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**Review of *Gilbert Hitchcock of Nebraska: Wilson's Floor Leader in the Fight for the Versailles Treaty* By Thomas W. Ryley**

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*Gilbert Hitchcock of Nebraska: Wilson's Floor Leader in the Fight for the Versailles Treaty.* By Thomas W. Ryley. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1998. Notes, bibliography, index. iii + 393 pp. \$109.95.

As acting Senate minority leader in 1919-1920, Gilbert M. Hitchcock worked for ratification of the Versailles Treaty, but the famous battle between President Woodrow Wilson and Senator Henry Cabot Lodge left him in the shadows. Thomas Ryley has attempted to explain Hitchcock's role in the Versailles drama.

Most of the first half of this book treats Hitchcock's life prior to 1919. Son of a Republican US Senator, Democrat Gilbert Hitchcock founded the *Omaha World-Herald* and served three terms in the House of Representatives and two in the Senate. As a Senator, Hitchcock was sometimes at odds with the Wilson Administration. He sought to propel American policy on the European War toward a more genuinely neutral stand, and after the US entered the conflict he criticized the Administration's war management. By

war's end, however, he was the senior Democrat on the Foreign Relations Committee, acting leader of his party in the upper chamber, and a strong backer of Wilson's peace program.

Ryley devotes three of his eight chapters to Hitchcock's role in the fortunes of the Versailles Treaty. Although he makes heavy use of the *New York Times*, published letters, memoirs, and secondary literature, Hitchcock's meager manuscript collection was a serious impediment to his research. Still, better use of the *Congressional Record*, Senate hearings, and the *World-Herald* might have helped pull Hitchcock out of the shadows. The author rarely quotes Hitchcock, and the reader gains little feeling for the Senator's passion for his cause or for his public interaction with his colleagues. Ryley might have benefitted as well from the use of theses and dissertations on Hitchcock cited in Nebraska bibliographies. Likewise, in discussing the controversy over Ireland's future, Ryley errs in saying that Senators Thomas Walsh (Montana) and James Phelan (California) "lacked any substantial Irish-American constituencies. . . ."

Ryley makes some notable conclusions about Hitchcock's failure in the Versailles episode, however. The Senator's past independence had antagonized the President, and Hitchcock probably became too enamored with keeping his recently-gained leadership position to deal firmly with Wilson. In the summer of 1919, he did not capitalize on an opportunity to convince the President to work with moderate Senate Republicans. Ryley does not believe, however, that Hitchcock could have achieved Senate ratification by defying the President to vote for the reservation-laden treaty in March of 1920.

The final chapter traces Hitchcock's career from 1920 to his death in 1934. Whatever its limitations, this book highlights the career of an important Plains internationalist.

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