfully in Mexico to security of life and enjoyment of property in connection with an established international law and our treaty rights."⁴⁹

Henry Lane Wilson could well be proud of his achievement. The plank contained all that he wanted. Since his dismissal from his Mexican post in 1913, he had tried to mold a Republican Mexican policy to replace a Democratic one that he felt was ambivalent and weak. He had been a key participant in making Mexico a coherent issue in 1916.⁵⁰ Despite Hughes' defeat that year Wilson had pushed to incorporate the topic as a major part of the 1920 Republican platform. After the 1920 election, one political observer commented that the Republicans "are probably more agreed upon the necessity of intervention in Mexico than they are upon any one other subject. . . ."⁵¹ Henry Lane Wilson had helped make this so.

Wilson's last contribution to the Republican effort in the election of 1920 was as a campaign speaker. He was a tireless campaigner, especially when he could sense victory. He began in late summer with a personal attack on the Democratic nominee, Governor James M. Cox of Ohio. Wilson stated that "All hope of Democratic success was banished with the nomi-

⁴⁸ *New York Times*, June 9, 1920.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ James H. Jones, "Henry Lane Wilson," 12-14.

⁵¹ "Republican Victory," *New Republic*, XXIV (November 10, 1920), 252-54.

nation of Mr. Cox. . . . I think it may be said with safety that not a single state west of the Mississippi with the possible exception of Montana, will give a Democratic majority."⁵²

Most of Henry Lane Wilson's speeches, however, like those of the rest of the Republican campaigners, were devoted to attacks on the lame-duck President. In New York, he criticized President Wilson for his "restless and opaque-visioned diplomacy [that] led to the extention of American sovereignty over Hayti [sic] and Santo Domingo, to the overthrow of one Mexican president and the autocratic investiture of another, and has cost us the friendship of Italy, the bitter criticisms of France, the cold distrust of Great Britain, and the reproachful complaints of China."⁵³

In Muncie, Indiana, he ridiculed the policy of national determination along racial lines as espoused by the President at Versailles. This policy had wrongfully been applied in the dismemberment of Austria-Hungary, yet had not been used properly to prevent the Japanese from taking control of the Chinese province of Shantung. If a policy was to be valid, it must be consistent, explained Henry Lane Wilson. To illustrate his point, the former ambassador examined how the President's policy would affect the United States: "This principle if applied in the case of New Mexico and Arizona, where there is perhaps a majority of people of Mexican blood, would justify their transfer . . . to the Mexican republic. . . ." He also hypothetically applied this principle to the eleven former Confederate states, this speech coming one week before the Grand Army of the Republic reunion in Indianapolis.⁵⁴

The Democrats realized that they had an uphill fight to retain the presidency and decided to concentrate their largest efforts in a saturation campaign in the "swing states" of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, West Virginia, New York, New Jersey, and Maryland. The Democratic nominee spent more time campaigning in Indiana than in any other state except his own, Ohio. In addition, over one hundred of the five hundred Democratic campaigners spoke in Indiana the final month. An equal number spoke in Ohio. The Republicans responded in kind, but Mark Sullivan, the famous political observer, commented that "of the five states in this middle Western country . . . Indiana is the one that Cox has the best chance of carrying." Sullivan attributed this to the state's strong pro-League temper.⁵⁵

⁵² *New York Times*, September 1, 1920.

⁵³ *Indianapolis Star*, September 3, 1920.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, October 2, 1920.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, October 2, 5, 25, 1920.

Nevertheless, Henry Lane Wilson continued the attack on President Wilson's League. Speaking at Indianapolis, the ambassador said, "Whatever its [Article 10] relative importance may be, . . . it takes away from the Congress . . . its constitutional right of declaring or refusing to declare war, and transfers that right to a secret international tribunal sitting in Geneva, Paris or Brussels."⁵⁶ Henry Lane Wilson's opinions on the League were shared by the Republican presidential nominee, Warren G. Harding. On October 7, in a speech at Omaha, Harding made up his mind on the League and rejected it in its entirety. He said, "I understand the position of the Democratic nominee and he understands mine. In simple words, it is that he favors going into the Paris league and I favor staying out."⁵⁷ Henry Lane Wilson hastened to support Harding's stand. At Evansville, Indiana, to show that his own position had been clear and correct, he read to the audience a portion of a speech he had made while still the Indiana president of the League to Enforce Peace. At that time he had warned of the loss of American sovereignty under the League concept: "we have been free, following the wise councils of Washington, reinforced by the admonitions of Jefferson, Cleveland and McKinley, from entanglements in European difficulties." A few days after the Evansville speech, he further admonished President Wilson and his internationalism: "We did not enter the war to make the world safe for democracy or to become arbitrators of European difficulties . . . but to establish the rights of American citizens to ride peaceably upon the high seas, and incidentally to destroy a menace which if it broke down the gates of Paris would have to be confronted at the gates of New York."⁵⁸

On October 14, Harding visited Indianapolis, and Henry Lane Wilson took charge of his reception. It is quite possible that the senator and the former ambassador had much to discuss concerning Mexico, for Harding next commenced a whirlwind tour of the Southwest. Delivering eleven speeches in two days, he condemned President Wilson's Mexican policy repeatedly. Harding advocated "a program of amicable relations to insure protection of American interests on Mexican soil without interfering unduly in the internal affairs of the Mexican republic."⁵⁹

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, October 5, 1920.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, October 8, 1920.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, October 9, 14, 1920. Quotation is from *ibid.*, October 14, 1920.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, October 10, 15, 1920.

Henry Lane Wilson was a hardy campaigner in the two weeks before the election. He spoke every day in a different city denouncing President Wilson, praising Harding, and urging the reelection of Indiana Republican senator, James E. Watson. On several occasions he left the impression that he and Harding had been close for fifteen years, although it is doubtful the two men knew each other very well.⁶⁰ Wilson, like other Republican workers, had to stretch the truth to claim an intimate relationship with the dark-horse candidate.

The postmortem of the election emphasized the importance of the Mexican issue to the Republicans. Several writers attributed the Democratic defeat in large measure to businessmen's desire to resume commercial expansion, especially in Mexico. Journalist Franklin H. Giddings felt that "American business wants to exploit Mexico and to trade with Germany. The entire American nation is tired of standing at moral attention. We want to do our duty of course—when did we ever fail? But we must be practical. . . ."⁶¹ The *New Republic* praised Woodrow Wilson's policy of nonintervention in Mexico but feared American impatience with the Mexican Revolution would allow exploitation of Mexico by "a relatively small group eager for loot and power. . . ."⁶² One writer wondered about the course of America's Mexican policy under the Republicans: "and the most immediate perhaps of all American questions, what is to be President Harding's response to those powerful interests which, as the presidential campaign has shown, have been consolidating their forces for a drastic change in the policy of the United States toward Mexico?"⁶³

This question also worried the Mexican government which for ten crisis-filled years had managed to avoid a large-scale American intervention. Mexican leaders knew well Henry Lane Wilson and his attitude of impatience toward political unrest that interfered with American business. Now the party that had given voice to these attitudes had been restored to power. Before the election, President Alvaro Obregón, Carranza's successor, began an intensive campaign to obtain recognition from

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, October 16, 18, 25, 1920. Harding's papers in Washington do not reveal a single instance of correspondence with the former ambassador. Warren G. Harding Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.).

⁶¹ Franklin H. Giddings, "What Did It," *Independent*, (November 20, 1920), 264.

⁶² "Recognition of Mexico," *New Republic*, XXIV (November 10, 1920), 258.

⁶³ S.K. Ratcliffe, "The Republican Triumph," *Contemporary Review*, CXVIII (November 5, 1920), 777-83.

President Wilson. It is true that General Obregón, as the new ruler of Mexico, would have desired American recognition in the normal course of diplomatic events, but the price he was willing to pay indicated desperation, not normality. Obregón would pay all rightful claims that American citizens had against Mexico and place all differences with the United States before an arbitration commission should these conditions be demanded in return for recognition.⁶⁴ The Mexican president, whose country was still in the throes of revolution, knew that he could not expect favorable treatment from the Republican President-elect. While spending a few weeks on the Texas border, Harding refused to consider a proposal to meet General Obregón. He also issued an ominous warning: "I like to think of an America whose citizens are ever seeking the greater development and enlarged resources and widened influences of the Republic, and I like to think of a government which protects its citizens wherever they are."⁶⁵

Harding could not have made a more satisfying statement for Henry Lane Wilson. The former ambassador could foresee a change in those policies which he considered so dangerous to American business, and he could be pleased with the part he had played in the seven-year struggle against the Democratic President. He had helped build a viable Republican alternative to President Wilson's Mexican policy through his opinions, which were based on his experience in that country, and his eagerness to serve his party. Although Mexico was not as important an issue as the League of Nations, it struck a responsive chord in those who disliked President Wilson's idealistic policies. Also, it was an issue upon which Republicans could agree. Henry Lane Wilson had capitalized on and indeed exemplified the frustration and lack of understanding of events in Mexico. Now the Republicans had regained control of America's foreign policy and, he believed, would return the country to the days of Roosevelt and Taft.

For Henry Lane Wilson, the election of 1920 marked the height of his influence in Republican party policy making. Although Harding and his foreign policy managers, notably Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes, attempted to undo what they perceived as errors in Woodrow Wilson's foreign policy, they were never able to return Mexico to the days of Porfirio Díaz. They gradually began to understand that Mexico had

⁶⁴ "Mexico's Efforts for Recognition," *New York Times Current History*, XIII (December, 1920), 460-61.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

undergone great social upheaval in the past two decades. The leaders who followed Huerta manifested an increasing degree of nationalism that Americans could not ignore. Wiser men than Henry Lane Wilson thus began in the 1920s to rewrite American policy toward Mexico. They sought compromise and understanding. Instead of sending troops into Mexico, as Henry Lane Wilson demanded, in response to Mexico's nationalization of oil and other mineral rights as prescribed under the Mexican Constitution of 1917, Republican negotiators hammered out a solution with the Mexican government agreeable to both sides. To improve United States-Mexican relations, the personable and sympathetic Dwight W. Morrow was sent to Mexico as a goodwill ambassador in 1927. Through his friendly attitude as well as honest bargaining, Morrow considerably improved relations between the two nations.⁶⁶

The business-oriented Republican Calvin Coolidge, not the idealistic Democrat Woodrow Wilson, determined a course of understanding instead of threats in dealing with Mexico because it made good economic sense. The old party of Dollar Diplomacy was formulating a plan that foreshadowed the Good Neighbor Policy.⁶⁷ Republicans no longer sought the counsels of Henry Lane Wilson. As a reward for his services, Harding and Coolidge both considered him for ambassadorships to Italy and Turkey, but for various reasons, including Harding's unexpected death, nothing came of these proposals.⁶⁸ Wilson suffered a paralyzing stroke in 1927 and, although he survived another five years, they were barren years compared to his influence a decade and half earlier.

⁶⁶ Bryce Wood, *The Making of the Good Neighbor Policy* (New York, 1961), 21-23; Thomas A. Bailey, *A Diplomatic History of the American People* (New York, 1958), 680; John D. Hicks, *Republican Ascendancy, 1921-1933* (New York, 1960), 156-57.

⁶⁷ Wood, *Making of the Good Neighbor Policy*, 18-21, 121-22, 163-65, 203-59; Samuel Flagg Bemis, *The Latin American Policy of the United States: An Historical Interpretation* (New York, 1943), 215-18.

⁶⁸ *Indianapolis Star*, March 11, April 23, 1925; *Dictionary of American Biography*, XX, 325; Wilson to Taft, August 4, 20, 1923, December 30, 1924, Taft to Wilson, August 14, 1923, Series 3, General Correspondence, Taft Papers.