

# THE RUSSIAN TREATY, ARBITRATION, AND HYPOCRISY

EDITORIAL BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

**I**CORDIALLY approve the action taken by Congress in abrogating the Russian treaty, because men must vote and act on the situation as it actually confronts them; and in the actual event Congressmen had but two alternatives, namely, to abrogate the treaty, or to submit to the continuance of conditions which have become intolerable to our National self-respect, and which represent a continuing wrong, especially to American citizens of Jewish faith. I still believe that in so serious a matter it would have been well first to endeavor to secure a decision by the Hague Court on the interpretation of the existing treaty. I am confident that such a decision would, of necessity, have been

in our favor; and, if so, it would have enabled Russia to retire from an untenable position with good grace and no loss of self-respect—an object that should always be held in view in dealing with any foreign nation with which at any time we have difficulties; while if the decision as to the interpretation of the clause in question had been adverse to us, we would then at once have abrogated the treaty, and have been clearly right in so doing. This was the position held by that distinguished diplomat Mr. Oscar Straus. But no movement had been made by either nation looking towards any other method of settling the matter than the one actually adopted. Congress was confronted by the

simple fact that unless the treaty were abrogated conditions would remain as they now are ; and, under the circumstances, Congress acted wisely and properly in declaring for the abrogation.

But this action was taken while the universal arbitration treaties are pending in the Senate. These treaties are avowedly championed as being of the kind we are to enter into with all nations, and as supplanting the existing arbitration treaties which we have with almost all nations, including Russia as well as England and France. These treaties, if ratified by the Senate unamended, will explicitly promise, will explicitly pledge the honor and good faith of the American Nation, to arbitrate precisely such questions as that which at this very moment we announce that we will not endeavor to arbitrate in the case of Russia. Under these circumstances, to ratify the general arbitration treaties would put the American people in an attitude of peculiarly contemptible hypocrisy, and would rightly expose us to the derision of all thinking mankind ; for we should put ourselves in the position of making sweeping and insincere promises, impossible of performance, at the very time when by our own actions we showed that we would certainly not keep such promises, nor translate them into action. I believe that we can normally arbitrate the question of the interpretation of a treaty, even if only as the preliminary to adopting the very serious action of denouncing such treaty. But I do not believe that we can arbitrate, with the intention of abiding by the arbitration, such questions as treating all our citizens alike, without regard to their creed, in the matter of passports, or such questions as the Monroe Doctrine, the admission of Asiatic immigrants in mass, or the refusal by the States to pay bonds, or many other similar matters. In short, I do not believe that we can afford to arbitrate questions of vital interest and National honor, or questions of settled American governmental policy. Moreover, the attitude we are now taking as regards the abrogation of the Russian treaty shows beyond possibility of doubt that if we were so foolish or so timid as to agree, as an abstract matter, by general arbitration treaties, to arbitrate such questions, we should instantly repudiate the agreement whenever a concrete case arose in which any considerable number of our citizens took an active interest. Under such circumstances

to proceed with the ratification of the general arbitration treaties unamended would be not merely a farce, but a farce played at the expense of our reputation for National good faith and sincerity. I believe most earnestly in peace, and in taking any step for arbitration which will genuinely tell in favor of peace ; and I oppose these treaties because, if unamended, they would tell against peace and would put us as a nation in an attitude of unctuous and odious hypocrisy. Both the Lodge and the Root amendments should be adopted ; the treaties would then cease to be detrimental to our National honor and interest, and (holding in view the abrogation of the Russian treaty) would be relieved from the present taint of evident insincerity—although even then they would represent a very small advance over our present position.

It is possible with sincerity and patriotism to favor the arbitration treaties (although I personally disagree with this view). It is possible with sincerity and patriotism to oppose the arbitration treaties. But it is neither sincere nor patriotic to make believe to support the principle of arbitration in general, and to try to get the country to commit itself to this principle, and at the same time to take part in, or to connive at, the repudiation by this country of the principle so loudly advocated, the very first moment that it is possible to reduce that principle to practice. In other words, it will put this country into a position both ridiculous and discreditable to pass the proposed general arbitration treaties at the same time that we denounce our general treaty with Russia.

The other day the lower house, with but one dissenting vote, passed a resolution in favor of the abrogation of the treaty. Among those who voted for this motion are many men who are against the unamended arbitration treaties. These men occupy a sincere and consistent position ; it is the position with which I personally agree. The one dissenting vote was that cast by a gentleman who announced that he was in favor of the general arbitration treaties, and therefore could not consistently take a position wholly incompatible with favoring them. Although I do not agree with this gentleman, I feel that his position showed both courage and sincerity. But surely all men who think clearly must unqualifiedly condemn any man who advocates the general arbitration treaties with-

out at the same time fearlessly showing his sincerity by denouncing the proposal to abrogate the Russian treaty without submitting its interpretation to arbitration. The Senate by vote has joined in abrogating the Russian treaty, and therefore it will act in a way to cast discredit upon the United States if it approves the arbitration treaties unamended. At the recent New York peace meeting in favor of the treaties (which ended in a riot) it was not creditable to the speakers for those treaties that they did not venture to declare themselves on the one practical issue, of the kind the treaties are expected to settle, which was actually before the people—that is, the matter of the abrogation of the Russian treaty without effort to get it authoritatively interpreted.

It cannot be too often repeated that these general arbitration treaties are nothing whatever but general promises. Their value lies wholly in the sincerity with which the promise is made and the fullness with which the promise is redeemed. I do not believe in making these promises, because I think that we are promising too much, and because, moreover, I fully believe that, as our action in abrogating the Russian treaty conclusively shows, in actual practice we would not keep the promise. To advocate the arbitration treaties, while failing to oppose the movement for denouncing the Russian treaty, is equivalent to open and cynical confession that as a people we do not intend to keep our promises, that we have no regard for the good faith of the Nation, that we are willing to make improperly sweeping promises to please one set of men and at the same time scandalously to break these promises to please another set of men.

These treaties are drawn in such sweeping and vague general terms, especially in the use of the word "justiciable," that they might, in any concrete case, be held to

mean anything or nothing, and to encourage just the kind of double-dealing and bad faith which is now being shown. One thing is certain: if the question of the interpretation of a treaty is not "justiciable," then there never can any question arise which is justiciable. If the action taken in abrogating the Russian treaty is not utter and complete violation of the whole spirit and purpose of the proposed arbitration treaties, then the latter are not worth the paper on which they are written. I believe that we are right in abrogating the Russian treaty, just because I also believe that the general arbitration treaties are not worth the paper on which they are written. The point upon which I insist is that this Nation should behave without hypocrisy and with straightforward sincerity in its international relations; that it should not lie, nor make promises which it would not keep. I do not question the honesty and sincerity of the many good people who, without sufficient thought, and in response to a vague general sentiment in favor of both peace and justice which fails to realize that sometimes peace can be obtained only at the expense of justice, have advocated both the universal arbitration treaties and the abrogation of the Russian treaty. But when the Nation, through its Government, acts, it cannot plead the excuse of lack of thought. If as a people our action is insincere and lacking in straightforwardness, then, when this action has been officially taken, we cannot escape the charge of hypocrisy when later we fail to live up to our promises. It is arrant hypocrisy for this Nation to support the unamended arbitration treaties at the same time that we abrogate the Russian treaty, and to do so is to put this Nation in a thoroughly false and discreditable attitude. Hypocrisy is as revolting in a nation as in a man; and, in the long run, I do not believe that it pays either man or nation.