

documented trace of Bahá'í involvement. But, in the case of Woodrow Wilson, it must be said that he had "some" knowledge of the Bahá'í Faith. The US National Bahá'í Convention of 1915 and 1916 had sent encouraging and friendly messages to the White House. To the 1916 message, the president replied personally. His Reply Reads: "The White House, Washington, May 5, 1916. My dear Mr Hall, the telegram you sent me on behalf of Bahá'ís of America, assembled in annual convention, has given me the deepest gratification and I hope you will have an opportunity to express my gratitude to all concerned. Cordially and sincerely yours, /s/ Woodrow Wilson."

In studying this subject, there were roadblocks to my search. A respected Wilson scholar, who for years has been editing The Papers of Woodrow Wilson, assured me in 1960 and 1987 he has not come across any trace of a Wilson-Bahá'í connection in his years of research. A Bahá'í professional Historian warned me of pitfalls, writing: "At this late date, with virtually all of Wilson's contemporaries dead, it would be impossible to obtain live testimony. One must rely on written sources." Since Margaret Wilson was not available, I wrote an inquiry to her nephew - at that time (1973), Dean of the Washington Cathedral. He answered, in part: "I may say that I would be highly surprised if Woodrow Wilson had ever heard of the Bahá'í teachings.. His eldest daughter, Margaret was indeed interested in Indian religion ... She often discussed this interest with me; but it was unrelated to Bahá'í."

What encouragement to bolster the Wilson-Bahá'í connection is in the authorized writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian Shoghi Effendi or in pilgrim notes (accounts by Bahá'ís of things they heard Shoghi Effendi say in Haifa while they were on Bahá'í pilgrimage)? There are quite a number of comments as to President Wilson's strenuous efforts at trying to establish world settlement and world peace, but nowhere do they unequivocally declare that Woodrow Wilson had read Bahá'í books. 'Abdu'l-Bahá did point out in his scrutiny of Wilson's "14 points" that most of them had been revealed by Bahá'u'lláh 50 years previously. And Shoghi Effendi had made a telling mention in a 1925 letter to a Bahá'í: "With regard to ex-president Wilson ... it seems fairly clear that ... (he was) ... considerably influenced by the Bahá'í teachings."

Although Shoghi Effendi was a master historian, he had not the time, in his busy life, to research the Wilson-Bahá'í connection. Before Shoghi Effendi died in 1957, however, one Bahá'í had been able to meet with Mrs. Eleanor Wilson McAdoo and receive confirmation of the connection, which she relayed to the Guardian. The Guardian dispatched her to the Library of Congress in Washington to review the Papers of Woodrow Wilson. She was turned away, with the excuse that the documents were not ready for general research.

What about the old reports as to Bahá'í books in the White House? I pondered my approach and decided to see if the private library of Woodrow Wilson had ever been catalogued. It had been in 1921. The microfilm, with the library listing, is now in the Wilmette Archive. The following paragraph details the information as to Bahá'í books which appear to have distanced from Woodrow Wilson's library.

Book number 1, Hidden Words from the Arabic by Bahá'u'lláh, is on the microfilm, as is a book of Edward G Browne. When I went to the library of Congress in 1981 to examine Hidden Words, it could not be located by the staff.

Book number 2 refers to Bahá'í book found by a researcher in general reference at the library of Congress. It is a compilation on peace by Ahmad Sohrab, titled The Most Great Peace, and was published in Boston in 1916. The book, when found, had been marked: "transfer from White House."

Book number 3 cannot be documented. It is the book, according to an old report, which it is claimed, Margaret Wilson had placed in her father's coat pocket. A letter sent me by a Bahá'í States: "Mrs Ives ... was present in Boston at a Bahá'í meeting when afterwards a Secret Service man came up to the book display exclaimed over one, 'This is the book I used to see President Wilson reading at intervals. He kept it in his pocket and whenever he had 10-15 (minute) interval, would get it out and read it.' No, I don't know which book it was ..." In a letter to a friend in Dublin, I mentioned the old report of a book in Wilson's pocket, with no title given. He informed me that while he was on pilgrimage in Haifa a long-time Baha; who was resident there, told him the name of that book was Abdu'l-Bahá on divine philosophy, which was written and published by Isabel Fraser Chamberlain. The Bahá'í at Haifa considered it authentic. A while later, I came upon a copy of this book in Jersey City. It was published in Boston in 1918; it was pocketable.

Book number 4 came into purview in the following manner, through the same correspondent who told of book number 3. Quoting Mrs Mable Rice-Wray Ives, the letter states: "Before World War War I began, a daughter (presumably Margaret Wilson) of Wilson attended a Bahá'í meeting, and afterwards, looking over the book display said, 'My father is interested in peace - May I take this book?'" Neither the title of this book or its whereabouts is known.

In 1980, a friend, who had left Brooklyn, New York in the early 1940s, to go to Albuquerque, Answered a request for information about the Wilson-Bahá'í connection which I placed on the American Bahá'í. His letter, presented here in part, corroborates evidence

that old reports were more than hearsay. This Bahá'í was a resident of Albuquerque when Mrs. Eleanor Wilson McAdoo visited. He reports: " Sometime between September 1942 and October 1946 when our address was ... Margaret Wilson (the Wilson daughter involved would actually have been Eleanor as Margaret had been in self exile in India for years), daughter of Woodrow, was lecturing in Albuquerque, I believe at the women's club but I am not sure. What I am sure is that she was invited to a reception and tea one afternoon which was held at our home on ... Two items stand out in my memory: She (Eleanor) stated that her sister had spent years studying yoga in India, the other was that the answer to a question put to her by one of the friends was, yes, her father did have access to Bahá'í writings and did glean his 14 points from the writings. In a continuing conversation, she stated that she believed the reason he did not publically establish the source of his ideas was that he felt political opponents might use that source as a means of discrediting the idea itself. He chose his course out of political expediency." The letter writer believes the visit was most likely to have been between 1943 and 1945.

This letter is clear evidence. There is another letter from an impeccable source-the Bahá'í sent to the library of Congress-which buttresses the facts in the letter quoted above. This letter to me, dated 1978, begins: "Many years ago I had lunch with president Wilson's daughter, Mrs McAdoo, who stated that it was true her father had studied the Bahá'í writings in making up the 14 points."

2. Addendum 1

Excerpt from "League of Nations and Collective Security"

by Vincent Littrell, 2012-02-09, from waisworld.org

... This lack of specificity of Presbyterian doctrine (I've also seen Wilson labeled as a modern Calvinist) vis à vis community of nations and collective security thinking, coupled with his world view rooted in antinomy, opened Wilson's mind to other sources for ideas (antinomy being the existence of contradiction in providential mystery; or in my own words, antinomy is the religiously oriented conscious acceptance of appearance of political incompatibilities/tensions that are to be resolved through divine processes and divinely planned order). Though Knock well traces Wilson's thought going back into the 1880s, Knock does say that Wilson really wasn't an original thinker regarding the specific ideas of "community of nations" and "collective security." The views of progressive internationalists, Edmund Burke, possibly Kant, activists on both sides of the Atlantic from the labor, peace, and socialist movements, were synthesized and propagated by Wilson. (p. 33) Knock does an outstanding job of delving into the sources of Wilson's thought, yet he seems to miss one strand I have run across in my own studies...namely the Bahá'í Faith.

I have yet to see literature outside Bahá'í sources regarding Woodrow Wilson's exposure to Bahá'í thought on the matters of the community of nations and collective security. There are Bahá'í scholars who do talk about this, and interestingly, some of the prominent progressive internationalists whom Thomas Knock lists as having met with Wilson like New York's Rabbi Stephen Wise, Stanford's David Starr Jordan, and Women's peace movement leader Jane Addams, also met with Bahá'í leader Abdu'l-Bahá during that religious leader's travels to the United States in 1912. Also not mentioned outside of Bahá'í scholarly circles is the fact that the Charge d'affaires of the Qajari Persian government to the United States was a Bahá'í who was well connected in Washington circles and whose wife Florence Khanum (interestingly an American and also a Bahá'í--the first known case of a Persian and American Bahá'í couple marrying) was close friends with Margaret Wilson, Woodrow's daughter. Bahá'í scholar Marzieh Gail's 1991 memoir *Arches of the Years* discusses the activities of the Persian Charge d'affaires to the United States Ali Kuli-Khan and his family. Marzieh Gail was his daughter. It is a fascinating read of life in the family of a Persian diplomat who not only was close to the Wilson family, but also to the family of Wilson's friend Colonel House, who represented the President on peace missions to the belligerents of World War I. Florence also was close to the wives of Wilson's Secretaries of State Bryan and Lansing.

Marzieh Gail states:

"Legends aside, we know that President Wilson was influenced by the Bahá'í Teachings in formulating his Fourteen Points, although it is not true that Khan 'rode up and down on the Mayflower teaching the Faith to the President.' We are indebted to the researches of Paul Pearsall for the information that at least three Bahá'í volumes were known to be in the White House. Pearsall also tells us that Margaret Wilson introduced Bahá'í literature into her father's reading, between 1913 and 1918. *The Hidden Words* 'appears on a 1921 listing of Wilson's private library.' Also, a compilation on peace given the President by a delegation of Washington Bahá'ís 'turned up in general reference at the Library of Congress marked "transfer from the White House.'" And *'Abdu'l-Bahá on Divine Philosophy* (Boston, 1918) is said to have much influenced his thinking." (*Arches of the Years*, p. 148)

I mention all of this for the following reason:

I have seen criticism of the concept of the United Nations or League of Nations or community of nations as being entirely a Western construct not compatible with the cultures of the East. Yet if it is true that Persian-originated Bahá'í thought, synthesized with other sources, influenced the President of the United States regarding his views towards community of nations and collective security, then Iranians have something to be proud of in that the powerful golden chain of spirituality to be found in Persian culture made a leap to influence the West most beautifully. During the US Presidential election campaign of 1916, the issues of the League of Nations and collective security loomed large in the debates.

In 1875, as part of an epistle to the Qajari Shah of Persia, Bahá'í leader Abdu'l-Bahá wrote the following passage. Note the similarity to President Wilson's thought:

"True civilization will unfurl its banner in the midmost heart of the world whenever a certain number of its distinguished and high-minded sovereigns--the shining exemplars of devotion and determination--shall, for the good and happiness of all mankind, arise, with firm resolve and clear vision, to establish the Cause of Universal Peace. They must make the Cause of Peace the object of general consultation, and seek by every means in their power to establish a Union of the nations of the world. They must conclude a binding treaty and establish a covenant, the provisions of which shall be sound, inviolable and definite. They must proclaim it to all the world and obtain for it the sanction of all the human race. This supreme and noble undertaking--the real source of the peace and well-being of all the world--should be regarded as sacred by all that dwell on earth. All the forces of humanity must be mobilized to ensure the stability and permanence of this Most Great Covenant. In this all-embracing Pact the limits and frontiers of each and every nation should be clearly fixed, the principles underlying the relations of governments towards one another definitely laid down, and all international agreements and obligations ascertained. In like manner, the size of the armaments of every government should be strictly limited, for if the preparations for war and the military forces of any nation should be allowed to increase, they will arouse the suspicion of others. The fundamental principle underlying this solemn Pact should be so fixed that if any government later violate any one of its provisions, all the governments on earth should arise to reduce it to utter submission, nay the human race as a whole should resolve, with every power at its disposal, to destroy that government. Should this greatest of all remedies be applied to the sick body of the world, it will assuredly recover from its ills and will remain eternally safe and secure." (Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 64; written in 1875)

I should also note that President Wilson is highly praised in the writings of Bahá'í leaders Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi.

"To her President, the immortal Woodrow Wilson, must be ascribed the unique honor, among the statesmen of any nation, whether of the East or of the West, of having voiced sentiments so akin to the principles animating the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, and of having more than any other world leader, contributed to the creation of the League of Nations--achievements which the pen of the Center of God's Covenant acclaimed as signaling the dawn of the Most Great Peace, whose sun, according to that same pen, must needs arise as the direct consequence of the enforcement of the laws of the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh." (Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, p. 36)

JE comments: Wilson's Achilles' Heel from our perspective will always be his reluctance to recognize the right to self-determination of non-white peoples: I'm thinking of how Ho Chi Minh was rebuffed in his efforts to achieve Vietnamese independence at Versailles. Was Wilson, a product of his times,

simply unable to transcend racial categories when it came to "all Mankind"?

Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt were the first US presidents to seek an active role in international affairs, thus it is very WAISly to discuss them.

My question for the floor: did Wilson's actions in the wake of WWI achieve anything positive for the cause of peace? What more could he have done, given France and Britain's thirst for vengeance? And consider, for example, how the nation-states (Iraq, anyone?) were drawn in the Middle East. ...

3. Addendum 2

Excerpt from "Woodrow Wilson, His Fourteen Points, The League of Nations and World Peace"

by Bahram Nadini, 2011-01-29, from commongroundgroup.net

... For me, as a Bahá'í, it would be impossible not to mention the high praise given by the central figures of the Faith to Woodrow Wilson for the formulation of the fourteen points and the creation of League of Nations. To Bahá'ís, it is clear that he was influenced by the spirit of the age, and many of his "fourteen points" seem to be very similar to the provisions of collective security elucidated by the Founder and heads of the Bahá'í Faith decades earlier, as well as echoes from German philosophers from a few centuries ago. While William Jennings Bryan — Wilson's eventual Secretary of State — knew of the Faith, and his wife and daughter were visited by Abdu'l-Bahá (son of Bahá'u'lláh, Prophet Founder of the Bahá'í Faith) during Abdu'l-Bahá's visit to the US in 1912, there is no conclusive evidence that Wilson, himself, knew of the Faith or had read Bahá'í books, in the formulation of his peace programme. Also The rumors of Wilson's daughters connection to the Baha'i faith were...most certainly without any basis whatsoever.

Nevertheless Abdu'l-Bahá and later his grandson, Shoghi Effendi, praised Wilson. Shoghi Effendi wrote:

"To [America's] President, the immortal Woodrow Wilson, must be ascribed the unique honor, among the statesmen of any nation, whether of the East or of the West, of having voiced sentiments so akin to the principles animating the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, and of having more than any other world leader, contributed to the creation of the League of Nations — achievements which the pen of the Center of God's Covenant acclaimed as signaling the dawn of the Most Great Peace..."[1]

This is a stunning statement that not only immortalizes Wilson, but also identifies the creation of the League of Nations as the start of a process that will eventually lead to Kingdom of God on earth.

Many believe that the concept of collective security is a western construct, however as noted before, in late 19th century and early 20th century, Bahá'u'lláh, the Prophet founder of the Baha'i Faith or His son Abdu'l-Baha on many occasions, talked about the key elements of collective

security. Also many “progressive internationalists” during the presidency of Wilson met with Abdu’l-Baha during His travels to the United States in 1912[2].

Here is an excerpt of a Tablet Bahá’u’lláh wrote to Queen Victoria:

“Be reconciled among yourselves, that ye may need no more armaments save in a measure to safeguard your territories and dominions... Be united, O kings of the earth, for thereby will the tempest of discord be stilled amongst you, and your peoples find rest, if ye be of them that comprehend. Should any one among you take up arms against another, rise ye all against him, for this is naught but manifest justice[3].”

This is eerie similar to the 4th point of Wilson’s fourteen points.[4] ...

Notes:

1. Citadel of Faith, by Shoghi Effendi, p. 36

2.

waisworld.org/go.jsp?id=02a3&objectType=post&o=68106&objectTypeId=62356&topicId=106

3. Tablet to Queen Victoria, bahai-library.com/bahauallah_lawh_malikh

4. history.howstuffworks.com/world-war-i/fourteen-points.htm

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