

Senate Debates War Zone Path For Relief Craft

Chance of Serious Incident Charged in Plan to Ease Rule for Red Cross Ships

From the Herald Tribune Bureau
WASHINGTON, June 18.—A proposal that the neutrality act be amended to that Red Cross ships could carry medical supplies and food into prohibited European war zones without safe conducts guaranteed by belligerent governments stirred a stiff debate today on the floor of the Senate.

The plan, which was occasioned by the situation in which the Red Cross ship McKeesport found itself two days out at sea without safe conduct granted by Germany and Italy for it to land at Bordeaux, France, as originally intended, and carrying contraband supplies for the Allies, including food. The Senate Foreign Affairs Committee held an emergency session this morning and hastily reported out a joint resolution to permit what the neutrality law specifically forbade.

Several Senators charged that to permit this to be done at this particular time would be to invite an incident which would inflame the country to a pitch of wanting to declare war on Germany.

Holt Criticizes Roosevelt

One Senator, Rush D. Holt, Democrat, of West Virginia, went so far as to assert that newspaper and radio commentators were saying that President Roosevelt was discussing with people at the White House "the question of whether or not he can have a declaration of war." He added that he would not vote to "put into his hands without question the possibility of an incident" which would drive the country to war.

Senator Bennett Champ Clark, Democrat, of Missouri, declared that he had serious misgivings about the advisability of amending the neutrality law in this respect, but admitted that this was a hard case and it would be unfortunate if the vessel had to return to an American port. He had gained, however, two points in voting for the resolution in committee and supporting it on the floor. The first was that the State Department and the Red Cross had given categorical promises that any loophole afforded by a change in the law would not be used in the future to run blockades. The second was that he tacked on an amendment to the resolution which barred the arming of Red Cross ships or sending them under convoy of Allied vessels or United States warships.

Senator Clark referred to a syndicated column written by Ernest K. Lindley in which Mr. Lindley, who has close Administration connections, said that the use of American ships, convoyed if necessary, was envisioned if Germany tried to bring England to its knees through blockade. He quoted a second alternative suggested by Mr. Lindley:

Second Alternative

"A second alternative might be to send food, clothing and other non-military necessities in unconvoyed ships bearing the insignia of the Red Cross with a warning that the torpedoing or bombing of any of them would bring us into the war as an acknowledged belligerent."

Food, which is an article of unconditional contraband, is aboard the McKeesport largely in the form of condensed milk. The other articles of contraband, mentioned in Senate debate, were automobiles and soap.

Senator Clark called upon Senator Key Pittman, Democrat, of Nevada, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, to verify the fact that Col. Breckinridge Long, Third Assistant Secretary of State, and Norman H. Davis, President of the American Red Cross, had given undertakings that there would be no effort henceforth to run blockades with food or other contraband. Senator Pittman did so. Senator Clark later described the assurances "as a weak instrument upon which to depend in the face of a grant of power by law."

The resolution was called up out of order, since it ordinarily would have to lie on the table for a day after being reported. Its passage today, however, was blocked by an objection to unanimous consent to take it up, by Senator Holt. It will undoubtedly be the subject of further debate tomorrow. It was also introduced in the House by the Foreign Affairs Committee in the same form as in the Senate.

McCarran Sees Emergency

Senator Pat McCarran, Democrat, of Nevada, charged that the country was facing a serious emergency, caused largely by "statements of the President of the United States." War-like statements emanating from the White House, he said, had caused dismay "the length and breadth of the land." He sympathized with people abroad, he said, adding:

"But I know that the greatest avalanche to bring us into this war is to sink a Red Cross ship with an American flag flying at its masthead. Just let one ship be sunk with an American flag at its masthead and the Red Cross on its side and every red-blooded American will rush into this holocaust of hell. And we have no place there. That was done in 1917. Let it not be done today under the guise of an emergency."

Senator Guy M. Gillette, Democrat, of Iowa, acknowledged that he was the only member of the committee to oppose the resolution and added that he would continue to oppose it, since "nothing would so inflame the minds of the American people as the halting and searching of a Red Cross ship on the high seas."

Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg, Republican, of Michigan, stated that this was not a time to "multiply hazards—I think we have all the hazards that we can assimilate."