Senate Debates War Zone Path For Relief Craft

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

WASHINGTON, June 18—A proposal that the neutrality act be amended to permit Red Cross ships to carry medical supplies and food through prohibited European war zones without safe conduct guarantees 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 early today after it was denied the right to return to the United States. The Foreign Affairs Committee of the Senate, in the guise of an emergency, called today for the resolution carrying less protection for contraband cargoes and in the form of a change in the neutrality law that would permit what the neutrality act now specifically forbade.

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 torpedoeing or bombing or any of them would bring us into the war as an acknowledged belligerent."

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 Byrd, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, to verify the undertakings that there would be no place there. That was done in the guise of an emergency.

Several Senators charged that to make the war with Germany seem imminent by the adoption of a resolution which would inflate 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 vote to put this hands without question the possibility of an incident which would drive the country into 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 talked 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 encouraged if Germany tried to bring England to its knees through blockades. He quoted a second alternative suggested by Mr. Lindley.